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Reintegration of Female Non-Commissioned Officer Veterans into the Private Business Sector

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Sector

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MA, Park University, 2008

BS, Park University, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Experiencing a significant career transition can directly impact military veterans. Literature exists on military transition and reintegration but is focused on topics ranging from combat-related disabilities and mental health issues to higher learning. There is a lack of knowledge regarding female Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) veterans' transition and reintegration experiences. The purpose of this qualitative study, using a phenomenological design with purposeful sampling, was to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans' process of transition and private-sector reintegration. The research question evaluated participants' perceptions, leveraging them to increase awareness and improve programs for the U.S. veteran population. Semi structured interviews were used with a sample of 16 female NCO veterans using audio recording and verbatim transcription of the interviews. The concepts of transition and reintegration formed the basis for the conceptual framework. Through a conceptual lens, Schlossberg's 4S and Nicholson's work-role transition models aided in revealing 17 emergent themes. The findings of this explorative study confirmed that transition and reintegration challenges linked (a) ineffective transition and reintegration programs, (b) consistent inability to translate military management skills and experience to private-sector employment, and (c) lack of gender-specific resources. Government officials, policymakers, and employers can use the findings to improve programs and policies directly impacting management models. Moreover, the findings may help to advance positive social change by influencing perspectives and improving resources, thus contribute to enhanced career transition and private-sector reintegration for U.S. veterans.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family, friends, mentors, and fellow veterans for without you, this work would not have been possible. To one of the monarchs of my family and the strongest woman I've ever met in my life, my dear Grandmother. I thank God each day for sharing you with the world for 101 years. You endured the challenges of living through segregation to desegregation, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and finally to one of the proudest and humbling moments of your life, casting your vote for the 1st African American President. To the second monarch of my family, my loving Mother, a proud woman of color and my epitome of a phenomenal woman. I love and miss you; please wait for me at Heaven's gates. To my eldest brother, you touched so many lives and are truly missed; and to my eldest sister, you were a woman of strength and character who was able to see the good in everyone. To Tekiela Harper, Areka Grant, Brandi Hamilton, Annette Schiff, Karen Bonaby and Kassandra Benson, a special debt of gratitude for your Prayer, the enduring sisterhood, and support no matter the when or the where. To those who consistently exhibit the qualities of a true leader, Major General Aaron Prupas, USAF; Lt Col Geremiah Brekke, USAF; and Dr. Yul Williams, I am eternally grateful for your leadership and counsel. To my amazing extended family, I thank God each day for our paths crossing. To my mentors and advisors, whose guidance and advice are invaluable. To my colleagues, thank you for the encouragement, support, and inspiration throughout this journey. To those whose lives are impacted by this body of work, the entire female veteran population, who continues to

be devoted to improving the programs and services tailored to meet not only their needs,

but those of their sister and brother veterans.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As of September 2015, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2015a) reported that the United States, Puerto Rico, and Territories/Foreign female veteran population numbered 2,035,213, accounting for 9.4% of the U.S. veteran population. Although the active-duty female population exhibited resilience and adaptability, many continued to unsuccessfully transition from the military and reintegrate into private-sector employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2015; Kintzle et al., 2015). The lack of an effective transition program that efficiently contributed to successful reintegration into private-sector employment is a shared management problem that spanned beyond the military departments and the Department of Defense (Department of Defense, 2015) to other government agencies and private-sector organizations. The Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs management officials and other governmental policymakers acknowledged the necessity for improvements to the Desert Storm-era Transition Assistance Program (TAP; Cronk, 2015; Kamarck, 2018). In 2011, the Department of Defense redesigned the TAP model revamping the program from an optional 3-day model to a mandatory five-day workshop, with additional days of optional training, that included a collaborative model evolving to a series of Transition Goals, Plans, Success-based (GPS) curriculum, services, and processes (Cronk, 2015; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Disabled American Veterans [DAV], 2014; Kamarck, 2018). Although the new program represented a meaningful step towards enhancing the transition and reintegration processes, officials and policymakers continued to challenge the overall effectiveness; communicated the need for continued

process improvements; and agreed a more integrated approach was needed (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck, 2018).

Considerable literature exists on military veterans' transitioning and reintegration, primarily focusing on the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related issues, mental health issues, and higher learning (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister, Mackey, Hackney, & Perrewe, 2015). However, there are notable gaps in literature relating to female Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid-level and senior-level management and or leadership level and the significant challenges this population encountered when seeking private-sector employment (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Zivin et al., 2016). The new information presented in this study related to the intersection of transitioning (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Hachey, Sudom, Sweet, MacLean, & VanTil, 2016; Kintzle et al., 2015) and reintegration (Elnitsky, Blevins, Fisher, & Magruder, 2017) amongst female NCO veterans for usage to generate a new area of management and leadership research not addressed in the extant literature. The results of this study could lead to positive social change by contributing to the efforts of the Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and others in the management field in the further development or restructuring of transition assistance and reintegration employment services. Additionally, the results could aid in tailoring assistance and employment services to effectively assist female NCO veterans by capturing the processes and behaviors

employed by those female NCO veterans who did not, as well as those who experienced some degree of success, secure comparable private-sector management roles (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). This study may contribute to positive social change by improving awareness and advancing the understanding of the challenges female NCO veterans experience during the military transition and the social implications of improving private-sector reintegration by private corporations.

In this chapter, I present the background of the study, the problem and purpose statements, and the research question that informs the study. Chapter 1 includes sections on the conceptual foundation for the study combined with Schlossberg's model of adult transitioning and Nicholson's work-role transition model. In the remainder of the chapter, I cover the nature of the study, assumptions relevant to the study, the significance of the study. I also discuss the scope and delimitations of the study and the pertinent limitations of the study.

Background of the Study

On September 11, 2001 (9/11), "19 militants associated with the Islamic extremist group al Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and carried out suicide attacks against targets in the United States" (History.com Editors, 2019, para. 1). Since 9/11, about 2.3 million military members transitioned to veteran status and reintegrated into civilian communities and many to private-sector employment (Koo & Maguen, 2014; Maury, Stone, & Roseman, 2016; Zivin et al., 2016). In 2016, females accounted for about 10% of the 20.9 million veterans in the U.S. (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV,

2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). In this qualitative phenomenological study, I explored the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with years of management and leadership experience, the transition from military service and reintegration to private-sector employment. In 2016, the overall unemployment rate amongst female veterans was 5% in contrast to 4.6% amongst nonveteran women and 4.2% amongst their male veteran counterparts (BLS, 2017). In comparison to their male counterparts, women veterans faced additional complexities associated with the distinctive needs recognized as significant impediments resulting in substantial risks when seeking private-sector employment (Kintzle et al., 2015; Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick, Osborn, Hayden, & Hoose, 2013). Little to no information exists that explored the nationwide trends associated with the challenges of transitioning and reintegrating to the private sector, particularly the issues associated with translating management and leadership skills (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2015; Hardison, & Shanley, 2016). The deficiencies in literature focused on exploring the significant challenges female NCO veterans encountered during transition and reintegration into the private-sector workforce at the management and leadership levels warrants further research given that in 2015, there were 2,035,213 female veterans with an anticipated increase of 16.3% by 2043 (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b).

In 1990, the Department of Defense established a TAP model to meet the needs of service members transitioning from military service to civilian society and the private

sector (Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). In 2011, the

Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Labor

partnered to address the challenges the U.S. veteran population consistently experienced

during the military transition and private-sector reintegration processes (Kamarck, 2018;

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). After Congress passed the "Veterans

Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act of 2011," President Obama signed the act into

law resulting in the implementation of a redesigned TAP model (Kamarck, 2018; U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). Despite collaborative efforts on the part of the

Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of

Labor to improve the TAP program, female NCO veterans continued to face challenges

during transitioning and reintegrating into the private sector, particularly the issues

associated with translating management and leadership skills to mid-level to senior-level

management positions (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014; Hardison, & Shanley, 2016; Hardison

et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a). Kintzle et al. (2015)

maintained that veterans face the significant challenge of the existence of a lack of

"understanding how the skills, occupational experience, and qualifications gained during

military service translate into skills, experience, and qualifications relevant and

appropriate to civilian jobs" (p. 6). Private-sector employers intensified the problem by

labeling veterans, particularly female NCO veterans, with a range of adverse

characterizations and prejudiced perceptions relating to competences and abilities to

serve in mid-level to senior-level management roles (DAV, 2014).

Kintzle et al. (2015) focused on identifying the reasons that both service providers and veterans believed that veterans were unprepared to search for and secure private-sector employment successfully. Kintzle et al. (2015) highlighted the reasons as "unrealistic expectations for the kinds of job opportunities veterans qualify for, as well as salary, the veteran perception of having to 'start over' as a civilian, and difficulty understanding how military experience translates to civilian employment" (p. 1). The authors used two focus groups to highlight the variations in employment challenges for 16 pre-9/11 veterans and 17 post-9/11 veterans. Kintzle et al. (2015) maintained that veterans reported a disconnect in communication, anxiety when interacting with civilians, and an inability acclimatizing to private-sector workplaces. Researchers revealed consistency in the absence of knowledge across communities, government agencies, and private-sector companies. These complexities that veterans faced are aligned to the perceptions, of support organizations, hiring managers, and private-sector employers, associated with veterans' competencies, skills, training, and experience obtained in the military (Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Gonzalez, Henriquez, & McKennon, 2014; Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Stewart, & Fisher, 2015; Keeling, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018). Extant research indicated that one of the most significant obstacles associated with securing employment is the inability to create a linkage between military abilities and years of experiences to private-sector occupational credentials and qualification (Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Faberman & Foster, 2013; Hall et al., 2015; Loughran, 2014; Zivin et al., 2016). Veterans reported that their differences in cultural beliefs, the stigma linked to military identities, readjustment to private-sector life and workplace, and an absence of

understanding economic stability (Berglass & Harrell, 2012; Elbogen, Johnson, Wagner, Newton, & Beckham, 2012; Griffin & Stein, 2015; Lim, Interiano, Nowell, Tkacik, & Dahlberg, 2018; Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2016; Prudential Financial, 2012).

Researchers reported that veterans consistently faced challenges relating to readjusting to civilian society while existing mental and physical disabilities sustained during military service further compounded those obstacles (Borah, & Manser, 2016; Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2011; Elbogen et al., 2012; Horton et al., 2013; Kukla, Salyers, & Rattray, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015; Smith, 2014). Strauss (2016) asserted that veterans have translatable management, leadership, decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, as well as expertise in collaboration and change management. Leslie and Koblinsky (2017) studied the private-sector employment experiences of 29 female veterans, and of the 25 who reported their employment status 36% employed full time, 24% were employed part-time, 28% were unemployed, and 12% were unemployed and not seeking employment. Although the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs decision and policymakers understood the extent of and reasons for the issues, they had yet to develop transition programs and reintegration initiatives tailored to effectively contribute to female NCO veterans' successful transition and reintegration into private-sector employment (DAV, 2014).

Considerable literature exists on U.S. military or veterans' transitioning and reintegration but the primary focus and themes of existing literature relate to the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related issues, mental health issues, and higher

learning challenges (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). A deficiency in literature focused on the evaluation of the overall fulfillment of female NCO veterans successfully experiencing transitioning to a second career continued (Robertson & Brott, 2014). The lack of literature broadens the gaps in existing literature focused on female NCO veterans who encounter significant challenges when seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid to senior management levels (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2016). This research is distinctive in that I explored and discussed an area that required further investigation to contribute to furthering the management and leadership disciplines by potentially aiding in decreasing gaps and impacting social change.

Scholars and decision-makers agreed that additional research was needed to further situational awareness and knowledge relating to these factors and other likely difficulties and negative consequences associated with persisted unemployment and economic issues faced by the veteran population (Council on Veteran Employment, 2015; DAV, 2014; Kintzle et al., 2015). This study may contribute to social change by aiding the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and others in the management field in the development or restructuring of transition assistance and veterans hiring programs to better assist female NCO veterans in securing private-sector employment. This study may also contribute to the development of more private sector aligned professional development during military service. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, corporate executives, Human Resource managers, hiring managers, community leaders, and other

agencies aiding military veterans anticipated an increase in the veteran population of 16.3% by the year 2043 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). To prepare for these and future increases, the Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and civilian companies can benchmark the processes outlined in these study findings and recommendations to enhance further transition assistance programs, developmental training, reintegration education, and civilian employment, as well as higher education institutions, recruitment programs. The results of the study may assist in partnered military and civilian reintegration assistance initiatives and veteran-focused hiring programs tailored to meet the needs of all veterans better.

Problem Statement

The general problem is the enduring inability of female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience to transition from military service and reintegrate into private-sector employment successfully (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). Kintzle et al. (2015) found that 65% of the 1,845 participants, of which females accounted for about 14%, reported having difficulties associated with transitioning, reintegration, and private-sector employment. Based on a recent analysis of existing literature focused on the transition and reintegration amongst the veteran's population, findings revealed that female veterans felt their years of management and leadership experience would not translate to comparable private-sector employment (DAV, 2014; Gould & Obicheta, 2015; Strauss, 2016; Ysasi, Graf, Brown, & Sharma, 2016).

Little to no information exists that explored the nationwide trends for issues associated with the challenges of transitioning and reintegrating into the private sector, particularly the issues associated with translating management and leadership skills (DAV, 2014). Despite collaborative efforts on the part of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Labor to improve the TAP, female NCO veterans continued to face challenges during transitioning and reintegrating into the private sector, particularly the issues associated with translating management and leadership skills to mid-level to senior-level management positions (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014; Kamarck, 2018). The specific problem is that 60%, of the 148 interviewed, of private-sector hiring managers believed that female NCO veterans with years of mid-level to senior-level management and leadership experience were unable to translate these skills to comparable private-sector employment (Coll & Weiss, 2016; DAV, 2014; Gould & Obicheta, 2015; Strauss, 2016; Szelwach, Steinkogler, Badger, & Muttukumaru, 2011). Of the 256 female veterans surveyed, 82% reported difficulties readjusting to the private-sector, and only 37% believed private-sector employers acknowledged their military service and experience (Gould & Obicheta, 2015).

By partnering with private-sector employers, the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are better positioned themselves to develop a results-based management strategy to aid policymakers and corporate decision-makers in establishing programs and policies geared towards effectively impacting veterans' transition and private-sector reintegration. By working together, these entities cam develop a results-based management strategy that facilitates

not only strategic planning, management, and learning but provides a framework for successful transition and reintegration (Bester, 2012; Cogan, 2016; Curristine, 2005; Gil-Rivas, Kilmer, Larson, & Armstrong, 2017; Lim et al., 2018; Pease et al., 2016; Unruh, Gagnon, & MaGee, 2018). The standardization of transition and reintegration programs and policies could aid organizations in planning and implementation, thus influencing preparedness for the anticipated increase of 16.3%, by the year 2043, in the veteran population (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study, using a phenomenological research design, was to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from military service and reintegration into private-sector employment. I used a qualitative phenomenological study to answer questions based on a paradigm of the personal knowledge and subjectivisms of female NCO veterans. As such, by describing the perspectives and interpretations, a better understanding of the distinctiveness of the participants' experiences by capturing and reporting the female NCO veterans' inclinations and actions during and after the transitional stage of reintegration may be provided. Offering descriptions of reintegration experiences allowed for the discovery and describing of the conceptual paradigms under which the transitioning program effectively or ineffectively works. The findings of this empirical investigation aimed at advancing knowledge on a transition from the military and reintegration into private-sector employment and contribute original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework. This study may

contribute to positive social change by improving awareness and advancing the understanding of the challenges female NCO veterans experience during the military transition process and may also have social implications for private corporations' efforts to improve and or develop private-sector reintegration initiatives.

Research Questions

In this study, I posed a single overarching research question: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegration into private-sector employment?" The Schlossberg's transition model and Drebing et al. (2007) reintegration model provided the framework for the research question. The research question drove the evaluation of military transition and private-sector reintegration amongst female NCO veterans and how the practice of resilience furthered their efforts to successfully reintegrate into the private-sector employment, particularly at the mid to senior management and leadership levels.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework allowed for the illustration, explanation, and reporting of the associated research question that drove this analysis, as well as describe the correlations that exist amongst the various aspects of the study (see Adom, Hussein, & Joe, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Eizenberg, & Jabareen, 2017; Lewandowski, 2016; McGaghie, Bordage, & Shea, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ravitch, & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2018). A conceptual framework was more appropriate because a theoretical framework would draw from existing concepts that embodies the findings of many

researchers on why and how a phenomenon occurs (Adom et al., 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Eizenberg, & Jabareen, 2017; Lewandowski, 2016; McGaghie et al., 2001; Ravitch, & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2018). Although a conceptual framework generated concepts, it also is a compilation or constructs of the various aspects (e.g., conjectures, outlooks, philosophies, and concepts) that allowed me to inform and substantiate the research (see Adom et al., 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Eizenberg, & Jabareen, 2017; Lewandowski, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ravitch, & Carl, 2016; Yin, 2018). The conceptual framework for this study represented the synthesis of literature utilized to explore the phenomenon of why female NCO veterans, with ten or more years of management and leadership experience and in some cases 20 or more years of active military service, unsuccessfully reintegrate into private-sector employment. The conceptual framework used was grounded in qualitative procedures of theorization. Deleuze and Guattari (1991) asserted that "every concept has components and is defined by them" (p. 15). A concept served as the foundation to merge other concepts to form meaning and alignment, allowing me to generate significance (see Dobson, 2002; Jabareen, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tamene, Tsegaye, Birhanu, Taye, & Birhaneselassie, 2016). Two critical concepts framed this study (e.g., transition concept and reintegration concept) that focus on the challenges female NCO veterans encounter during the transition from military service to reintegrate into private-sector employment (Drebing et al., 2007; Glover-Graf, Miller, & Freeman, 2010).

The transition concept focused on movement across institutional settings, such as leaving a military environment to reintegrate into a private-sector environment (Glover-

Graf et al., 2010). I used a transition concept to explore using various models and concepts. A theoretical framework provided me with a clear perception upon which to evaluate a phenomenon (Imenda, 2014). Flowers, Luzynski, and Zamani-Gallaher (2014) maintained that the type of transition and whether the individual's viewpoint is a positive or negative impact on the outcome. This perspective aligned with Schlossberg's transition model, which provided a conceptual lens to evaluate the career transitioning of female NCO veterans throughout the various phases transpiring over time. Schlossberg's model was used to assess both internal and external aspects that enabled or hinder successful transition. The transition is a life event that results in some type of modification to consistent day-to-day life events, personal and professional roles, and predetermined conjectures (Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011). The use of Schlossberg's transition model allowed for the exploration of the overarching research question.

Drebing et al.'s (2007) reintegration concept related to an individual's involvement in a life role such as leaving the military workforce to reenter into private-sector employment. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2010) defined reintegration as the process of the reassuming one's age, sex, and domestic and communal ethical responsibilities as well as workforce roles. Resnik et al. (2012) defined reintegration as the process of an individual's reassuming his or her life role, functionality, or involvement within the community. Elnitsky, Blevins, Fisher, and Magruder (2017) maintained that the basis for successful reintegration was the veterans' degree of certainty, willingness, and preparedness to adapt to the private-sector. Elnitsky et al. (2017) used the conceptual reintegration model to evaluate the private-sector

reintegration process, which encompassed transition, readjustment, and community integration. Elnitsky et al. (2017) maintained that reintegration required an understanding of the overall circumstances or environments in which the procedure of reintegration occurs, which facilitated successful reintegration as well as to highlight adversities, difficulties, practices, and their effect on reintegration aftermaths. The reintegration concept aligned with Nicholson's work-role transition model, which is useful in describing the work-role adjustments the female NCO veteran population contended with during reintegration into a private-sector workforce. The use of Nicholson's work-role model allowed for the evaluation of the overarching research question.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative, which supported efforts to obtain and report a greater understanding of the personal meanings female NCO veterans assigned to their experiences during transition from the military and reintegration into private-sector employment. The principal aim of a phenomenological study was to define lived experiences by uncovering the meanings and essences of the experience (see Latham, 2014; Moustakas, 1994; Roberts, 2013). The purpose of phenomenological research, as well as the primary goal and core principle of implementing phenomenological methods, is that an appropriate response to this study's purpose is met by exploring the lived experiences and personal meanings of female NCO veterans (see Moustakas, 1994). The other qualitative research designs considered included case study, narrative, and ethnography. The case study design did not align with the primary aim to uncover meaning and is appropriate when identifying existing cases by the researcher (Patton,

2015). Smythe (2012) maintained that a narrative approach was best suited when the focus is on how the stories are shared while the phenomenological researcher focused on discovering the meaning. Lastly, an ethnographic approach was not appropriate due to the ethnography researcher's objective was to gain a greater understanding of the cultural context (Denke & Barnes, 2013). Therefore, the reasoning for using a phenomenological design was that it allowed me to collect first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of the shared phenomenon.

The use of a qualitative phenomenological study aided in furthering the management discipline, advanced existing literature, influenced overall awareness, and providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative phenomenological research assisted in answering the central research question and creating a greater understanding of the needs of and the challenges facing female NCO veterans, as well as aid in giving voice to an often-marginalized population of U.S. society (Mankowski & Everett, 2016). The use of the phenomenological research design allowed me to focus on exploring and reporting the lived experiences of female NCO veterans regarding their transition from the military service and reintegrate into private-sector employment (Patton, 2015). Moustakas (1994) maintained that an empirical phenomenological design allowed me to obtain comprehensive descriptions, which provided the source for a reflective exploration to describe the essences of the participants' experiences. The core principle of the phenomenological is the way participants experience a phenomenon "represent a relationship between the experiencer and the phenomenon being experienced [sic], leads to the expectation that different ways of experiencing are logically related

through the common phenomenon being experienced [sic]" (Akerlind, 2012, p. 116).

Marton and Booth (1997) maintained that phenomenological is the assertion that the

differences in viewpoints association with varying explanations of how individual

experiences a phenomenon are logically connected. I utilized the study design to describe

the challenges, based on reflection and interpretations of female NCO veterans encounter

attempting to secure mid-level to senior-level management and leadership employment.

In the study, I provided a greater insight into the management and leadership attributes of

female NCO veterans.

Consideration was given to the quantitative research approach deeming it

inappropriate because the methods utilized highlight independent measurements and the

statistical, mathematical, or numerical evaluation of data gathered from questionnaires,

surveys, and or by manipulating existing statistical data (Frankfort-Nachmias, Nachmias,

& DeWaard, 2014; Hartas, 2015). Quantitative research is also deductive and aided in the

evaluation of the variables and premises to reach definite conclusions (Yilmaz, 2013).

Additionally, quantitative researchers typically use large sample sizes resulting in the

qualitative approach being more feasible because, in this study, a small group of 16

female NCO veterans was used (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). The data-gathering

phase incorporated in-depth semi structured face-to-face interviews using an informal and

interactive process as well as open-ended comments and questions (see Cohen, Kahn, &

Steeves, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Schram, 2006). Therefore, use of a quantitative research

approach did not aid me inadequately answering the research question because

quantitative researchers use close-ended questions with predetermined selections or

options (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2014; Hartas, 2015). Data were collected using documented records and field notes. The documentation and usage of field notes aided in identifying and discovering patterns and themes. The process utilized a purposive sampling methodology.

The use of the phenomenological research design allowed for an in-depth analysis of an assertion that a small group has assigned to shared meaning. By utilizing a phenomenological design, I focused on understanding, capturing, and documenting the lived occurrences of a specific occurrence (see Patton, 2015). I used a self-reflection journaling process to document personal presuppositions and experiences as well as my actions during the research process (see Ortlipp, 2008). Data were collected existing documentation, archival records, physical artifacts, demographic, social, economic, and statistical data from various government databases.

Definitions

The definitions, and authoritative sources, of important terms and concepts outlined throughout the study, are provided for a greater understanding of subject-specific terms and contextual meanings differentiated from traditionally accepted meanings.

Active duty service member: Is a member of the uniformed services who service full time and perform duties and responsibilities during training, peacetime, and wartime (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018b).

Bracketing: Act of suspending existing beliefs about a phenomenon by lessening the possibility of an adverse impact of preconceptions allowing me to present an unbiased description, setting aside any contradictions and oppositions to incorporate, of the

participants' perspectives of their lived experiences, during the analysis and reporting of the research (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Vagel, 2014; van Manen, 2014; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

Civilian workforce: Is defined as "The broader societal culture. It is in stark contrast to the military culture, which may be considered a sub-set of civilian society" (Savion, 2012, p. 29).

Commissioned officer: A member of the uniformed services with at least a bachelor's degree and serve in the ranks of O-1 to O-10 (Department of Defense, 2015; McAllister et al., 2015).

Enlisted member: Is an individual who enlisted in the military service and held a rank, below a commissioned officer or warrant officer, of E-1 to E-9, for example, military-grade of Private to Command Sergeant Major; a person who enlisted and currently enrolled in an officer training program; individual who (Department of Defense, 2015; Sloan, 2018).

Female war veteran: Active duty female armed services member that served in OIF/OEF (Department of Defense, 2015; McAllister et al., 2015).

Hermeneutics. The process of interpreting lived experiences using the participants' words (van Manen, 2014).

Lived experience. A person's experience of an event; the foundational data used during an inquiry and reflecting reporting the event; the initiation and reporting of phenomenological research (van Manen, 2014).

Lived meaning. The process by which an individual develops and understands the

reality of an event and the meaning derived from their experience (van Manen, 2014).

Military transition: The act of an active duty personnel member who is leaving the military to return to civilian life (Cooper, Caddick, Godler, Cooper, & Fossey, 2016).

Noncommissioned officer or petty officer: Is a member of the military who serves in the capacity of a manager, leader, and or technical expert responsible for the overall development and welfare of subordinate personnel. Also serve as advisors to commissioned officer personnel (Dempsey & Battaglia, 2013; Department of Defense, 2015; Sloan, 2018).

Nonveteran: Person who never served in the military (Humensky, Jordan, Stroupe, & Hynes, 2013).

Reintegration. The process of reassuming one's age, sex, and domestic and communal ethical responsibilities as well as workforce roles (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

Transition: Is defined as "Any event, or nonevent, which results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39). Three types of transition categories include: (a) predicted, (b) unforeseen, and (c) nonevents (Schlossberg, 2011).

Self: This coping source represents the unique personal and demographic individualities of the person entering a transitional stage. The personal attributes include health, socioeconomic status, and gender that have a direct impact on how the individual perceived him or herself and overall quality of life (Anderson et al., 2012; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Schlossberg, 2011).

Situation: This coping source includes evaluating one's circumstances at the time of the transition. The process of examining the situation encompasses having an awareness of any triggers, the degree of control, the timing, and the evolution of roles (Schlossberg, 2011).

Strategies: Involves the characteristic behavior to assess and manage the transition process, particularly any barriers. The individual can (a) alter the meaning; (b) modify the situation; and (c) influence or limit any associated stress (Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Schlossberg, 2011).

Support: This coping resource entails what sources of support are in place to influence the transition process. Support can derive from numerous sources such as family units, networks of friends, intimate relationships, and institutions/communities (Anderson et al., 2012; Anderson & Goodman, 2014; Schlossberg, 2011).

Veteran: A individual who served on active duty in the uniformed services to include United States Army (USA), United States Air Force (USAF), United States Marine Corps (USMC), United States Navy (USN), or the United States Coast Guard (USCG) for more than 180 days and was discharged, separated, or retired. The individual could also be a member of a reserve component under an order to active duty according to section 672 (a), (d), or 673 (a) of title 10 U.S.C. and was discharged or released from such duty with other than a dishonorable discharge (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018b).

Assumptions

Simon and Goes (2013) asserted that assumptions in research are those statements

or things perceived as being correct or that are taken for granted and are outside my control but were necessary throughout the research process. The process of understanding the participants' lived experiences provided the data to complete a phenomenological study. The participants in this phenomenological study shared experiences (see Englander, 2012; Wolgemuth, Hicks, & Agosto, 2017; Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015). The first assumption was that the female veteran participants would report information associated with their lived experiences truthfully, candidly, and accurately (see Varona, Saito, Takahashi, & Kai, 2007; Wolgemuth et al., 2017; Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015). Thereby offering information that improved my knowledge and awareness of how female NCO veterans' experiences impacted the transition and reintegration processes through the analysis of the participants' accounts. The assumption is that the participants would make a significant contribution reporting how their lived experience impacted their transition from the military and reintegration to private-sector employment. The analysis of other research approaches and methodologies resulted in the assumption that to accomplish the desired outcome and interpretation of the shared lived experiences that the qualitative phenomenological approach would best inform the study and explore the female NCO veteran's experiences. I assumed that data saturation would occur, resulting in the potential of not identifying new themes associated with the phenomenon. Seidman (2013) emphasized the importance of utilizing a small sample size in qualitative research, which is acknowledged by Fusch and Ness (2015), who asserted that the process of achieving saturation is reliant on the research approach and design.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study included female NCO veterans as participants. For the study, female NCO veterans were defined as an individual who served on active duty in the uniformed services and separated with ten or more years of management and leadership experience and in some cases 20 or more years of military service. I did not consider any organizational managers as participants for this study. A total of 16 participants were asked to respond to interview questions during a face-to-face meeting, or via SKYPE interviews for those wanting to participate but are unable to meet face-to-face, as part of the phenomenological study design is a delimitation. In addition to being asked a series of demographic-related questions, the participants were asked open-ended questions focused on military transition and private-sector reintegration experiences. The aim was to address the overarching research question of what are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegrate into private-sector employment?

I combined two concepts (e.g., Schlossberg's transition model and Nicholson's work-role model) to create the conceptual framework. This framework allowed me to explore female NCO veterans' lived experiences through their perspectives and accounts of the phenomenon. I incorporated the concept of transition, which focused on movement across institutional settings such as separation from a military setting and movement to a private setting (see Glover-Graf et al., 2010) and Drebing et al. (2007) concept of reintegration. I also integrated Schlossberg's 4S model and Nicholson's work-role transition model. The projection is that the results of the study will aid the Department of

Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and others in the management field in the development or restructuring of transition assistance and veterans hiring programs. The Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private companies can benchmark these processes to enhance further transition assistance programs, developmental training, reintegration education, and recruitment programs. This study may contribute to the female NCO veteran population, as well as the U.S. veteran population, in general, resiliency following military service and abilities to secure private-sector employment.

Limitations

The limitations of the study primarily stem from the inclusion of 16 female NCO veterans, potentially creating a limitation because a small sample size may cause the findings to not be generalized to larger groups. Because qualitative research produced transferable results as opposed to generalizable findings, the findings will be representative of other female veterans who are not NCO or not enlisted members of the military because of purposeful sampling. Second, the data were limited to the availability, to what the participants are willing to report, and their capacity to communicate their experiences and thoughts articulately, expressively, and reflectively (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Third, in qualitative research, I was the primary data collection instrument (see Patton, 2015). Because the study is qualitative, the use of my frame of reference and experiences aided in interpreting the participants' lived experiences. Gearing (2004) maintained that the concept of bracketing is best suited for research focused on exploring female NCO veterans' lived experiences. Additionally, in a

phenomenological study, it is vital to recognize and reduce any potential bias as well as understand the impact prior knowledge can have during data collection and analysis (O'Halloran, Littlewood, Richardson, Tod, & Nesti, 2016). Because of personal experience as a female veteran, the process of bracketing aided in lessening the possibility of influencing the participant's perspectives or knowledge of the phenomenon. The process of not acknowledging research bias could have a long-term impact resulting in the need to employ bracketing to mitigate my presumptions (see Lomangino, 2015; Tufford & Newman, 2012). It was essential to incorporate the participants' interpretations and verbiage describing their experiences allowing me to report vivid language and provide insight resulting in the transferability of the findings (see van Manen, 2014). Another limitation is the ability to overcome any participants' perceived vulnerabilities relating to predetermined assumptions, sociocultural, and current employment status. A means of overcoming these issues is the process of reassuring participants that the confidentiality of their participation and information was protected (see Killawil et al., 2014).

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may have a positive social because of the significant challenges female NCO veterans face during the military transition and private-sector reintegration (see Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). This study is critical because it addressed the notable gap in the literature by highlighting and reporting the first-hand account of the lived experiences of female NCO veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid-level and

senior-level management and or leadership level encounter significant challenges in securing employment (see Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). In comparison to their male counterparts, women veterans faced additional complexities due to distinctive gender-specific needs (see Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013). Although considerable literature exists on U.S. military or veterans' transitioning and reintegration primarily focusing on the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related issues, mental health issues, and higher learning (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). This research is vital because of the potential valuable lessons to be learned from an underrepresented portion of the veteran population. This research is imperative and could potentially establish a foundation to improve the transition and reintegration efforts for future female NCO veterans as they transition to a second career (see Robertson & Brott, 2014). Scholars have addressed the requirement to further explore the distinctive and individualistic experiences and challenges of female NCO veterans during transition and reintegration to civilian culture and private-sector workplaces (see Crocker, Powell-Cope, Brown, & Besterman-Dahan, 2014; Maiocco & Smith, 2016). The research is important because it may contribute to addressing these needs as well as to the field of management and organizational leadership filling a gap in understanding the increased complexities and challenges female NCO veterans face when reintegrating into the private-sector.

Throughout this process, the focused was placed on the participants' viewpoints to ensure the acknowledgment of any potential biases that stemmed from significant previous experience as a female NCO veteran serving in the military for over 30 years

making it imperative to conduct a self-assessment to acknowledge viewpoints, philosophies, and preconceptions (see Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). It was essential to personally reflect on and articulate my perspectives, viewpoints, and biases (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to transcribe and record the essence of those lived experiences, from the participants' perspectives, in writing, resulting in a comprehensive description of the phenomena (see Sanjari et al., 2014). The process of bracketing was consistently employed to ensure not to allow any biases to shape the ways of viewing, understanding, and interpreting the data (Chan et al., 2013). Additionally, I used a reflective journal to document my views and interpretations to ensure accuracy in presenting an unbiased explanation of the transition and reintegration experiences of female NCO veterans.

Significance to Practice

The practical significance of this study provided information to not only separating or retiring female NCO veterans but the veteran population. The study may broaden the awareness of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and other organizations associated with the participants' perspectives of the criticality of developing and implementing effective transition and reintegration programs and policies. The primary aim of conducting the study was to explore and document female NCO veterans' lived experiences during the military transition and private-sector reintegration. The study may have significant implications for the military and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs transition counselors, HR and hiring managers, as well as recruiters. For example,

transition counselors could utilize the information to improve existing services and better

understand the veterans' frame-of-mind and practical preparedness to transition and

reintegrate into private-sector employment (Robertson & Brott, 2014). The Department

of Defense, the Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, private-

sector employers, communities, families, and other agencies must understand that

transitioning from the military and reintegrating into the private-sector workforce is a

lengthy and complicated process. From a business and professional practice standpoint,

the results of the study provided a foundation to develop further business initiatives and

policies that could aid in addressing the disparities amongst commissioned officers and

NCOs. Many private-sector companies, including General Electric, Booz Allen

Hamilton, and Walmart, to name a few, recruitment initiatives focus on attracting and

hiring commissioned officers over NCO veterans, thus making clear distinctions in

private-sector career paths (O'Keefe, 2015; So, 2012). By focusing on hiring

commissioned officer's veterans, companies overlooked valuable assets with years of

experience, education, and management training and expertise. The study may contribute

in that I focused on veterans' needs, current practices and implications for counselor

educators, and issue a call for future research highlighting the fact that transitioning from

the military culture to civilian life creates tremendous culture shock like that immigrant's

experience when arriving in the United States or other countries (see Rausch, 2014).

Significance to Concepts

Considerable literature exists on U.S. military or veterans' transitioning and

reintegration primarily focused on the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-

related issues, mental health issues, and higher learning (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). However, gaps persist in existing literature relating to female NCO veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid to senior management and or leadership levels and the significant challenges encountered in securing employment (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). Despite existing studies, there is a deficiency in literature focused on the evaluation of the overall fulfillment of female NCO veterans successfully experiencing transitioning to a second career (Robertson & Brott, 2014). This research filled a gap in understanding the increased complexities and challenges female NCO veterans face when reintegrating into the private-sector. An evaluation of existing literature revealed no indications of the use of Moustakas' (1994) empirical phenomenological design to explore the female NCO veteran population's transition and reintegration lived experiences. The phenomenological research aided in obtaining comprehensive descriptions that served as the source for a reflective exploration to describe the essences of the participants' experiences. The model of adult transitioning provided a conceptual lens to evaluate the career transitioning of female NCO veterans throughout the various phases transpiring over time (Schlossberg, 1981). The work-role transition model was useful in describing work-role adjustments when reintegrating into a private-sector workplace (Nicholson, 1984). The research design offered contributions to transition and reintegration research through the use of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model for evaluating the validity, reliability, and research quality.

Significance to Social Change

The study may contribute to social change by increasing the attention focused on further enhancing and restructuring existing transition and reintegration initiatives that ultimately contribute to fair use of a misunderstood, underutilized, valuable, and experienced population, thus directly impacting the sustainability of private-sector and government organizations. The managers and leaders, across the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, corporations, communities, and private-sector employers, who have awareness and an understanding of the impact that female NCO veterans bring to the workforce should increase their attention and behavior producing more effective support to female NCO veterans' transition and reintegration experiences. The collaborative efforts, of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and others in the management field, must be given more attention particularly in the development or restructuring of transition assistance and veterans hiring programs to better assist female NCO veterans in securing private-sector employment. This study may have a social implication in that the aim was to capture the processes and behaviors employed by those female NCO veterans who did not, as well as those who experienced some degree of success, successfully reintegrate and in some cases secure comparable private-sector management roles. The Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private companies can benchmark these processes to enhance further transition assistance programs, developmental training, and reintegration education programs. This study may have social implications aiding in the capturing of best practices tailored

towards improving military professional development, the transition assistance program, and private-sector recruitment and hiring initiatives. The implications for positive social change at various levels.

The findings of this study had the knowledge and practical implications in the fields of management and leadership as well as encourage positive social change at the individual, Department of Defense, and national levels. The results of this study may impact positive social change through the adequate documentation of the first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of female NCO veterans. This study may have positive social change implications providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon and acknowledging the female NCO veterans' sphere of influence on advancing transition policies, programs, and practices. Through cultivation, the female NCO veterans' personal qualities, obtained through military professional development programs, are better aligned to those qualities sought after by private-sector human resources and hiring managers.

At the Department of Defense level, the results of this study may have positive social change implications across the military departments by encouraging the use of more innovative approaches to develop collaborative, amongst the military services, Department of Defense, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, post-transitional programs and policies that have an impact on not only female NCO veterans successful transition and private-sector reintegration well into the future but the veteran population. At the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and other governing bodies, level, this study is likely to aid in improving programs and practices at local, state, and national levels.

This study may also lead to positive social change by influencing perspectives and improving the accessibility to employment resources for female NCO veterans and the U.S. veteran population. At the private sector level, this study may impact the advancement of reintegration education and recruitment programs that have national and global influence through increased interdisciplinary and results-driven management research initiatives. At the societal level, this study may provide new knowledge that may aid in taking a more collaborative approach by employing collective behaviors to address the challenges (e.g., unemployment, medical, PTSD, and homelessness) faced by veterans from a global perspective.

The results of this study are intended to impact positive social change by facilitating the development of strategies focused on providing education and training throughout, as opposed to immediately before discharge, separation, or retirement, the female NCO veterans' military career to better prepare them potentially creating more private-sector employment opportunities, particularly at the mid to senior management levels. This investigation may assist military leaders, policymakers, private-sector employers to expand benefits to other governing bodies, service providers, and communities. The result of this study may facilitate more progressive and collaborative behavior, aiding in reforming existing policies, programs, and initiatives focused on military and career transition as well as identifying and securing equivalent private-sector management and leadership employment. Social innovations and their relation to positive social change impact social integration and improve social equality to aid in the long-term sustainability of society in general (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017). The results of this

study could aid in the advancement of the approach to management and leadership development across the military departments through collaborative efforts with other government service providers and private-sector organizations, thus fostering positive social change.

Summary and Transition

In 2011, President Obama signed into law the Veterans' Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act mandating that all military members transitioning from the military participate in TAP (Cronk, 2015; Disabled American Veterans [DAV], 2014; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck, 2018). As a result, the Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs partnered, in 2013, with the White House Economic and Domestic Policy Council to restructure the program (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The Department of Labor also revamped its transition workshops to develop a more comprehensive design; however, the programs did not adequately strengthen and systematizes services, training, and counseling women received before, during, and after separation or retirement (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Although veterans leave the military with translatable management and leadership skills and experiences, private-sector employers, the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs policymakers and leaders continued to face challenges in developing a transition programs and reintegration initiatives (DAV, 2014; Strauss, 2016). The programs and initiatives did not effectively contribute to female NCO veterans' successful transition and reintegration into private-sector employment (DAV, 2014;

Strauss, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore

the lived experiences of female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership

experience, regarding their transition from military service and reintegration into private-

sector employment. In Chapter 1, I presented the background of the study, the problem

and purpose statements, and the research question. The nature of the study, relevant

assumptions, the significance of the study, scope and delimitations of the study, and

pertinent limitations of the study are covered. In Chapter 2, I provide the literature review

incorporating a summary of pertinent literature. I highlight the gaps in the available

literature relating to female NCO veteran's challenges during the military transition and

private-sector reintegration processes. In Chapter 3, I discuss the qualitative research

design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methodology, data collection, and

issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter includes an investigation of the relevant literature regarding the challenges amongst U.S. female NCO veterans transitioning from military service. The intent of reviewing military transition and private-sector reintegration in the scholarly literature was to provide a greater understanding of the complexities female NCO veterans face when reintegrating into the private-sector. Through the literature review, I aimed to explore and identify existing gaps in the research to gain greater insight of the enduring inability of many female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience to transition from the military service successfully and reintegrate into private-sector employment (see Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2016). The specific problem was that many female NCO veterans with years of mid-level to senior-level management and leadership experience are unable to translate these skills to comparable private-sector employment (DAV, 2014; Gould & Obicheta, 2015; Strauss, 2016; Szelwach et al., 2011). The purpose of this qualitative study, using a phenomenological research design, was to explore the lived experiences and reveal assigned personal meanings from female NCO veterans with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from military service and reintegration into private-sector employment.

The exploration of the central phenomenon, transitioning from the military to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce, included an in-depth review of the literature. Considerable literature exists on military veterans' transitioning and reintegration, primarily focusing on the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-

related issues, mental health issues, and higher learning (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). However, gaps persisted in existing literature relating to female NCO veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid to senior management and or leadership levels and the significant challenges encountered while attempting to secure employment (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015).

This chapter includes a description of the search strategies. The review of the literature offers a historical perspective of the veteran female population, specifically the enlisted NCO corps. The review includes an overview of the investigation of Schlossberg's 4S transition model and the work-role transition model that formed the conceptual framework for the study. The review of the literature focuses on exploring female NCO veterans' transitional phase from the military and their reintegration to private-section employment, emphasizing the challenges and complexities. The discussion briefly provides those techniques and support programs female NCO veterans employed attempting to reintegrate, highlighting the need and recommendations for future research successfully. Before conducting an in-depth literature review, I define and conducted the literature search strategy.

Literature Search Strategy

During the literature review process, the review encompassed academic journals, scholarly books, and peer-reviewed scholarly articles. The Walden University Library proved to be a useful source for locating scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles and published dissertations. Through the Walden University Library, use of several

EBSCOhost interfaces aided in gaining access to the Thoreau Database, ProQuest, ABI Inform Complete, PsycINFO, Thoreau Database, Business Management Complete, Education Research Complete, Academic Search Complete, and SocINDEX, to name a few. The process included an examination of published information and literature relevant to military transition and private-sector reintegration. Because the study was qualitative phenomenological research, the review included an analysis of literature relating to the conceptual framework. Another focus of the review was to evaluate the types of concepts aligned with the transition from the military and reintegration to the private-sector, specifically Schlossberg's transition model and work-role transition model. The review included the consultation of the Department of Defense, Department of Labor, U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, BLS, and military services websites to gather statistical data and other literature relating to transitioning and reintegration into the private-sector. After reviewing the references from other sources, additional sources yielded further data (e.g., dissertations). The Library of Congress website was an excellent source for accessing books, journal articles, and other printed materials.

The utilization of Google Scholar allowed for the broadening of the search efforts relating to the topic of this study by employing keywords searches incorporating the terms *military and reintegration or veterans and reintegration; military and transition or veterans and transition; military and reintegration and private-sector or veterans and reintegration and private-sector; military and transition and private-sector or veterans and transition and private-sector; military and reintegration and private-sector; female*

veterans and reintegration or female veterans and transition; female military and

reintegration or female military and transition; women veterans and reintegration or

women veterans and transition; female veterans and civilian employment; women

veterans and civilian employment; transition or veterans and transition, veterans and

transition and civilian, military; Schlossberg 4S model; and *work-role transition model.*

I initially conducted a broad search and later modified and or narrowed the

parameters to a keyword or a group of more than one phrase associated with transitioning

from the military and reintegrating into the private-sector. I also referenced any

correlated concepts and or methodologies. For example, the Walden University Thoreau

database search started with the usage of the Boolean search incorporating such phrases

as *veterans AND transition, veterans AND reintegration, military AND transition,*

military AND reintegration, female veterans AND transition, and female veterans AND

reintegration, to name a few. The utilization of these words and or combination of words

yielded 21,904 results. I then narrowed the parameters for existing literature published

from 2013 to 2017. I then confined the search parameters to resulting in the Boolean

search keywords to incorporate the veterans AND transition AND civilian. This search

yielded 334 results. I scanned the articles and found about 183 articles relevant to the

topic of military transition and private-sector reintegration. Similarly, the Boolean search

phrase *military AND transition AND civilian* yielded 807 results. I scanned the articles

and found 146 articles relevant to this topic.

I utilized the same process searching broadly and then narrowing the search for

extant literature published between 2013 and 2017 using the Google Scholar search

engine. A broad search using Google Scholar yielded 3,640,000 articles relating to the

work-role transition model that would be useful in the study. I then narrowed the search

parameters to 2013, which yielded 521,000. A broad search of the terms female veterans'

reintegration yielded 20,700 and 9,590 since 2013. For example, I narrowed the search to

2017 articles using the phrase *female veterans and reintegration*, which yielded 309

results. I narrowed the search even further to include the phrase private-sector, which

yielded 88 results. I did not set search parameters (e.g., 2012-2017) when searching for

research associated with concepts and or methodology because I wanted to obtain the

origin or source of the concepts referenced in this study. My review of the literature

included government sites and testimonies from the Department of Defense leaders on

the restructured military transition program. In the next section, I provide a brief

overview of the conceptual framework and a discussion of the role of concepts of

transition and reintegration. This section also includes a description of Schlossberg's

transition model and the work role model and how they aligned to military transition and

private-sector reintegration.

Conceptual Framework

The utilization of either a theoretical or conceptual framework depended on my

overall objectives for researching as is integrated throughout the research process but is

ambiguous in existing literature (see Green, 2014). The absence of a clear understanding

and interpretation of what differentiates, or constitutes, a theoretical framework from a

conceptual framework exists. Green (2014) found the frameworks highlighted in several

books but neglect to provide in-depth clarification that provided readers with greater

insight and comprehension of the most significant utilization of theoretical or conceptual

frameworks. This gap in literature was potentially hindering when deciding as to which

framework is best suited to inform his or her subject matter, provide greater insight, or

identify the most valuable strategy. The use of a conceptual framework aided the

investigation of a specific problem that requires additional analysis serving as a research

paradigm grounded in my perspectives on how to evaluate a research problem (see Miles

& Huberman, 1994). Figure 1 is a graphic illustration of the conceptual framework for

successful military transition and private-sector reintegration. This framework may aid

government policymakers, nongovernment stakeholders, communities, and private-sector

management could address the notable gaps in the literature as well as improve existing

programs and policies.
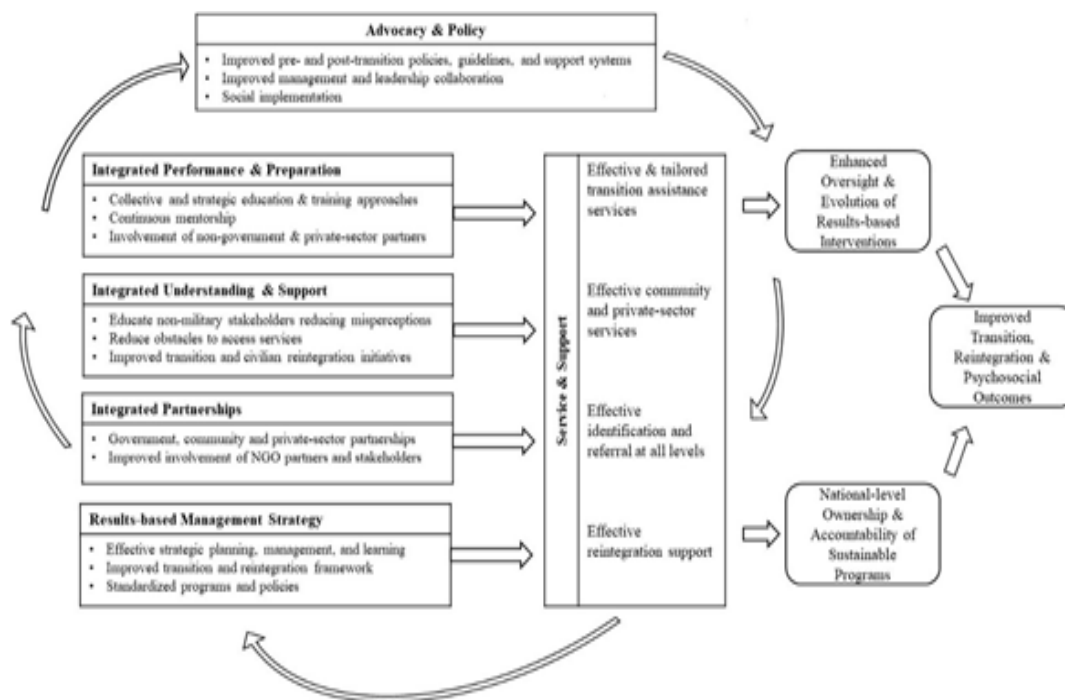
Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

The Role of Concepts

The role of concepts in qualitative research served as the foundation to merge other concepts to form meaning and alignment, allowing me to generate significance (see Dobson, 2002; Jabareen, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tamene et al., 2016). As I discussed in Chapter 1, Deleuze and Guattari (1991) maintained that "every concept has components and is defined by them" (p. 15) and these "components, or what defines the consistency of the concept; its endo-consistency; are distinct, heterogeneous and, yet, not separable" (p. 19). Concepts had a significant impact on determining the appropriate research design and in determining what to research as well as aided in developing concise research questions that best informed the field of study. Concepts strengthen methodologies and impacted the methods used to collect, analyze, translate, and report information. By utilizing a conceptual framework and concepts, the process of categorizing perspectives to illustrate and explain a phenomenon helped in advancing efforts to create an essential description of a more complex account, awareness, and description of this study participants' perspectives. For example, concepts supported the ability to capture a more comprehensive, practical, and first-hand observation as well as develop a framework for conceptualizing and comprehending the process of career transition and private-sector reintegration (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010).

The role of concepts facilitated significant analysis of a phenomenon supporting more complex methodologies to the data so that the research experience limited issues when developing and asking various questions (Dobson, 2002; Jabareen, 2009; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tamene et al., 2016). The use of concepts validated

each other articulated the associated phenomena, and aided in determining the research design (Jabareen, 2009). Latham (2017) asserted that the methodologies used in qualitative research must align with the concepts, as well as the concept relations and context. Fischer (2007) found that altering a conceptual framework could create uniformity to this study context and central research question. Fischer (2007) also maintained that by altering the framework, the necessary tools to collect systematic interpretations and clarifications of female NCO veterans' lived experiences when transitioning from military to civilian culture, I was able to articulate the fundamental components of associations amongst two or more elements or events. The assertions further supported these assumptions that a concept provided a greater understanding of an issue(s) or the reason(s) why events occur as an illustrative account for explaining an occurrence or incident (Fain, 2004).

Concept of Transition

This study is grounded in the concept of transition, which focused on movement across institutional settings such as a female NCO military member separating or retiring from a military environment and reintegrating into the private-sector work environment (see Glover-Graf et al., 2010; Penk et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 2011), and Drebing et al.'s (2007) concept of reintegration. Regardless of whether the female NCO veteran is departing the military after four years, retiring with 20 or more years, is involuntarily discharged, or is medically discharged or separated, transitioning and reintegration were challenging for the veteran and her family (see Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011).

The concept of transition was adapted and evolved by scholars such as Adams, Hayes, and Hopson (1977), Schlossberg (1981), and Bridges (1991). Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) asserted that the concept of transition advanced knowledge related to adults in the process of transition and the necessity to identify those programs and initiatives geared to assist in managing the familiar and unexpected occurrences during transitioning and other life changes. Evans et al. (2010) maintained that the conceptualization of the concept of transition resulted in filling the gap of a foundational construct that aided in understanding the behavior of adults in transition. The concept of transition also highlighted an individuals' ability to gain access to services to assist in coping with changes associated with regular and uncommon life occurrences (Evans et al., 2010). The Schlossberg's 4S transition model further addressed the concept of transition.

Schlossberg's 4S transition model. Schlossberg (1981) initially conceptualized the transition model as a methodology for exploring how individuals adapt to the process of transitioning. The developmental process was grounded in the work of scholars such as Liberman, Lipman-Blumen, and Zill (see Schlossberg, 1981). The use of the Schlossberg's 4S model aided in providing greater awareness of the challenges female NCO veterans encounter during the transition and reintegration process to the private-sector workforce. The first component, *situation*, aligned with the female NCO veterans' situation at transition precisely, what was occurring from the NCO veterans' perspective as they chose to transition from the military to reintegrate into the private-sector (see Schlossberg, 1984). The second component, *self*, related to the female veteran's

identifiable and demographic individualities, as well as the emotional resources used by the female NCO veterans in this situation, in other words, what she is feeling and experiencing during the transition (Schlossberg, 1984). The third aspect, *support*, represented the assistance and services the veteran has access to as they transition to and reintegrate into the private-sector (Schlossberg, 1984). The final factor, strategies, embodied three distinct coping strategies to include (a) adapt to or alter the situation, (b) modification of the significance of the situation, or (c) influence the degree of stress associated with the situation (Schlossberg, 1984).

The model offered a framework for separation and or retirement transition and outlines the requirement for transition resources, training and counseling, strategies, and initiatives focused on providing support to service members, retirees, and veterans throughout the transition process (see Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg (1981) described the transition as a complex process the individual experience when dealing with significant changes in their lives that requires an evaluation of characteristic traits and external influences. Regardless if a female NCO veteran was departing the military after four years, retiring with 20 or more years, is involuntarily discharged, or is medically discharged or separated, transitioning and reintegration were a challenge (see Coll et al., 2011; Coll & Weiss, 2016; Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2012). Although Schlossberg's model described as a model of adult development, several practitioners, such as Sheikh and Edwards, aligned the model to transitional experiences of immigrant veterans and the challenges veterans encounter as they transition to the civilian workforce, respectively (Anderson et al., 2012). The Schlossberg's 4S model was

extensively utilized particularly concerning the complications and struggles that veterans encounter as they transition and reintegrate into the private sector in hopes to translate mid-level to senior-level management and leadership skills to comparable civilian management roles (see DAV, 2014; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Johnston, Fletcher, Ginn, & Stein, 2010; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011).

Griffin and Gilbert (2015) maintained that a gap exists in literature focused on the veterans' population, particularly relating to the female NCO veterans. Numerous factors impacted whether an individual can successfully transition to include the nature of, the category of, and the reasoning within which transition occurs, and associated resources (Anderson et al., 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995; Vogt et al., 2016). Schlossberg (1981) maintained that a compilation of these factors aligned to four significant components that impact an individual's capacity to deal with the challenges of transition. Schlossberg (1981) used his model to assess the degree of impact the female NCO veterans' situation, self, support, and strategies had on enabling or hindering the transition process (Roberts, 2013; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Although Schlossberg's model has not been extensively used to explore female NCO veterans' military transition and private-sector reintegration, it served as a framework for empirical research on female NCO veterans, and the veterans' population in general (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Schlossberg's model also highlighted pertinent work, identifying assistance programs as well as the significant challenges female NCO veterans face during transition and reintegration (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Elnitsky et al. (2017) used Schlossberg's model to evaluate (a) whether an

individual can adapt to the change associated with transitioning, (b) the degree of

certainty relating to the individual's preparedness, and (c) the degree of certainty relating

to the ability to reintegrate and secure private-sector employment successfully.

Schlossberg's model incorporated four key factors that influence the process of

transition and provided a conceptual lens for exploring and evaluating female NCO

veterans' transition from the military services. The model also served as a mechanism for

broadening the contextual perspectives relating to military separation or retirement

highlighting the critical need for the transformation of existing programs, counseling,

resources, and joint transition initiatives tailored to meet better the needs of not only

female NCO veterans but the U.S. veteran population (see Anderson et al., 2012; Elnitsky

et al., 2017). Figure 2 is a sample career transition model.
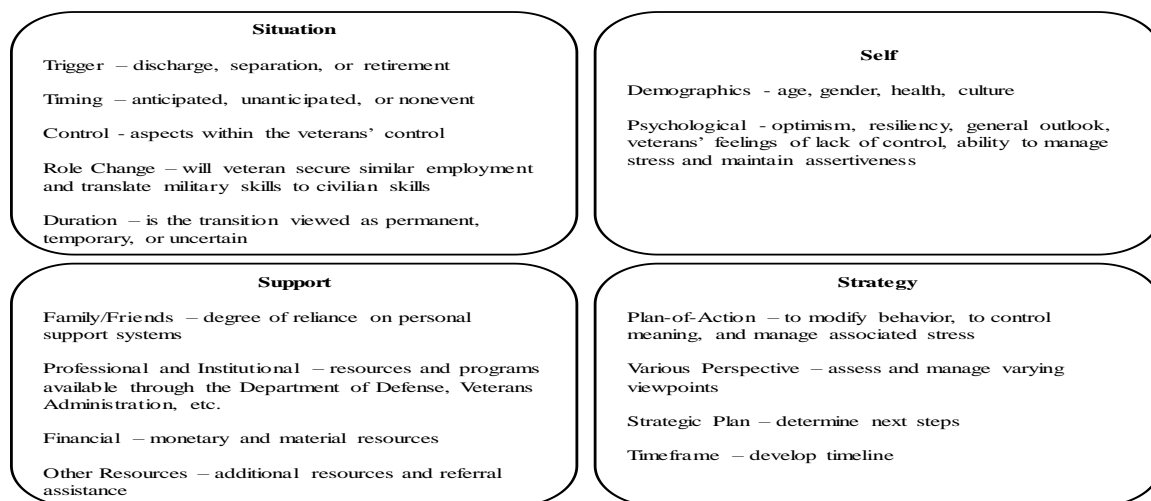
Figure 2. Sample career transition model. Adapted from "The Challenge of Change: The transition Model and Its Applications," by N. K. Schlossberg, *Journal of Employment Counseling, 48*(4), 159-162. Copyright 2011 by the American Psychological Association.

The Concept of Reintegration

The process of reintegrating was not the same for any two veterans (Coll et al.,

2012; Coll & Weiss, 2016). The concept of reintegration is the process of assimilating or reestablishing oneself into a previous way of life as well as progressing, emerging, or advancing from one period or practice to an alternative or new state ("Reintegration," 2019). Elnitsky et al. (2017) asserted that the reintegration process encompasses the aspects of transition, readjustment, and community integration. The process of reintegrating from a military community to a civilian community required the individual to alter personal, relational, participation in community groups, as well as societal components (Elnitsky et al., 2017). These factors enabled or hindered advantageous reintegration. The ability to cope with stressful life events, such as private-sector reintegration, was a critical aspect of successful reintegration.

Elnitsky et al. (2017) found that most researchers did not provide an acknowledged description of military service members' and veterans' reintegration or an understanding of the overall circumstances or environments in which the procedure of reintegration occurs. A requirement exists for further investigation of the factors needed to facilitate successful reintegration as well as the need to highlight adversities, difficulties, practices, and their effect on reintegration aftermaths. The description of reintegration varied across time, disciplines, and organizations with VetAdvisor (2015) defining reintegration as the process of reassuming one's age, sex, and domestic and communal ethical responsibilities as well as workforce roles. Currie, Day, and Kelloway (2011) described reintegration as the linked behaviors associated with transitioning to personal and work-related functions or positions post-military service. Furthermore, Reistetter and Abreu (2005) defined reintegration as acclimating to the activities

categorized or motivated by change or progress that aligned with one's private life, social

bonds, and is complex.

Resnik et al. (2012) defined reintegration as the process of an individual's

reassuming his or her life role, functionality, or involvement within the community.

Elnitsky et al. (2017) assessed the veterans' degree of certainty, willingness, and

preparedness to adapt to the private-sector. VetAdvisor (2015) maintained that although

the veteran's transition and reintegration are often interchangeably utilized, there are

distinctive variations. Elnitsky et al. (2017) maintained that the enablement of military

transition and private-sector reintegration is a shared government, employers, and

community responsibility of importance. As the female NCO veterans attempted to

reintegrate into private-sector employment, she experienced a significant change to the

work role held while in the military. I used the work-role transition model to inform

private-sector reintegration.

Work role transition model. The work-role transition model was grounded in

the role concepts developed by George Mead in 1913 and evolved by Ralph Linton in

1936. Nicholson (1984) defined work-role transition as "any change in employment

status and any major change in job content" (p. 174). A person's roles directly linked to

his or her functions or positions in the community and workplace and influenced the

individual's self-perceptions (Linton, 1936; Mead, 1913). Cottrell (1942) asserted that a

correlation exists amongst an individual's cultural background and experiences associated

with role adjustments and transitions, such as reintegration. In 1957, Phillips utilized role

concepts to evaluate the transition process and the outcomes of older adult's post-

retirement experiences. Phillips (1957) found that males who retired were widowed, and over the age of 70, transition experiences were less effective compared to their counterparts who were 60 to 69 years of age, employed, and married. Nicholson (1984) introduced the work-role transition model and scholars such as Nicholson & West, 1988; West, 1987; West, Nicholson & Rees, 1987; and West & Rushton, 1989 further investigated the premise that the impact on an individual's life can be dramatic based on changes in roles whether personal or professional. Nicholson's (1984) work-role transition model had a direct correlation to Schlossberg's 4S transition model. In that, an individual's transition from the military and reintegration into the private-sector required work-role adjustments, particularly when attempting to secure mid-level to senior-level management positions in the private sector.

Ashforth and Saks (1995) evaluated the work-role model using a longitudinal design to assess the behaviors associated with business school graduates' lived experiences when transitioning to new work roles. Ashforth and Saks (1995) utilized the work role transition model to evaluate 350 Concordia University's undergraduate business program to assess the transition process during three phases to include the semester proceeding the acceptance of a new position, the fourth month after transitioning into the new work role, and ten months after assuming the new work role. The process of adjusting to new work roles included making concessions amongst their needs and the needs of the organization (see Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Brett, 1984; Dawes & Lofquist, 1984).

Nicholson (1984) asserted that the process of transitioning from one work role to

another stimulates subjective and or role growth. When an individual transitioned to a new position, his or her advancement aligned with the uniqueness of the responsibilities and with the individual's necessity to gain acceptance and approval from others (Nicholson, 1984). Nicholson (1984) maintained that role progression directly impacted an individual's preferences and the necessity to maintain power and or influence over the events associated with the change of transitioning. Nicholson and West (1988) maintained that the personal development aspect of the work-role transition encompassed the individual's behavior and ability to adapt to insignificant modifications associated with their day-to-day events to significant growths and self-perceptions. The role advancements included transforming the new role to meet the desires of the individual to include adjustments ranging from daily schedules to overarching organizational goals (Nicholson & West, 1988). Southwell and Wadsworth (2016) asserted that the focus of a female NCO veteran, still serving, due to her military commitment, is work role related. As a female NCO veteran entered the transition phase from the military to the private sector, she began to shift her focus to personal aspects, such as family, resulting in a short-term decrease of attention on her work role (see Gewirtz, Pinna, Hanson, & Brockberg, 2014). In most cases, she began to simultaneously focus on successfully reintegrating and securing private-sector employment, potentially causing some work-life challenges as she transitions to a veteran-civilian employee role (Lloyd-Hazlett, 2016).

Concept of Employability

Taylor (2016) described employability as "a lifelong journey of learning and reflection about yourself and what you can offer the world of work" (p. 1). For decades,

scholars argued over the validity of employability as a concept describing employability as a complicated and diverse concept that is difficult to define and employ from a practical perspective (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Taylor, 2016). The use of the concept of employability spanned across several fields of study to include, but not limited to, economic, social, organizational, and from an individual perspective that emerged during the 1990s (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Taylor, 2016). The concept of employability had a rich history and was formally acknowledged as having a direct impact on academic, unemployment, and broaden opportunities for populations susceptible to exclusion in the workplace (Feintuch, 1955; Vanhercke et al., 2015). The concept gained attention as a mechanism to assess the process of securing employment throughout an individual's career with less employer dependency (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 2002). The acknowledgment of employability related to the transitions individuals made throughout their careers and the influence of transitioning on successfully securing a new job (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Vanhercke et al., 2015). The terminology incorporated "any change in employment status and any major change in job content" (Nicholson, 1984, p. 173). The process of transitioning can occur with the same employer or with different employers (Vanhercke et al., 2015).

Although the meaning changed over time, the importance of employability within the strategic direction continue to be highlighted (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). Rosenberg, Heimler, and Morote (2012) maintained that an individual's employability is grounded in the foundational skills acquired to perform a job or hold a particular position. Rosenberg et al. (2012) noted that by securing employment, an individual could advance

employability to develop fundamental transferable skills into marketable talents, competencies, and or expertise. Taylor (2016) emphasized that by sustaining employability, an individual goes through a continuous practice of evolving not only in their careers but understanding the impact of personal life on the process.

Yorke (2006) maintained that the concept of employability is not the ability to secure a job or position but rather the individual's capacity to achieve accomplishments that are pertinent coupled with the functionality while in a job or holding a position. Yorke's contentions aligned with Dacre Pool and Sewell's (2007) assertions that employability expanded beyond a person's ability to secure employment. For individuals, such as female NCO veterans, to succeed in transitioning to the private sector and securing a management position, it was essential to understand the process from a personal perspective as well as aspects (e.g., health, economic, and social) that impact their employability. Gaps, and a shared understanding, persists in literature focused on providing a greater understanding of the concept of employability and the development of other options focused on providing the necessary skills needed (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2013; Taylor, 2016). Moreau and Leathwood (2006) asserted that the government highlighted the significance of employability. Taylor (2016) highlighted the importance of future research, and shared definition is needed to facilitate the transition and securing employment for groups such as female NCO veterans.

In summary, the conceptual framework served as a foundation for exploring and analyzing female NCO veterans' transition from the military and private-sector reintegration using the 4S transition and the work-role transition models. I aimed to

provide greater understanding by further enhancing awareness of military leaders,

policymakers, private-sector managers, and program directors that provide training,

counseling, and assistance to veterans. Figure 3 is a graphic illustration of the barriers,

potential intervention components, the transition and reintegration environments, and

potential outcomes that aided in female NCO veterans' successful transition and private-

sector reintegration. This study may influence social change by informing policies and

strategies that impact all veterans.
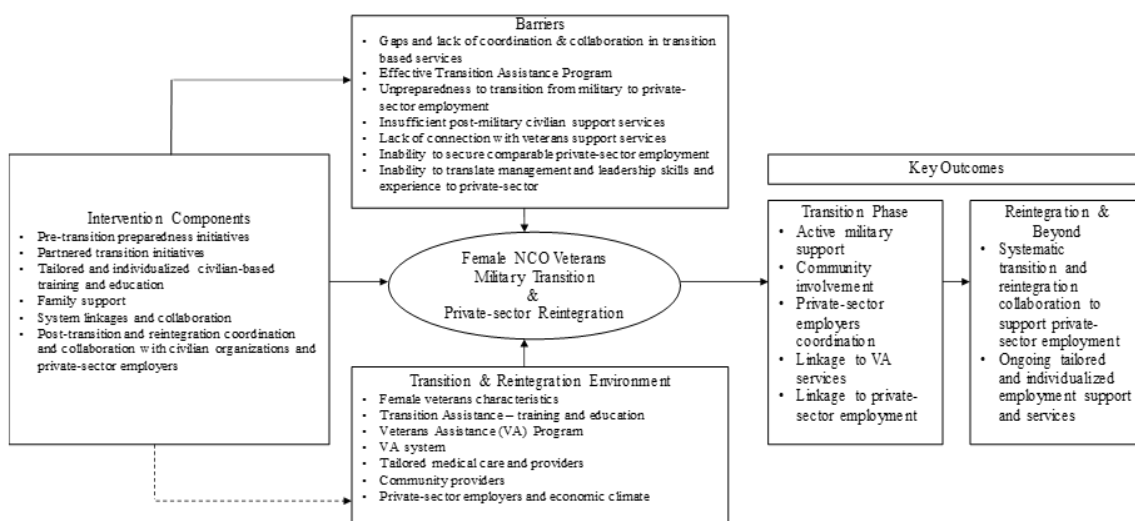
Figure 3. Military transition and private-sector reintegration.

Literature Review

In this section, I evaluate existing literature to identify sources that provide

relevant information about female NCO veterans transitioning from the military and

seeking management and leadership employment in the private sector. The examination

focuses on scholarly literature relating to female NCO veterans as service members,

managers, and leaders as well as veterans. I also discuss military transition, transition

programs, and resources as well as private-sector reintegration. I examine military culture and military management and leadership. I also discuss the challenges associated with transition, reintegration, and translating military experience and skills to civilian occupations and careers. I explore female NCO veterans and unemployment as well as homelessness. I conclude with a discussion of the gaps in the literature and a summation.

The transition from military service to civilian life was a foreseeable life event of separating or retiring from the military. The veteran population faced numerous obstacles before, during, and after the transition process. Most of today's veterans' populations are part of the all-volunteer force and dealt with issues previous generations of veterans did not face (Crampton, 2018; Morin, 2011; Routon, 2014). Their struggles were more complicated than previous generations of veterans who left the military and reintegrated into civilian life and in some cases private-sector employment (Crampton, 2018; Morin, 2011; Routon, 2014) with nearly 44% reporting some type of problem (McAllister et al., 2015). Female NCO veterans typically encounter similar complications as their male counterparts but also faced barriers associated with a set of unique issues (e.g., female related service-connected risk factors, gender-specific health issues, sexual trauma, and inadequate transitioning education, counseling, and preparation focus on dealing with their unique issues) during the reintegration process (DAV, 2014; Street, Vogt, & Dutra, 2009; Vogt et al., 2016).

Gaps persists in existing literature relating to female NCO veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid-level and senior-level management and or leadership level encounter significant challenges in securing

employment (see Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2016). There was also a deficiency in literature focused on the evaluation of the overall fulfillment of female NCO veterans successfully experiencing transitioning to a second career (Robertson & Brott, 2014; Vogt et al., 2016). Lloyd-Hazlett (2016) maintained that there was a gap in literature focused on addressing how to effectively assist this population to overcome the challenges associated with military transition and private-sector employment. To better understand the military transition and private-sector reintegration, and any associated challenges, processes it is essential to first understand the female NCO veteran as military service members and as veterans.

Female NCO Veterans as Service Members

Women served throughout American history disguising themselves as male soldiers in the American Revolution and Civil Wars and began serving as nurses during World War I with those roles evolving to combat pilots in Afghanistan (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). Since the early 1700s, women played a role in military services, initially providing services such as laundry, cooking, and medical assistance (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Although women unofficially served in the military since the establishment of the U.S. military, the acknowledgment of their service was not until 1901 following the creation of the Army Nurse Corps (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Women served in various capacity informally since the establishment of the U.S. military with their contributions evolving, in 1901, to include more formal roles in the Army Nurse Corps (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Women's roles became perpetual in 1948 when Congress passed the

Women's Armed Services Integration Act (Kamarck, 2015). Despite this enactment, the limitation of the number of women allowed in the military was 2% of the enlisted corps and 10% of the officer corps (Kamarck, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a). In 1967, Congress lifted the limitations, and in 1973, the U.S. military transformed to an All-Volunteer Force opening additional opportunities for women (Deuster & Tepe, 2016; Kamarck, 2015; Segal, Smith, Segal, & Canuso, 2016). In the early 1990s, the roles of female enlisted personnel shifted to meet better the needs of military operations and mission objectives (Robertson, Miles, & Mallen, 2014). Despite 1973 to 2010 military drawbacks, the total of female enlisted members grew from 42,000 to 167,000 during the same period, and the number of roles continued to grow (Kamarck, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a).

Since 9/11, women played a significant role in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Afghanistan and Iraq, accounting for 11% of deployed forces (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). In 2013, women were granted opportunities equivalent to those of their male counterparts and allowed to serve in combat roles and other occupational roles historically held by men (McGraw, Koehlmoos, & Ritchie, 2016; Prividera & Howard, 2014). Prividera and Howard (2014) maintained that by setting these historical precedents highlighted the value of women's contribution to the military and this country. In 2014, women represented 16.5% of the active military and Reserve & National Guard that comprised 200, 692, and 156,180, respectively (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). The number of females serving on active duty continued to grow. These female service members eventually

transitioned and became part of the veteran population. Although the number of women

veterans remained proportionally small, in 2015, women accounted for 9.4% of the U.S.

veteran population with a projected increase of 16.3% by 2043 (U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs, 2017b).

Female NCO Veterans as NCO Managers and Leaders

As NCOs, female military service members acted in the roles of managers and

leaders. An NCO is a military member who served in the capacity of a manager, leader,

and or technical expert responsible for the overall development and welfare of

subordinate personnel. In some cases, the entire organizational-level and higher enlisted

corps, and also served as advisors to commissioned officers (Dempsey & Battaglia,

2013). The female NCO worked closely with the officer corps overseeing the day-to-day

management and leadership of enlisted personnel and serving as advisors to the officer

corps. As depicted in Table 1, the ratio of active-duty enlisted remained consistently

higher than the number of active-duty officers (Department of Defense, 2015).

Table 1

Transition Ratio of Active Duty Enlisted and Officers

Enlisted and officer transition			
	Voluntary	Involuntary	Retirement	Deaths
Total active duty	47.7%	25.7%	26.2%	0.4%
Active duty enlisted	49.0%	27.4%	23.2%	0.4%
Active duty officers	36.1%	10.9%	52.4%	0.5%

In the book titled "The Noncommissioned Officer and Petty Officer: Backbone of

the Armed Forces," Dempsey and Battaglia (2013) stated:

Our noncommissioned officers and petty officers have chosen the uncommon life

unique to all members of the Profession of Arms, a life of service and sacrifice,

grounded in our sacred oath to defend the Constitution. I am enormously proud of

them. Their honorable service on and off the battlefield has earned America's

respect and trust. Moreover, the mutual trust they build with their subordinates,

peers, and superiors enables them to be the Backbone of the Armed Forces. (p. ix-

x)

The noncommissioned-commissioned officer professional relationship is like that

of a private-sector manager-employee relationship. Title 10 of the United States Code

outlines the roles of the services. The noncommissioned and commissioned officers'

corps forged confirmatory relations built on mutual respect and trust. The professional

connection between officers and enlisted personnel remained unavoidably aligned since

the 1770s (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The Department of Defense

(2015) reported that the officer construct encompasses commissioned and warrant

officers highlighting that the officer corps obtains a presidential commission with

confirmation from the Senate. The variation amongst commissioned and warrant officers

is that the appointment of warrant officers is by their respective service secretary.

Although warrant officers are subject matter experts in their related fields, such as

technology, they do hold college degrees at the time of appointment. The differences and

or inequalities amongst commissioned and noncommissioned officers spanned beyond

the military services and are prevalent in societal, professional, and private-sector

environments (Department of Defense, 2015). The Department of Defense (2015)

maintained that the source of the disparities amongst these two groups of managers and leaders was a matter of status construct that was grounded in the variations in higher education achieved before joining the military.

Noncommissioned officers are members of the enlisted corps and hold the top five ranks (e.g., E-5 through E-9; Department of Defense, 2015). The authorities to manage and lead the enlisted corps is granted by their respective military service regulations and delegated by commissioned officers. NCOs served in management and leadership roles and are responsible for the daily care of the enlisted corps, including training and equipping the enlisted corps to achieve organizational and mission goals and objectives, resulting in NCOs being empowered and trusted to act on behalf of the officer corps. NCOs received management and leadership authority and responsibilities once achieving the rank of E-5 with the degree of authority increasing through E-9. The levels of authority and responsibilities significantly increases at the ranks of E-7 to E-9, at which time these individuals transitioned from NCO to Senior Noncommissioned Officer (SNCO; Department of Defense, 2015). SNCOs frequently served for 15 to 30 years and act as commanders' senior advisors for enlisted corps matters (Department of Defense, 2015). An E-9 achieved the position as the senior enlisted person for his or her respective military department and served as the enlisted corps spokesperson (Department of Defense, 2015). Throughout their military careers, female NCO veterans received training and education tailored to becoming productive NCOs.

NCO professional education programs. As the largest military in the world, the U.S. military departments, and Department of Defense, provide service members skills,

occupation, and professional education and training, as well as advanced training, throughout his or her military career beginning with Basic Military Training. Although service members usually do not serve in management and leadership roles before achieving NCO status, management and leadership training and education began early in their careers. At each stage of military service, members received the necessary skills to improve their knowledge and proficiencies to become experts in their field, managers, and leaders. Enlisted service members are also allowed to attend higher education institutions during their off-duty time to obtain an advanced college degree. Throughout their careers, NCOs gained invaluable skills and experience that aided in making decisions that not only impacted the mission but making critical and time-sensitive decisions that ultimately contributed to saving lives.

The military services provided professional development training to its noncommissioned officers. For example, the USAF began training its noncommissioned officer corps beginning with the Airman Leadership School (ALS), the Noncommissioned Officer Academy (NCOA), and the Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy (SNCOA), and the Chief Master Sergeant Leadership Course (CLC; United States Air Force [USAF], 2016a). The purpose of the ALS program was to develop further airmen for the transition to NCO status and greater responsibility. ALS was the first of the Air Force's professional development initiatives aimed at developing future leaders and managers (USAF, 2016a). The attendees received leadership, followership, and management skills training. The NCOA provided professional education and training required to manage and lead workforces while instilling teamwork, good order, and

discipline (USAF, 2016b). Attendees received the necessary training to not only manage resources but to lead people as well, thus strengthening the enlisted members' management and leadership skills. The program design aimed to aid the attendees in becoming mid-level managers and leaders, focusing on enhancing management abilities and leading organizations (USAF, 2016b).

The SNCOA program was the advanced level of professional development and military education and training. The attendees received advanced skills focused on preparing them for increased responsibilities through the expansion of existing management and leadership abilities. The design of the course structure ensured that all military services SNCOs would benefit from attendance in this joint and coalition program. The program offered training for senior enlisted managers and leaders. It focused on the adaptability in joint environments, critical thinking, and the strategical relevancy of operating across military departments' boundaries as well as managing and leading diverse groups that included military, civilian, and contractor personnel (USAF, 2016c). Attendees received training related to effective communication, teamwork, professional leadership, and managerial development skills. The CLC was a 165-hour executive-level course structured to provide SNCOs with the necessary insight to align operational and strategic perspectives to inspire, effectively lead, manage, and mentor the enlisted force (USAF, 2016d). The program served as the capstone for the enlisted corps professional military education.

The Army had similar professional development to include the Basic Leader Course, the Advanced Leader Course, the Senior Leader Course, the Master Leader

Course, the Sergeants Major Academy, and the Command Sergeants Major Course (U.S. Army [USA], 2016). These courses were components of the Army's Noncommissioned Officer Educational System (NCOES) which provided attendees with the necessary skills to become subject matter experts as well as skills relating to the translation of strategic goals and objectives, interpersonal, time management, as well as developing useful communication skills (USA, 2016). The USMC Enlisted Professional Military Education offered endless and career-level educational opportunities to improve their leadership, critical thinking capability, and sound tactical skills in an increasingly distributed and joint environment (U.S. Marine Corps, 2014).

Female NCOs as Veterans

To better understand the challenges female veterans faced, it required an awareness of the demographic characteristics of this diverse and unique population. Women served in each branch of the military services, accounting for 15.5% of active duty service members and 19% of the National Guard and Reserve forces (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). In 2015, females represented 9.4% of the U.S. veteran population with an anticipated increase to 16.3%, by year 2043, of the total number of surviving veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). The BLS (2017) reported that women accounted for 18% of the 3.6 million veterans who served in the military from 2001 to 2016. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2017b) reported that the veteran female population is the fastest-growing despite the overarching decreases in the overall veteran population at a yearly decrease of 1.5%, with the veteran female population increasing at an annual rate of 1%. Most of today's female veterans

served from September 2001 to the present, with over 55% serving from August 1990 to the present (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). In 2015, 21% of the population had a high school diploma or less, 44% had some college, 34.5% had a bachelor's or advanced degree compared to their nonveteran female counterparts with 40%, 32%, and 28.1% respectively (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). In 2015, 71.5% of working-age (e.g., 17 to 64 years old) female veterans were in the labor force compared to 70.1% for nonveteran women with 34% employed in the government sector compared to their counterparts with 16% (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2017b) also reported that female veterans are less likely to be living at the poverty level, with 10% of female veterans and 15% of nonveteran having incomes below the poverty threshold in 2015.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs gathered and compiled data from the Veteran Population Projection Model, the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Veterans Benefits Administration administrative data, USVETS, Veterans Health Administration administrative data, National Cemetery Administration, and the Department of Defense (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Based on the analysis of this data, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2017b) published the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Data Governance and Analytics findings that the veteran female population would increase by approximately 18,000 per year over the following ten years. DAV (2014) reported that women accounted for "20 percent of recruits, 14.5 percent of the 1.4 million active-duty components, and 18 percent of the 850,000-reserve component" (p. 2). Each of these women transitioned from the military

and became veterans. Despite insurmountable obstacles, women continued to serve in the

military, some making the ultimate sacrifice, with honor to find themselves unemployed,

homeless, and lacking adequate healthcare. DAV (2014) reported that as military women

left the military and began reintegration back to civilian communities "the Department of

Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Labor are also on an

unfinished journey themselves in terms of fostering and adapting programs and policies

to support women service members returning to civilian life" (p. 1).

As of September 30, 2015, the United States, Puerto Rico, and Territories/Foreign

women Veteran population numbered 2,035,213 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

2015a). Given the steady increase of the women veterans' population, it was crucial to

provide services that support their transition from active duty to civilian life. Since one of

the decisive factors in making a successful transition was to obtain suitable civilian

employment, there was a great need for programs that assist veterans in their job search

and career development process (DAV, 2014). Despite the myriad of existing programs

offering employment and training services to veterans, the unemployment rate among

veterans, especially among female veterans, was still significant. Stein-McCormick,

Osborn, Hayden, and Hoose (2013) maintained that female veteran's experiences were

more sophisticated, resulting in the requirement for providing unique practical and

psychological assistance during the transition and private-sector reintegration processes.

Female veterans experience challenges much like those of their male counterparts but

also faced problems (a) relating to income equity, (b) achieving work/life balance, (c)

single parenthood, (d) gender inequality, and (e) military sexual trauma while serving

(Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013).

As the number of female veterans continued to grow, the challenges of

transitioning and reintegrating remained persistent. Zoli, Maury, and Fay (2015)

maintained that the public perceptions and support of military personnel and their service

were the highest recorded since 1989, with 74% having trust and confidence in the

military as an institution. Despite this increase in support, gaps persist in understanding

the military transition from the veterans' population perspectives with veterans reporting

a disconnect when returning to civilian life, particularly having concerns relating to

higher education and employment (Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015). Of the 8,500 veterans,

active-duty service members, members of the National Guard and Reserves, and military-

connected dependents, 60% reported having difficulties in successfully understanding

and utilizing the services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (Zoli et

al., 2015). Zoli et al. (2015) also reported that 55% reported having challenges securing

employment, and 41% experienced problems with reintegrating into civilian

communities. Furthermore, 40% had financial concerns; and 39% reported having issues

when attempting to translate and align military skills with civilian occupation (Zoli et al.,

2015). In the following sections, I discuss military transition and private-sector

reintegration.

Military Transition

Gaither (2014) maintained that to transition the service member (a) successfully

must anticipate and adapt to significant change, (b) adjust to variations between military

and civilian culture, and (c) secure employment and reintegrate into the civilian workforce. The definition of transition is a life event that results in some type of modification to consistent day-to-day life events, personal and professional roles, and predetermined conjectures (Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011). Gaither (2014) emphasized that "at any given time over 20,000,000 resumes are flying through space and cyberspace. Over 50% of the workforce was either actively or passively looking for another job. While veterans served the country, the civilian competition built up networks and employment contacts" (p. 216). Wolfe (2012) maintained that each year more than 200,000 service members transitioned from the military to civilian society and, in some cases, private-sector employment. Zoli et al. (2015) asserted that 36% of transitioning service members reported their reason for leaving the military was they no longer trust the military and or political leaders while 32% and 31% reported they wanted to obtain higher education and training and family obligations as their reasons for leaving, respectively. Anderson and Goodman (2014) highlighted the importance of the military, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private-sector counselors understanding the transition process from the veterans' perspective and how they perceived their experiences during this phase. When assisting the veteran population, it was critical to have an awareness of the cultural differences, military value system, and any preconceived biases (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Gaither (2014) recommended that to successfully transition veterans must employ the same degree of commitment they gave to the military, in defense of this Nation, during the transition process and the attempt to secure private-sector employment.

There was a great deal of literature focused on exploring the lived experiences of civilians associated with career transition and reintegration into other professional environments (Chae, 2002; Jepsen & Choudhuri, 2001; Perrone & Civiletto, 2004). Perrone and Civiletto (2004) focused on providing a greater understanding of the transition factors such as contentment and happiness. Brown (1995) introduced findings relating to career counseling models to assess an individual's experiences obtaining self-actualization through value-based advising and support systems. Because of the degree of instability and unpredictability in the job market, the consistent unemployment rates, the underrepresentation of certain groups in the labor force as well as the process of experiencing career ambiguity, the attention on better understanding career transition dramatically increased (Robertson & Brott, 2014). Robertson and Brott (2014) asserted that work relating to military career transition is minimal. Robertson and Brott (2014) maintained that minimum work, highlighting Baruch and Quick, 2007; Baruch and Quick, 2009; and Spiegel and Shultz, 2003, exists focused on understanding the significant impact of preretirement and or separation planning as well as private-sector employment after military service. Researchers, such as Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2011, evaluated the influence of mental health on employment (Robertson & Brott, 2014).

The transition to the private sector and civilian life is a foreseeable life event for female NCO veterans separating or retiring from military service. The DAV (2014) found that female NCO veterans typically encountered similar complications as their male counterparts but also faced barriers associated with a set of unique issues (e.g., female related service-connected risk factors and inadequate transitioning education, counseling,

and preparation focus on dealing with their unique issues) during the reintegration process. Researchers identified several challenges that impact this process including unemployment, homelessness, military sexual trauma (MST), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and issues relating to military and civilian cultural differences (Hamilton, Washington, & Zuchowski, 2013; Imani et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2014). Considerable literature exists on military veterans' transitioning and reintegration primarily focused on the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related issues, mental health issues, and higher learning (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). However, there are notable gaps in literature relating to female NCO veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid to senior management and or leadership levels and the significant challenges this population encountered when seeking private-sector employment (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). The intersection of transitioning (Anderson et al., 2012) and reintegration (Elnitsky et al., 2017) amongst female NCO veterans generated a new area of management and leadership research not addressed in the extant literature. Anderson et al. (2012) defined transition as "Any event, or nonevent, which results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 39). Schlossberg (2011) maintained three types of transition categories included: (a) predicted, (b) unforeseen, and (c) nonevents.

Since 9/11, about 2.3 million military members transitioned to veteran status and reintegrated into civilian communities and many to private-sector employment (Koo & Maguen, 2014; Maury et al., 2016). In 2016, females accounted for about 10% of the

20.9 million veterans in the U.S. (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a). Flowers et al. (2014) maintained that the two factors that impacted the outcome of the transition process were (a) the type of transition and (b) whether the individual's viewpoints were positive or negative. This perspective aligned with Schlossberg's transition model, which provided a conceptual lens to evaluate the career transitioning of female NCO veterans throughout the various phases transpiring over time. Schlossberg's model was used to assess both internal and external aspects that enabled or hinder successful transition. The transition process spanned across time and incorporated the necessity to assess the various phases to successfully transition because transition not only influenced the veteran but families, roles, and routines.

Military Transition Assistance Program

Beginning in 1990, the Department of Defense recognized the need to provide, to separating and retiring military service members, assistance during the transition process (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c). The Department of Defense TAP was an initiative to prepare service members for separation or retirement by offering counseling and training to members separating from the military to better prepare them for re-entering civilian culture (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018). Although the program design was to assist all service members, this study focused on the benefits and obstacles the program provided to women veterans. Before 2011, attendance and participation in the Department of Defense TAP were not mandatory for service members, apart from those serving in the USMC (Department of Labor, 2017). Because

of the low rates of attendance, President Obama signed, in 2011, into law the "Veterans

Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act of 2011" (Department of Labor, 2017; Faurer,

Rogers-Brodersen, & Bailie, 2014; Parker, 2012). The VOW Act mandated that all are

separating and retiring service members participate in the program before leaving the

military (Department of Labor, 2017). In addition to this requirement, the VOW Act also

outlined the necessity for the Department of Labor to revamp the structure of its

employment workshop (Department of Labor, 2017; Faurer et al., 2014). The

organization of the curriculum, with the Department of Labor workshop being the most

dynamic aspect, was structured to align the program with opportunities in the current job

market (Department of Labor, 2017). The Department of Labor Veterans' Employment

and Training Service (VETS) was deemed the lead organization for executing the

initiative across the military service departments (Department of Labor, 2017). In

addition to in-class instructions, the Department of Defense implemented a virtual

curriculum that ensured geographically separated and deployed personnel were able to

fulfill the mandated attendance requirements (Department of Labor, 2017). The program

launched using the Department of Defense Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) learning

management system to allow veterans and spouses of a military member to participate

(Department of Labor, 2017).

Structural framework. Because of the 2011 Presidential charge, the Department

of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs led the Veterans Employment

Initiative Task Force interagency initiative to revamp the Desert Storm-era TAP

(Kamarck, 2018). In 2013, the Department of Defense and VA partnered with the White

House Economic and Domestic Policy Council to restructure the program to provide a more comprehensive, modular, outcome-based design that strengthens and systematizes the potentials for improved career opportunities, available services, and training and counseling women receives before separating or retiring (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Before 2013, the voluntary program was a 3- to 5-day workshop depending on the branch of service (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The reformatting of the program incorporated results-driven structural framework focusing on transitional goals, plans, and successes and is known as Transition Goals, Plans, and Success (GPS; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The enhancements included an interlinked curriculum, services, and processes that are provided by numerous partners such as Department of Defense, the military services, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, Small Business Administration, Department of Education, and Office of Personnel Management (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-d).

GPS. The new Transition GPS curriculum focused on providing skill-building knowledge, an overview of available services and resources, as well as the mechanisms to assist in meeting the requirements for the Career Readiness Standards (CRS; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The GPS was structured to enhance skills to prepare service members for private-sector reintegration, ensuring members depart the military as 'career-ready' as possible regardless of the branch of service (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018). The Department of Defense and U.S. Department

of Veterans Affairs leadership primarily aimed to provide understanding and knowledge that advocated, progressed, and inspired members to think about their post-separation careers much earlier (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs leadership maintained that the new structure incorporated adequate levels of education, career technical training, and entrepreneurship that better align with civilian occupations (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The overarching objective was to cultivate a military culture that not only assisted female NCO veterans but all military personnel before they transitioned to ensure they were better prepared to reintegrate into private-sector (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The program incorporated limited information relating to securing employment that provided at minimum equivalent pay and obtained adequate housing to become productive members of civilian society (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The program was also open to military spouses. The updated structure provided members with crucial milestones that span across the military members' career "Military Life Cycle (MLC)," (see Figure 4). The updated structure allowed members to plan better for their military career goals while hopefully providing them the resources to have successful civilian careers by better aligning their military path with a desired civilian career path (Department of Defense, n.d.-b; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b).
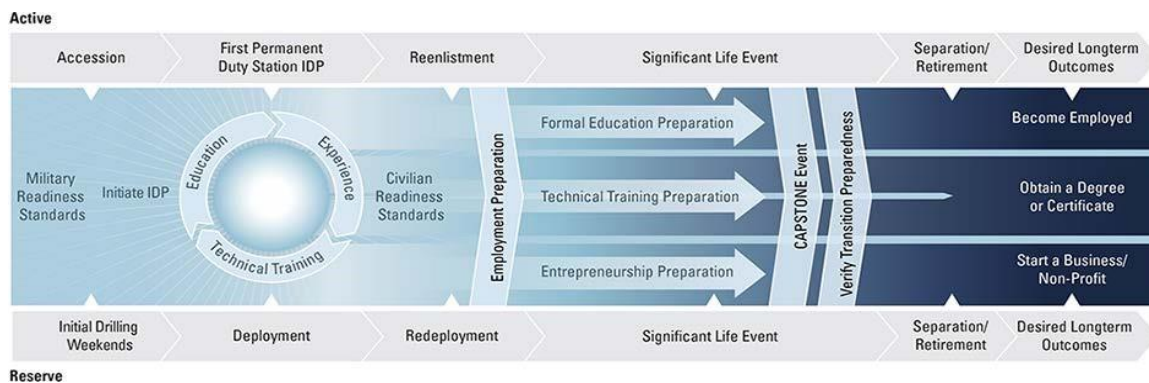
Figure 4. Military life cycle transition model. Reprinted from Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-b. Retrieved March 15, 2018, from https://www.Department of Defensetap.mil/mlc.html.

The new Transition GPS program incorporated a whole structure beginning with a five-day workshop with an option of additional days based on the career path chosen by the member. The service member is allowed to determine his or her path based on whether they elected to obtain higher education post-transition, seek employment, or began the process of becoming a business owner. This personalized transition design implemented resources to assist the member in achieving CRS guidelines (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The Transition GPS had three sessions to include a two-days focused on fundamental curriculum education (e.g., financial plan, family concerns, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs allowances, mentorship, and counseling; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). It also included three days dedicated to the Department of Labor career workshop that provided services such as resume development, job interviews, and searches exercises, as well as social media use (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, 2015b). Finally, an optional two-day seminar focused on three tracks to

depending on the members' plans after separation or retirement to include (a) college-

focus, (b) career-focus, or (c) business ownership-focus (Department of Defense TAP,

n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). It is important to

note that John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act authorized additional

changes to the TAP program to ensure better effectiveness and progress towards

providing better assistance and resources as well as better preparing service members for

transition and reintegration (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018).

Although these updates were authorized, the Department of Defense did not incorporate

the guidelines into the Department of Defense TAP instruction until September 26, 2019

(Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c), resulting in further delays in preparing veterans for

transition and reintegration. It is essential to highlight that once implemented across all

military branches service members will begin the program only 365 days before

separation or retirement.

Other Transition Assistance Resources

  CareerScope. A program tailored to provide veterans career counseling by

assisting in aligning desired career tracks and military skills with civilian occupations

(U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017a). The tools provided the veterans with

information, based on provided criteria, on selecting careers that were not only aligned

with associated skills but provided job satisfaction as well (U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, 2017a). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2017a) also highlighted the

tools provided recommendations of the training courses and programs that best aided in making second career decisions.

Vocational rehabilitation and employment (VR&E). The veteran female population sustained combat-related disabilities at increased rates and researchers recognized the need to understand better and acknowledge the female NCO veterans' population sustainment of disability relating to combat service (Ben-Shalom, Tennant, & Stapleton, 2016; Dye, Eskridge, Tepe, Clouser, & Galarneau, 2016). This program focused on aiding veterans with service-connected disabilities that potentially impaired the veterans' capacity to work (Collins et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a). The VR&E offered five tracks to include the (a) reemployment track helped employer to meet the veterans' needs, (b) self-employment, (c) rapid employment, (d) independent living, and (e) long-term employment services (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a). Although these services were available, Cerully, Smith, Wilks, and Giglio (2015) reported that about one-third of the 21,120 veterans surveyed in 2014 used the program.

SkillBridge. Morin (2015) highlighted the effectiveness of this program in connecting private-sector employers and veterans interested in participating in programs such as apprenticeships, training, and internships. DiGiovanni (2015) maintained that there are several companies actively participate in SkillBridge to include General Motors and Microsoft. The program offered employers the ability to temporarily employ veterans to ensure employability and skills match with nominal risk (DiGiovanni, 2015).

Veterans' employment center (VEC). This program was introduced in 2014 by Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden. The VEC is a federal government online tool to assist veterans in attempting to secure private-sector employment and private-sector employers interested in recruiting veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; White House, 2014). As previously highlighted, female NCO veterans experienced challenges associated with employability, which impacted their ability to transition and reintegration successfully. The VEC tool aided in effectively translating military skills to align with private-sector opportunities. The tool was useful to both the veteran and the employer HR and hiring managers by providing a user-friendly and easily accessible mechanism for connecting employers with the desired group of potential new hires (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; White House, 2014). The program, the first of its kind, was used as a government-wide initiative that served as a mechanism for the public- and private-sector employers to offer available veterans the ability to translate military skills and training to a language understood across the private-sector in real-time. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, Department of Defense, Department of Education, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management partnered to develop and implement the tool ensuring to integrate unique and tailored features that aid in providing practical employment assistance online (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). To ensure program effectiveness, officials from the various agencies and organizations should work together to communicate the existence of the program to ensure higher rates of enrollment before beginning the transition process (Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Stewart, & Fisher, 2014).

In summary, the establishment of the original TAP program was to provide separating or retiring military members' assistance during the transition process (Hodges, Heflin, & London, 2014; Kamarck, 2018). Scholars and policymakers highlighted the requirement for an in-depth analysis of the program to determine the near- and long-term effectiveness (Cloud, 2012; Johnston et al., 2010; Kamarck, 2018). As previously discussed, the Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and Department of Labor partnered to address the need for restructuring the TAP program and potentially initiating additional programs and resources to aid successful transition and private-sector reintegration (Collins et al., 2014; Kamarck, 2018; White House, 2014). The increased attention on program and resources effectively resulted in increased funding to revamp existing programs and improve communication across military departments, private-sector employers, and other support organizations and agencies (Neill-Harris et al., 2016). The restructured TAP program addressed the growing need for improvements and increased participation by making attendance mandatory for all service members. With knowledge of the military transition process, the challenges associated with civilian society and private-sector employment can be better understood and appreciated.

Private-Sector Reintegration

Regardless to whether the female NCO veteran departed the military after four years, retired with 20 or more years, was involuntarily discharged, or was medically discharged or separated, transitioning and reintegration was a challenge for the veteran and her family (Coll et al., 2012; Coll & Weiss, 2016). The VetAdvisor (2015) defined

reintegration as the process of the reassuming one's age, sex, and domestic and communal ethical responsibilities as well as workforce roles. Currie et al. (2011) described reintegration as the linked behaviors associated with transitioning to personal and work-related functions or positions post-military service. The process of reintegrating was not the same for any two veterans (Coll et al., 2012; Coll & Weiss, 2016). Reintegration is the process of assimilating or reestablishing oneself into a previous way of life ("Reintegration," 2019). The transition is progressing, emerging, or advancing from one period or practice to an alternative or new state ("Transition," 2019). VetAdvisor (2015) maintained that although the usage of the veteran's transition and veteran's reintegration is interchangeable, there are distinctive variations.

Although each branch of the service provided separation counseling and transition services before leaving the military, these interventions tend to be short-term and focused on initial job search activities. The reintegration process, however, was a complex process of adjustment across both life and career, as veterans move through a transition that involves changing structures, culture, and life roles (Stein-McCormick et al., 2013). When re-entering civilian society, a significant number of veterans found themselves unprepared to successfully transition and reintegrate due to emotional and psychosomatic issues as well as the lack of awareness of the private-sector workforce relating to the value of military skills (DeGroat & Crowley, 2013). The inability to effectively navigate the private-sector work environment resulted in "unprecedented levels of unemployment, low GI Bill utilization rates and, most discouraging, a growing reliance on entitlement benefits in place of self-sufficiency" (DeGroat & Crowley, 2013, p. 6). DeGroat and

Crowley (2013) maintained the inefficient process of transitioning veterans resulted in long term outcomes that impact reintegration nationwide.

The BLS (2017) reported that acknowledged role assignments played a significant role in determining an individual's career path. Bem (1981) asserted that engrained perceptions always impacted an individual's communicative and approachability behavior. Bensahel, Barno, Kidder, and Sayler (2015) maintained that women consistently faced challenges if attempting to gain employment in roles other than medical, explicitly nursing, retail, administration, and or as an educator, to name a few. Bensahel et al. (2015) asserted that women's abilities to secure corporate management and leadership roles making comparable salaries as their male counterparts despite equal, or in some cases surpassing, talents, and experience. Although attention increased to address the issues with gender makeup in corporate business environments, the leadership and management literature continue to have persistent gaps. Bensahel et al. (2015) maintained that researchers failed to examine and report the lived experiences of talented, experienced, and knowledgeable women who have been successful in securing corporate management positions. Bensahel et al. (2015) maintained that a significant amount of research conducted only emphasized labor for integration and issues associated with gender biases. According to the BLS (2015), despite women being successful in some respects, women continued to earn 77 cents for every dollar in comparison to males. It is critical to transforming overall goals and philosophies, particularly concerning the ability to achieve balance across gender dynamics is critical to successfully creating global leaders and workforces (Khan & Hasan-Afzal, 2011).

The female NCO veteran population possessed the abilities to contribute to finding and sustaining gender dynamics balance. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2015a) reported that veterans accounted for 5,406,093 of the total 21,680,534 U.S. labor forces with 772, 487 female veterans. In comparison with the overall female workforce, the female veteran's population was culturally and ethnically diverse, with distinct professional experiences, talents, and educational background. Despite these attributes, female NCO veterans consistently endured challenges when reintegrating into the private sector, particularly when attempting to secure management and leadership positions (DAV, 2014). Benmelech and Frydman (2014) asserted that large corporations, such as Verizon, General Motors, FedEx, and Johnson and Johnson, hiring practices required recruiting and human resources managers to seek out male NCOs and commissioned officers whom they viewed as possessing the capacities to manage and lead civilian workforces successfully. It was imperative to address the perceptions of private-sector leaders and hiring managers who have a shared viewpoint that the males and commissioned officer veterans' population was more experienced, knowledgeable, trained and better decision-makers, particularly about addressing diversity and complexities in stressful situations thus setting them apart from the female NCO veteran population (Benmelech & Frydman, 2014).

Benmelech and Frydman (2014) maintained that corporations like Wal-Mart and General Electric invested resources in developing and implementing recruiting programs targeting the male and commissioned officer veteran populations. These types of recruiting and hiring practices created unfair practices, recruiting, and hiring biases, and

disparities in the diversity of workforces (Benmelech & Frydman, 2014). Benmelech and

Frydman (2014) maintained that private-sector organizational leaders could not

comprehend and acknowledge the degree of knowledge, talent, and experience female

NCO veterans contributed to managing and leading diverse workforces. Organizational

endeavors to create multinational organizations, leaders, and workforces necessitated the

allocation of resources focused on training and professional development. The utilization

of existing talents and experience assisted in furthering efforts and cutting costs. A

significant and existing asset is female NCO veterans who had a great deal of lived

experience building multinational and foreign partnerships, conducting operations in

global settings, and residing in societies worldwide. Other critical contributions of female

NCO veterans were years of experience and certifications in foreign languages. The

female NCO veterans' population had years of mid- to senior-level leadership and

management experience. They had backgrounds in leading and managing substantial,

diverse, and geographically separated workforces.

Civilian and private organizations, policymakers, government officials,

communities, and the Department of Defense executed a partnered effort that focused on

successful reintegration a top priority (BLS, 2017). Although this joint initiative was a

step towards positive change, female NCO veterans continued to face obstacles and

remain one of the most underutilized resources by corporate America. Female NCO

veterans had multifaceted skills that civilian organizations have a misconception that they

are all combat-related. The U.S. veteran's population received leadership, management,

and teamwork training that enriched interactive, social, and relationship-building

practices that profoundly influenced diverse human behavior, social, and ethical values systems. These women received organizational leadership coaching that assisted in developing organizational strategies, effectively allocating resources, as well as devising, articulating, and executing strategic visions and missions. Organizational leadership needed to overcome any misperceptions to acknowledge that despite military leadership and management years of experiences and training various in some capacity, a corporation could effectively utilize the skills and expertise of this population.

The veteran population left an organization and or institution in which they were trained for specific roles and obtained a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors that were required to be successful throughout their military careers (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Anderson and Goodman (2014) asserted that one of the most significant aspects of assisting veterans during reintegration was adequately supporting the process. Veterans transitioning and reintegrating into a civilian culture and private-sector employment shifted from an environment with a strict hierarchical structure, and consistent communication regarding rules and obligations, and organizational mission took precedence (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Anderson and Goodman (2014) asserted that "for returning veterans, the focus on self as an individual requires a shift away from conformity and following commands to finding one's way and navigating a civilian world that may now be very unfamiliar territory" (pp. 41-42). To inform the military transition and private-sector employment processes, a basic knowledge of (a) military culture, and (b) military management and leadership that aided in developing and

implementing new and innovative programs, initiatives, and policies. In this section of the literature review, I began with a discussion of military culture.

Military Culture

To provide adequate assistance to military service members who either reintegrated into private-sector employment and or enter higher learning environments, managers, leaders, employers, and educators needed to have an understanding and be knowledgeable of military culture (Cole, 2014). Scholars across numerous disciplines, including professional and counseling, conducted in-depth research relating to various cultures (Bradley, Johnson, Rawls, & Dodson-Sims, 2005; Smith-Adcock, Daniels, Lee, Villalba, & Indelicato, 2006; Yeh, 2001). Cole (2014) asserted that a gap in literature focused on military culture exists. Scholars, employers, educators do not have a clear and shared understanding of the differences that exists amongst military and private-sector cultures (Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobson, 2011; Cole, 2014).

The military culture was described as distinct and diverse, resulting in female NCO veterans experiencing a unique set of challenges (Brown & Lettieri, 2008; Cole, 2014; Gooddale, Abb, & Moyer, 2012; Luby, 2012). Military members are not only impacted professionally, but their way of life and families are impacted by existing in a military environment (Cozza & Lerner, 2013). McAuliffe (2013) emphasized the importance of understanding every aspect of service members' experience, and emotional ties, in military culture and how it can impact the processes of transitioning and reintegration. Cole (2014) described the most significant aspects of understanding military culture had an awareness of differences in language, chain-of-command

structure, structured and established guidelines, rules, and regulations, personal expectations, and acceptance of making significant sacrifices.

Language. The understanding of military culture and the variations in the language in comparison to operating in an international market (Huebner, 2013; National Military Family Association, 2014)? The use of terminology and acronyms relating to occupation, geographic locations, as well as resources and services in the military varied across each department of the military (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). The departments of the military also employed moral codes-of-conduct (e.g., integrity, character, courage, and strength), which impacted members personally and professionally, not typically used in civilian culture (Kuehner, 2013; Luby, 2012).

Hierarchy. The military employed a hierarchical structure that incorporated rank and uniformity built on an authoritarian construct (Hall, 2008; Martins & Lopes, 2012). The female NCO veterans' rank established earnings, the level of training and education, availability of resources, and the degree of management and leadership responsibilities (Cole, 2014; Department of Defense, 2014; Huebner, 2013; Luby, 2012). Drummet, Coleman, and Cable (2003) maintained that the service member's family was impacted by his or her rank, which created the family's individuality and position in the military community.

Rules and regulations. The Department of Defense established a strict set of rules and regulations that military members, and in some instances (e.g., etiquette, dress, and public activities) their families, were required to adhere to (U.S. Army War College, 2011). This set of guidelines was unmistakably and well-defined and communicated.

Military service members received instructions regarding where to live, travel, and whom they interacted with socially.

Self-expectations. Military service members and their families established a high level of personal expectations and, at times, manage distinct challenges and obligations associated with being in the military. Individuals volunteered to serve their country for various reasons, which typically resulted in the sense of commitment and pride not generally presented in a civilian environment. Members developed a sense of obligation and devotion to duty (Cole, 2014; Hall, 2008; Huebner, 2013). The military culture created the ability to overcome challenges, operate in stressful environments, and sustain emotional balance (Danish & Antonides, 2013; Dingfelder, 2009; Halvorson, 2010; Huebner, 2013).

Self-sacrifice. Military service members and their families sacrificed a great deal to include separation during deployments, numerous relocations, and putting the mission and organization ahead of personal and family needs (Cole, 2014; Hickman, n.d.; Park, 2011). Military members and their families understood that during both peacetime and combat situations that there would be challenges associated with being a part of the military family (Cole, 2014). Despite the high numbers of deployments and family separations, most service members and their families were satisfied with being a part of military culture and remained committed (U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, 2005).

Military Management and Leadership

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, management was defined as the "act or art of managing, conducting or supervising of something (such as a business)" ("Management," 2020, para. 1). While leadership is "the capacity to lead and the act or an instance of leading" ("Leadership," 2020, para. 1). Koontz and O'Donnell (1972) maintained that an active manager employed his or her leadership attributes to enable efficient management. The requirement to have the ability to act as a leader was a consistent aspect of active management. The Department of Defense's definition of leadership evolved from an on focused on total quality, principle-centered leadership to the Lean Six Sigma and Competency-Based Model construct (Thomas, Barton, & Chuke-Okafor, 2009). Leaders in the Department of Defense recognized the need to broaden the term to align with the current operational environment that required today and future leaders to possess attributes from each. The Department of Defense leadership efforts focused on developing leaders who made quick and effective decisions, who adapted and were flexible, as well as who had leadership traits of a servant and a transformational leader. The military departments used similar terminology to describe leadership and management. For example, in Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1, leadership was defined as the "art and science of motivating, influencing, and directing Airmen to understand and accomplish the Air Force mission" (Department of the Air Force, 2011, p. 86). Based on the U.S. Army doctrine, leadership is "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization" (Department of the Army, 2012, p. 1).

Scholars across disciplines, including management and leadership, continued to debate whether variations exist amongst management and leadership traits and practices. Bass (2010) asserted that scholars debated the subject for decades with noted assertions that management and leadership intersect, and variations exist. Algahtani (2014) maintained that there was a persistent assumption that an individual possessed the traits associated with management also possess the characteristic of a leader. Not all managers exhibited or practiced leadership qualities, while some effective leaders were in leadership roles without ever serving in a management role (Algahtani, 2014). Yuki (1989) noted that the level of commonality resulted in differences. Ricketts (2009) maintained that management and leadership are entirely different and resulted in ineffective leadership and an inability to manage successfully. Northouse (2018) maintained that the primary objective of employing effective management was to provide the workforce direction and to create consistency across the entire organization. Leadership entailed identifying the need for change, communicating change, and successfully implementing and monitoring change initiatives. Northouse (2018) asserted that "Management is about seeking order and stability; leadership is about seeking adaptive and constructive change" (p. 12).

Leadership and management were similar in that both require the ability to influence, work with and inspire diverse groups to build workforces who have the talent and desire to achieve organizational goals and objectives (Northouse, 2018). Gleeson (2017) defined management as "a set of systems and processes designed for organizing, budgeting, staffing and problem-solving to achieve the desired results of an organization"

(para. 3) and leadership as "the vision, mission and what the "win" looks like in the future. It inspired the team to embody the beliefs and behaviors necessary to take the actions needed to achieve those results" (para. 3). Managers and leaders both possessed the traits and characteristics to inspire and motivate others to achieve organizational mission, vision, and objectives (Northouse, 2018). Mullins and Christy (2010) maintained that for a manager to succeed, he or she must be able to evolve into an effective leader. Kotterman (2006) asserted that in ever-changing and innovative workplace environments, creative management, and influential leadership were needed for organizational success. The contributions of managers and leaders were required to sustain a competitive advantage.

Managers and leaders were different in that managers sustained practical workplace functionality and operations while leaders were visionaries who focused on determining, communicating, and implementing long-range objectives (Yukl, 1989). The principal difference was the attributes and practices employed day-to-day to achieve the organization's overarching and strategic objective (Algahtani, 2014; Kotterman, 2006; Northouse, 2018). The ability to employ various attributes of management and leadership equally was vital to organizational success. The need for a diverse workforce trained as talented individuals who possessed the traits of both managers and leaders as well as who worked well together and communicated one message was essential in every organization (Algahtani, 2014; Kotterman, 2006). Algahtani (2014) emphasized that "In today's dynamic workplace, organizations need leaders to cope with new challenges, and transform organizations to achieve a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Also,

organizations need managers to maintain a smoothly functioning workplace, and to utilize resources effectively" (p. 81).

Gleeson (2017) maintained an organization success resided in the strength of those that served in leadership and management roles. A transformation occurred when innovative and creative leadership traits aligned with effective management. For an organization to sustain and achieve organizational vision and mission, as well as a competitive advantage, leaders must possess both revolutionary leadership and management qualities (Gleeson, 2017; Northouse, 2018). Leaders inspire and motivate followers by appealing to their needs, values, and emotions essential to influence leadership initiatives. Female NCO veterans served in the role of followers, managers, and leaders throughout their military career and possessed the talents that private-sector employers sought when building a manager and leader cadre. In the next sections, I describe female NCO veterans as (a) service members, (b) NCO managers and leaders, and (c) veterans.

Challenges Associated with Transition and Reintegration

Throughout their military careers, female NCO veterans felt confident in the fact that they sustained secure employment, which allowed them to maintain a permanent resident, health care, insurance, and other benefits provided by the Department of Defense and military departments. The life-changing occurrences of military transition and private-sector reintegration potentially resulted in the absence of a sense of sureness, safety, and well-being (Mellencamp, 2015). I used (a) the challenges of translating military skills, (b) unemployment, and (c) homelessness rates as indicators of the

ineffectiveness of the military departments' assistance preparing the veteran population for military transition and private-sector reintegration. Although women accounted for 10% of the veteran population and were considered a vital aspect of today's workforce, they only accounted for 2% of employed women in the U.S. labor force (Department of Labor, 2017). The impact of unemployment and homelessness compounded by societal perceptions relating to assigning value to an individual based on his or her financial and or career status influenced by the absence of secure employment or persistent periods of unemployment (Bullock, Braud, Andrews, & Phillips, 2009; Mellencamp, 2015). The military offered a sense of security, which was lost after transition and was compounded by the inability to secure private-sector employment (Mellencamp, 2015).

Translating Military Skills into Civilian Occupations and Careers

The veteran population was trained, skilled, and experienced and offered a great deal to a potential private-sector organization. In the early 1990s, the occupational roles of military women began to evolve due to the Department of Defense policy changes (Patten & Parker, 2011). Military occupations and technical skills ranged from computer science, engineering, infantry, air traffic control, intelligence, Cyber, medical, administrative, personnel, maintenance, combat-related, aircraft maintenance, sniper, and special operations (Hardison et al., 2017). Although the skills obtained in the military focused on meeting military operations, mission objectives, and combat operations goals, female NCO veterans left the military with useful talents and experiences. Kintzle et al., (2015) maintained that veterans faced the significant challenge of the existence of a lack of "understanding how the skills, occupational experience, and qualifications gained

during military service translated into skills, experience and qualifications relevant and appropriate to civilian jobs" (p. 6).

Female NCO veterans were trained and experienced with expertise ranging from team building, technical, project/program management, organizational management and leadership, professional development, to name a few, and had advanced degrees. The female NCO veteran also had invaluable nontechnical and professional skills to include management, leadership, decision-making, resilience, communication, time management, and attention to detail (Hardison et al., 2017). Hardison et al. (2017) maintained that these nontechnical skills were considered critical to securing private-sector employment. Hardison et al. (2017) asserted that military veterans had the necessary training and experiences to contribute to the success of private-sector organizations. This group of skilled managers and leaders offered resilience, perseverance, and meticulousness. The skills and experiences female NCO veterans offered were similar, and translatable, to private-sector management, leadership, decision-making, and resilience (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2017). Despite these assertions, military members reintegrating into private-sector employment and civilian employers did not have a clear understanding of how formal military education, training, and professional development translate to the private sector (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2017). Hardison et al. (2017) maintained that "for both veterans and civilian employers, understanding which skills veterans have received formal training and education courses and, on the job, is challenging because military and civilian workplace cultures and languages can seem radically different from one another" (p. iii).

Veterans faced numerous challenges during the transition and reintegration processes, with one of the most significant issues being navigating the civilian employment market and the ability to secure private-sector employment successfully. Female NCO veterans had the training, skills, and experiences but were unable to translate to civilian employment resulting in heighten complications during transition and reintegration. Faberman and Foster (2013) asserted "if the skills and abilities of these individuals were better suited to military life, such a switch might result in a 'mismatch' between their skills and the skills required for available civilian jobs" (p. 2). It was critical to understand the experiences and career paths to adequately support the veteran population through tailored counseling and allowing the individuals to openly communicate these experiences and desires relating to private-sector employment (Mellencamp, 2015). Hardison et al. (2017) asserted that veterans reported having problems translating their military skills and years of experience in a way private-sector employer understood. Some military members translated their military skills to a private-sector position, for example, a military medic translated his or her skills to a private-sector medical position without retraining or interruptions in employment (VetAdvisor, 2015). In this situation, the veteran transitioned from a military to a private-sector position without experiencing changes in a career path (VetAdvisor, 2015). On the other hand, VetAdvisor (2015) reported a combat specialist found it difficult to translates his or her skills to a civilian occupation despite the individual receiving highly functional and exclusive training and career acceleration. Understanding the challenges women veterans faced when reintegrating from military to civilian culture about translating their military

training and skills to civilian occupations, it was critical to have a basic knowledge of military skills.

Although military training and experience armed women veterans with a diverse set of abilities and skills, they still experienced challenges in securing civilian employment. One of the most significant obstacles women faced was translating their military skills and experience to a civilian occupation or career. Prudential Financial (2012) noted that was one of their most significant employment challenges was "60 percent of veterans indicated that explaining how military skills translate" (pp. 127-128). Management needed to ensure that service members had access to the necessary training to assist in translating military skills and experiences. When members have this ability, their level of self-perception, and sense of value dramatically increased directly effecting their efforts to secure employment.

According to Parker (2012), "approximately 160,000 active-duty service members and 110,000 National Guardsmen and Reservist's transition to civilian life each year. The process is made increasingly difficult by the challenges resulting from the current economy and the high unemployment rate in the general population (at 8.1 percent as of April 2012)" (p. 27). The Department of Labor (2017) reported there were over three million job openings in the United States. A significant number of employers found that military women and veterans did not have the skills and expertise that qualified them for most of their positions. The Department of Defense and Department of Labor must continue to partner with civilian organizations to develop programs that aided in better qualifying this affected group of individuals. Another option available to these entities

was to invest in a training program geared to improve the skillset that filled the gap for the requirement of skilled, experienced, and competent workers. As previously discussed, President Obama's VOW Initiative was a significant first step. This Act required the Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Department of Defense and other organizations, to evaluate and identify those military skills and training that should be translatable into the civilian sector while working to make it easier for veterans to get the licenses and certifications they need.

According to Szelwach, Steinkogler, Badger, and Muttukumaru (2011), 60% of human resource managers surveyed shared their concerns when considering hiring military women and veterans, that there were issues about translating military to civilian skills. Approximately 18% of those managers felt that military women and veterans applied for jobs they were underqualified to do. Szelwach et al. (2011) noted that military women and veterans face the same types of challenges their male counterparts face but also must contend with reentering the civilian workforce dealing with other issues that result in broken and destroyed lives. In conjunction with previously discussed issues relating to reintegration, women veterans faced issues with securing employment with the same level of compensation and benefits provided by the military. A significant number of these women were the sole providers for their families and dependents. Foster and Vince (2009) reported that one single parent shared that she was "having a tough time finding a company to pay me enough to provide for my home and to pay for childcare. It is very hard as a single mother with no experience. My first and only job was the military" (p. 48). One of the most profound causes of issues relating to reintegration is

the inability to translate skills, proficiencies, and knowledge gained while servicing to those needed to obtain civilian employment (Szelwach et al., 2011; Hardison, & Shanley, 2016; Hardison et al., 2015). Secondly, obtaining adequate education also played a crucial role in securing civilian employment. Higher levels of educational attainment have positive effects on veterans' occupational status and income (Szelwach et al., 2011).

Although the military services offered educational assistance, in the military environment, service members were not always allowed to utilize those benefits during their military service. Having to wait until post-separation or retirement to use these benefits is another obstacle for military women and veterans when readjusting and reintegrating. Lack of education had a direct impact on securing employment and having a career after servicing in the military. The educational levels of military women and veterans ranged from about 72 percent having some college to one-quarter having a high school education (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a).

Female veterans and unemployment. Cohen, Suri, Amick, and Yan (2013) suggested, "since 2001, over 1.5 million U.S. soldiers have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Individuals with combat exposure in prior conflicts are known to have had a greater than twofold increase in the prevalence of unemployment" (p. 213). Females separating or retiring from the military was apprehensive about the economic stability and the potential of becoming unemployed (Mellencamp, 2015). The challenges of transitioning and reintegration increased based on the negative impact of the number of deployments and the challenges (e.g., gender-related and sexual trauma) and general experiences of being deployed coupled with the uncertainty of reentering into the civilian

workforce (Faberman & Foster, 2013; Mellencamp, 2015). These challenges, compounded by physical and or psychological issues, further influenced the female NCO veteran's ability to secure private-sector employment resulting in persistently high unemployment rates amongst this group (Faberman & Foster, 2013). Female veterans were considered a minority amongst the veteran and employed women populations and are younger, more educated, and have a higher representation in the labor force than their male veteran counterparts (BLS, 2017). As a subpopulation, female veterans consistently experienced higher unemployment rates. In 2014, the enrollment in higher education institutions for female veterans was 11% compared to 6% of the male veteran populations in the same age category of 18 to 54 years of age (Council on Veterans Employment, 2015). In 2016, there were 20.9 million men and women veterans making up 9% of the civilian noninstitutional population age 18 and over, with approximately 10% being women (BLS, 2017). In 2016, the overall unemployment rate amongst female veterans was 5.0% in contrast to 4.6% amongst nonveteran women and 4.2% amongst their male veteran counterparts (BLS, 2017).

The unemployment rates for female veterans decreased, and the annual average was not significantly higher than that of nonveteran females in 2013 and 2014 with 6.9% vs. 6.8% and 6% vs. 5.9%, respectively (Council on Veterans Employment, 2015). In 2013 and 2014, 14% of employed female veterans were employed by the government compared to 2% of their nonveteran counterparts (Council on Veteran Employment, 2015). In comparison to their male counterparts, women veterans faced additional complexities associated with the distinctive needs recognized as significant impediments

resulting in substantial risks when seeking private-sector employment (Kintzle et al., 2015; Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013).

Little to no information exists that explored the nationwide trends for issues associated with the challenges of transitioning and reintegrating into the private sector, particularly the issues associated with translating management and leadership skills (DAV, 2014). The deficiencies in literature focused on exploring the significant challenges female NCO veterans encountered during transition and reintegration into the private-sector workforce at the management and leadership levels warrants further research given that in 2015, there were 2,035,213 female veterans with an anticipated increase of 16.3% by 2043 (DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015a).

Female veterans and homelessness. Homelessness exists in the U.S. for decades with increases in homelessness during the 1970s and 1980s, with scholars and experts citing different reasons for the increases (Perl, 2015). For example, "demolition of single room occupancy dwellings in so-called "skid rows" where transient single men lived, the decreased availability of affordable housing generally, the reduced need for seasonal unskilled labor, the reduced likelihood that relatives will accommodate homeless family members" to name a few (Perl, 2015, p. 1). The homeless population in the U.S. also included military veterans. Although the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Housing and Urban Development partnered to address the increasing homeless rates amongst veterans, 1 to 2% of the total female veteran population, and 13 to 15% of female veterans living poverty, experienced homelessness during a given year

(Perl, 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

Although the number of homeless veterans decreased by 35% between 2009 and 2015, female veterans "are more than twice as likely as nonveteran women and over three times as likely as nonveteran women living in poverty to experience homelessness" (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). The factors contributing to homelessness include unmarried, unemployment, disabled, identifying as Black, and residing in the Northeast (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). Perl (2015) highlighted the needs of female veterans and the additional challenges they faced that potentially resulted in the risk of homelessness. Female veterans were more likely to be single parents and experienced sexual trauma, which potentially contributes episodes of homelessness (Perl, 2015). Perl (2015) asserted that in the past, there were minimum programs geared towards addressing the unique needs of female veterans and female veterans with children. Perl (2015) maintained that the number of homeless veterans was unknown, but the 2013 estimation was males accounted for 91%, and females accounted for 9% of homeless veterans in comparison to the overall percentages of 92.4% and 7.6% of males and females' veterans, respectively.

Gaps in Literature

There are recognizable gaps in literature focused on female NCO veterans, seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid-level to senior-level management and or leadership levels, and the significant challenges this population encountered when seeking private-sector employment (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). Much of the existing literature exclusively

focused on military veterans' transitioning and reintegration primarily highlighting the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related issues, and mental health issues, resulting in gaps in the research literature exploring female enlisted veterans, specifically female NCO veterans, transitioning from the military to reintegrate into private-sector employment. (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2016).

This lack of literature reiterated the need for further examination because no major studies evaluated the lived experiences of female NCO veterans and their experiences with military transition, private-sector reintegration, and the inherent challenges associated with these significant life experiences. This significant gap in the literature emphasized the need to address and fulfill this gap that would provide a greater understanding of while extending awareness of the experiences of female NCO veterans during the military transition and reintegrating into private-sector employment at comparable mid-level to senior-level management positions. In part, this revealed the originality of this subject of investigation. The existing literature focused on addressing veterans with service-connected disabilities (Koenig, Maguen, Monroy, Mayott, & Seal, 2014; Minnis & Stern, 2016). Others focused their efforts on highlighting the transition from the military to higher learning institutions (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; Jones, 2013; Kirchner, 2015; Kirchner, Coryell, & Yelich Biniecki, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). Many of the gaps are beyond the study's scope; I present delineation of several of the existing gaps relevant to the focus of this study.

The recurring themes identified in existing literature and throughout this study reveal the need to pursue additional data across a wider veteran population to better understand veterans' perspectives and or lived experiences associated with military transition, private sector reintegration, and available veterans' resources and services. By taking this approach, new data regarding the diverse aspects of perceived challenges, as they exist, from the veteran's perspective. The analysis of the data resulted in the creation of five categories and 17 emergent themes (see Table x) that were vital to the research question. A common factor identified in existing literature is the absence of deductive patterns and data relating to the topics, categories, and themes discussed in this study. The data presented in this study revealed the significance of all of the findings. I provide a description of the findings associated with each of the categories beginning with the first category.

Choosing the Military

Finding 1. The findings associated with research question one indicated that the participants enlisted in the military for various reasons. Based on the analysis of the findings, four sub findings emerged to include:

- Finding 1a. Seeking opportunities.

- Finding 1b. Seeking security/stability.

- Finding 1c. Tradition or culture.

- Finding 1d. Service to the country.

Serving in the Military

   Finding 2. Describes the various occupational specialties that the participants

held at the time of enlistment. The six sub findings are listed below. Although all of this

study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and

warrants further details as discussed below.

- Finding 2a. Traditional occupations.

- Finding 2b. Nontraditional occupations.

- Finding 2c. Being a female and non-commissioned officer.

- Finding 2d. Role disparities.

- Finding 2e. Gender inequalities.

- Finding 2f. Psychological distress and sexual trauma.

   Finding 2d. This finding is associated with role disparities experiences as

described by the participants. These findings extended existing literature in that

throughout the interview process; the participants displayed and shared anxieties relating

to role inequalities they experienced during and after their military service. An

overwhelming 75% reported there were noticeable differences in their roles throughout

their careers, with some mentioning that after becoming an NCO, the disparities

increased despite having the same and in some cases more, rank, training, and

educational background as their male counterparts.

   Finding 2e. Finding 2e describes the participants perspectives on their gender

inequalities experiences. Finding 2e advanced existing literature in that participants

reported, displaying a degree of anxiety associated with their experiences, gender

inequalities, during and after their military service. The participants' understanding and experiences throughout their military careers and the private-sector, exposed the profound influence of their gender on their lives and careers.

Finding 2f. Finding 2f highlights the participants' psychological distress and sexual trauma experiences. McAllister et al. (2015) focused on highlighting the impact of stress and the resultant strain on the veterans' ability to successfully reintegrate into a civilian society, which aligned to finding 2f of this study. The findings reported in this study revealed that most of the participants either witnessed and or experienced psychological distress or sexual trauma directly. Additionally, Koenig, Maguen, Monroy, Mayott, and Seal (2014) focused on the transition experiences of 17 male and 14 female Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, emphasizing the transition process as it related to improving awareness and understanding of health care providers. The authors found that "veterans' experiences resulted from an underlying tension between military and civilian identities consistent with reverse culture shock. Participants described challenges and strategies for managing readjustment stress across three domains: intrapersonal, professional/educational, and interpersonal" (Koenig et al., 2014, p. 414). These findings expanded this literature and provided first-hand accounts of female NCO veterans who experienced psychological distress and depression during the transition and attempting to reintegrate into civilian society and workforce.

Military Transition

Finding 3. Based on the findings reported in this study, military transition emerged as the third category. The findings uncovered that the lack of an effective

transition program that efficiently contributed to successful transition continued to be a shared management problem that spans beyond the military departments and the Department of Defense to other government agencies and private-sector organizations (Cronk, 2015; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Finding 3 revealed that overwhelming the participants felt that the TAP assistance provided prior to transition lacked effectiveness. Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below. The sub findings associated with this finding are indicated below:

- Finding 3a. Feelings of uncertainty.

- Finding 3b. Transition challenges.

- Finding 3c. Flexible transitioning experience.

- Finding 3d. Recommendations.

Finding 3a. Finding 3a reveals the participants' feelings of uncertainty during the transition process. Finding 3a advanced literature describing that for some of the participants, this life-changing transition caused stress and psychological distress as well as feelings of depression. McAllister et al. (2015) also explored veterans' private-sector identities and how they aligned with the disparities of military rank and veteran identity strain. Additionally, the participants highlighted a lack of support from military leadership. They noted they had to rely on family and friends, with some seeking out medical professionals, to minimize the negative impacts (e.g., stress, and depression) associated with leaving the military and reentering an unfamiliar environment.

Finding 3b. Finding 3b describes the challenges experienced during the transition process. Overwhelmingly, the participants experienced challenges during the transition process and entering an environment, whether private-sector employment or college, in which they had no exposure to for periods ranging from 7 to 20+ years. Based on the participants' responses, 11 participants (68.8%) mentioned the challenges, and 5 participants (31.3%) mentioned no challenges. These findings are consistent with the findings of Kirchner (2015), who highlighted the challenges that veterans faced during the military transition processes and entering a college environment.

Translation of Military Experience and Skills

Finding 4. Finding 4 is related to the participants' experiences reintegration into the private sector. Kirchner, Coryell, and Yelich Biniecki (2014) emphasized the importance of acknowledging the challenges of reintegrating into a civilian culture and the obstacles of becoming student veterans. Although this literature focused on student veterans, the finding of this study expanded the literature from the perspectives of acknowledging and understanding the challenges not only female NCO veterans faced, but veterans in general, during reintegration. Gould and Obicheta (2015) maintained that of the 256 female veterans surveyed, 82% reported difficulties readjusting to the private-sector, and only 37% believed private-sector employers acknowledged their military service and experience. Additionally, McAllister et al. (2015) asserted that "veterans are having a difficult time reintegrating back into the civilian sector following their service, with nearly 44% reporting some type of problem" (p. 93). These bodies of literature were confirmed by these study findings that revealed that 81.3% of this study participants

reported experiencing difficulties during reintegration and adjustment to private-sector. This finding has five sub findings as indicated below. Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below.

- Finding 4a. Flexible reintegration experience.

- Finding 4b. Reintegration challenges.

- Finding 4c. Over-employed/underemployed.

- Finding 4d. Private sector employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness.

- Finding 4e. Transitional program effectiveness.

- Finding 4f. Skills and experience translation challenges.

Finding 4c. Kirchner (2015) noted that the requirement "to provide retention and graduation-impacting support services is critical. Adult educators need to be aware of the programs and services available to student veterans to promote their school as military-friendly" (p. 117). In line with Kirchner's contentions, these findings advanced this body of literature in that the findings highlighted the need for private-sector employers, much like adult educators, to be aware of the management experience veterans offer. Additionally, the findings highlighted the programs, services, and resources available to veterans, who seek out employment as managers, to aid in promoting their efforts to recruit not only military officer managers but female NCO veterans who are qualified, trained, and educated managers as well. The findings also revealed that during the process of seeking and securing employment, some of the participants received information that they were either overqualified or underqualified, resulting in not

securing employment and or working in positions that were not comparable to those held in the military.

Finding 4d. Moreover, Kirchner (2015) asserted that there was a further impact on veterans' experiences by stereotypes and adjusting to settings that were not structured, such as those experienced in the military. This study participants' experiences ranged from private-sector employers and employees not acknowledging years of management experience, refused to accept advice and mentorship, and viewed their military background as a hindrance resulting in the participants finding the reintegration process difficult. The finding 4d expanded the assertions discussed in Kirchner's work, which documented the challenges these study participants experienced associated with private-sector employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness of the female NCO veteran population's ability to reintegrate into a private-sector management position. These findings also advanced previously reported literature confirming that private-sector employers intensified the problem by labeling veterans, particularly female NCO veterans, with a range of adverse characterizations and prejudiced perceptions relating to competences and abilities to serve in mid-level to senior-level management roles.

Additionally, the skills and experiences female NCO veterans offered were similar, and translatable, to private-sector management, leadership, decision-making, and resilience, (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2017). Despite these assertions, private-sector and other civilian employers did not have a clear understanding of how formal military education, training, and professional development translated to the private-sector (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2017) which finding 4d confirmed that indicating that female NCO

veterans lacked awareness of as well. Hardison et al. (2017) maintained that "for both

veterans and civilian employers, understanding which skills veterans have received

formal training and education courses and, on the job, is challenging because military and

civilian workplace cultures and languages can seem radically different from one another"

(p. iii). These study participants shared varied responses with one reporting her

experience with a university staff member who oversaw the veteran's support office. The

participant shared he stated she "was not a veteran because she did not retire" to which

she informed him that his "information was incorrect" to which he insisted that "to be

classified as a veteran, the individual must have retired from the military." It is this lack

of knowledge, awareness, and education that had a profound impact on the female NCO

veteran population's ability to reintegrate back into civilian society and private-sector

employment successfully.

Finding 4e. One of the most important, if not the most important, aspects of

transitioning successfully, is ensuring the effectiveness of transition assistance programs

and practices. Although in 2011, military and other government officials partnered to

improve transition assistance programs, the program's effectiveness continued to come

into question (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck,

2018). The Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs leadership

(a) maintained that the new program represented a meaningful step towards enhancing

the transition and reintegration processes and (b) continued to insist that the new structure

incorporated adequate levels of education, career technical training, and entrepreneurship

that better aligned to civilian occupations (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b).

According to existing literature, other officials and policymakers continued to challenge

the overall effectiveness; communicated the need for continuous process improvements;

and agreed a more integrated approach was needed (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014;

Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, 2015b). Despite the Department of Defense TAP program restructuring in 2011,

the findings reported in this study confirmed the assertions reported in the existing

literature that highlighted the need for continuous process improvements (Cronk, 2015;

DAV, 2014; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The findings revealed that most of the participants did not

attend, because it was not a requirement of separating or retiring, and those who attended

the TAP classes did not find them useful. On August 13, 2018, the John S. McCain

National Defense Authorization Act enactment authorized additional changes to the TAP

program to ensure better effectiveness and progress towards providing better assistance

and resources as well as better preparing service members for transition and reintegration

(Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018). Although these updates

authorization was in 2018, the Department of Defense did not incorporate the guidelines

into the Department of Defense TAP instruction until September 26, 2019 (Department

of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018) resulting in further delays in preparing veterans

for transition and reintegration. It is important to note that military service members are

not allowed to enroll in the new program until 365 days before separation or retirement.

The findings confirmed that the program did not provide the necessary information or

training that adequately aligned to the private sector. Approximately 32% of this study

participants were still serving in the military during when the new program

implementation and felt that the new program was not useful, did not aid in preparing

them for employment outside of the military, and did not align with the new program's

curriculum. These findings expanded existing literature that noted that military and

government officials, and other experts, continued to call for further research on effective

programs and practices (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a;

Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b) which is substantiated by

this study findings.

Finding 4f. In 2015, unemployment rates amongst veterans decreased to 5.8%

down from 7.2% in 2014 (BLS, 2017). Despite the 1.4% reduction, veterans transitioning

experienced significant challenges when attempting to reintegrate into the private-sector

(BLS, 2015). In 2016, the overall unemployment rate amongst female veterans was 5% in

contrast to 4.6% amongst nonveteran women and 4.2% amongst their male veteran

counterparts (BLS, 2017). Although women accounted for 10% of the veteran population

and were considered a vital aspect of today's workforce, they only accounted for 2% of

employed women in the U.S. labor force (Department of Labor, 2017). This study finding

4f highlighted the fact that only 37.5% of this study participants who secured

employment worked in a private-sector position. The participants' experiences while

seeking private-sector employment varied with one participant reporting it took 11 years

and one sharing it took seven years to secure comparable private-sector employment.

While another participant, who retired four years ago, remained unemployed, and others

reported working minimum wage jobs despite their management experience, higher

education, and training. One of the critical aspects of successful reintegration is the ability to translate management skills and experience, obtained while serving in the military, to comparable private-sector management positions.

Additionally, Strauss (2016) maintained that Post-9/11 veterans reported that the inability to translate military training and the level of higher education were causes of the inability to secure employment directly equivalent to the incomes and benefits while serving. This study finding 4f confirmed these assertions, thus expanding knowledge and literature, with the participants overwhelmingly responding that they expected their military experience and training, as well as higher education achievements, to translate into meaningful and comparable private-sector employment. Often it did not, resulting in participants finding the process of translating skills and experience difficulty with one participant reporting that she found the most challenging aspects of reintegrating was her inability to translate her management skills to private-sector employment. It is important to note that at the time of this study, eight (50%) of the 16 participants had employment, 5 (62.5%) of the eight were in government employment. In comparison, only 3 (37.5%) of the eight were in the private-sector employment primarily due to the inability to translate their military skills and experiences to comparable private-sector employment.

Gender-Specific Resources

Finding 5. Resources and services emerged as the fifth category. Schlossberg's model incorporated four key factors that influenced the process of transition and provided a conceptual lens for exploring and evaluating female NCO veterans transition from the military services. The model also served as a mechanism for broadening the contextual

perspectives relating to military separation or retirement highlighting the critical need for the transformation of existing programs, counseling, resources, and joint transition initiatives tailored to meet the needs of female NCO veterans and the U.S. veteran population (Anderson et al., 2012; Elnitsky et al., 2017). Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below. The sub findings associated with finding 5 include:

- Finding 5a. Accessibility and barriers.

- Finding 5b. Availability of services.

- Finding 5c. Participant's recommendations.

Finding 5a and 5b. Another gap in existing literature was addressing the lack of gender-specific resources provided to female NCO veterans and the U.S. female veteran population. Although there were significant advancements towards establishing gender-specific women's health resources, this study's findings revealed, as reported by the participants, that the gender-specific resources available to female veterans are not comparable. In comparison to their male counterparts, women veterans faced additional complexities due to distinctive gender-specific needs (Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013), calling for the need for gender-specific resources for not only female NCO veterans but all female veterans. Choy et al. (2015) conducted a study relating to the existence of Women's Health Centers (WHCs) reported that of the top 50 ranked Hospitals for Urology "Sixteen of 50 (32%) promoted some type of MHC, compared to 49 of 50 (98%) offering a WHC" (p. 170). This compilation of literature was expanded in this study findings, specifically finding 5b, which described how participants reported

experiencing challenges and problems after departing the military to include being

provided resources and services tailored to meet their specific needs. The findings

expanded existing literature presented documenting the participants varied experiences

with most agreeing there was a lack of knowledge, awareness, and accessibility calling

for the need for greater understanding and allocated resources for gender-specific

services provided to female veterans. The findings ranged from perspectives that female

experiences with depression and PTSD were different from male veterans and healthcare

providers tended to treat women like they were men. This finding also advanced the

literature in that participants reported that a lot of wounded women did not have access to

gender-specific, and in some cases, any services, services, nor were they afforded the

opportunity to seek them out.

Furthermore, this research expanded literature documenting the participant's

perspectives that they were not saying that they could not do the same jobs successfully

but felt that it was essential to share that women respond in different ways. For example,

the impact and aftermath of combat and military service, in some cases, affect women

differently, particularly in those experiences associated with sexual trauma. Additionally,

finding 5a revealed that most of the participants reported they were unaware of the

services and only found out about available services and resources after transitioning

through networking and visiting the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs website.

A persistent gap in the literature continue to exist, supporting the need for further

examination of female NCO veteran experiences of challenges and perhaps even were

unsuccessful, associated with military transition and private-sector reintegration. This

work highlighted the need for (a) continuous process improvements, (b) improved education, (c) continuous partnered efforts to provide improve transition assistance through the restructuring of programs and practices, and (d) involving the veteran population in the program improvement efforts. Therefore, a relevant focus of this study presented different paths female NCO veterans experienced and some of the influences and underlying forces behind their encounters and hindrances. A persistent need exists to evaluate further the potential challenges and obstacles faced by the veteran population. By further evaluating the challenges, I obtained greater insight, and a more realistic perspective of (a) serving in the military, (b) transitioning, (c) reintegrating, and (d) the system of support provided to this population.

Summary and Conclusions

Elnitsky et al. (2017) maintained that the enablement of military transition and private-sector reintegration was a shared government, employers, and community responsibility of importance. Elnitsky et al. (2017) asserted that the reintegration process encompassed the aspects of transition, readjustment, and community integration. The process of reintegrating from a military community to a civilian community required the individuals' personal, relational, participation in community groups, as well as societal components (Elnitsky et al., 2017). These factors enabled or hindered advantageous reintegration. The ability to cope with stressful life events, such as private-sector reintegration, was a critical aspect of successful reintegration. Elnitsky et al. (2017) found that most researchers did not provide an acknowledged description of military service members' and veterans' reintegration or an understanding of the overall circumstances or

environments in which the procedure of reintegration occurs. A requirement for both

aspects was required to facilitate successful reintegration as well as to highlight

adversities, difficulties, practices, and their effect on reintegration aftermaths. In Chapter

2, I provided the literature review incorporating a summary of pertinent literature. I

discussed the concepts of transition and reintegration, incorporating Schlossberg 4S and

the Work Role Transition models. I also provided an overview of women in the military

and the veteran female population. I also highlighted the gaps in the available literature

relating to female NCO veteran's challenges during the military transition and private-

sector reintegration. In Chapter 3, I discuss the qualitative research design and rationale,

the role of the researcher, the methodology, data collection, and issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study, using a phenomenological research design, was to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from military service and reintegration to private-sector employment. In the preceding chapter, I described existing literature associated with the female NCO veteran population's challenges during transition and reintegration. I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to address the research question based on a paradigm of the personal knowledge and subjectivisms of the participants. As such, describing their perspectives and interpretations, a better understanding of the distinctiveness of the participants' experiences was captured and explored. The process of transitioning from military service to private-sector employment was a challenging endeavor. Despite existing research relating to the transition and reintegration processes, a gap focused on the lived experiences of female NCO veterans persisted (Robertson & Brott, 2014). In this chapter, I examine the central research question. I discussed the research design and rationale, as well the role of the researcher. I also discuss the methodologies and participant selection process. In this chapter, I also describe the data collection instrument and source, as well as the data collection processes. I conclude this chapter by covering the issues of trustworthiness that incorporated credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. Figure 5 is a graphic depiction of the qualitative phenomenological method.

Select Research Design	Instrumentation	Recruitment & Participation	Data Collection	Data Analysis
Identify Researcher's Role	Primary Researcher	Flyers, Internet Posting, Webpages	Demographic Questionnaire	5-Phase Approach
Select Research Methodology	Pre-determined Semi-structured Questions	Participant's Criterion	Interviews: 25 Face-to-Face SKYPE	Transcribing & Coding
Select Research Methodology	Interview Plan-of-Action		Field Notes Audio Recording Member Checking Documented Records	Issues of Trustworthiness
Define Participant Selection Criteria	Develop Interview Protocol			Final Report

Purposeful Sampling | Snowball Sampling

Determine General Population

Narrow Targeted Population

Determine Sample Size: 25

Bracketing and Reduction

Delineating Units of Meaning

Clustering Units of Meaning

Summarizing, Validating, and Modifying

Extract Unique Themes

Figure 5. Graphic illustration of qualitative phenomenological method.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, I posed a single overarching research question: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegration into private-sector employment?" I answered the research question using a qualitative phenomenological approach. The objective of the study was to capture, gaining a greater understanding, the lived experiences of female NCO veterans as they struggle to address transitional challenges associated with reintegration and secure private-sector management and leadership positions. I used an open-ended technique to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans resulting in employing a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative approach even though the approach could evolve. This study was foundationally tailored to allow for exploring, gaining more excellent knowledge of, and documenting the lived

experiences of 16 female NCO veterans. By examining the participants' experiences, I was able to uncover the impact of and highlight any unreported issues relating to the military transition and private-sector reintegration experiences. Qualitative research assisted in exploring interpretations and viewpoints to uncover and understand the meaning participants assigned to their experiences (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

Research Design

Quantitative research aided in determining how individuals display specific behavioral patterns, while qualitative assists in better understanding the how is and why are these patterns occurred (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Widespread use of qualitative research yielded variations in viewpoints (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). For example, Sutton and Austin (2015) described two distinct viewpoints "first is the culture of the indigenous population of Canada and the place of this population in society, and the second is the social constructivist concepts used in the constructivist grounded concept method" (p. 227). I employed a reflective technique to not only provide a contextual perspective to the reader but also further insight into the phenomenon. By effectively capturing the participants' voices textually, I reported the experience from the participants' perspective (see Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Another aspect of focusing on the participants' viewpoints is my ability to acknowledge personal biases and effectively communicate beliefs, perceptions, and biases ensuring the reader understood the reason for questions, data collection, and analysis, and stated findings (see

Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Sutton & Austin, 2015; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

The traditions associated with qualitative research included case study, narrative, ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, grounded concept, and case study (Patton, 2015). The case study design did not align with the primary aim to uncover meaning and is appropriate when the researcher identified existing cases (Patton, 2015). A narrative design was best suited when the focus is on how the stories are shared and has a biographical format that describes the course of a person's life over time and gathered from data obtained through the first-person account of an individual's lifetime, oral interpretation, or biography (Merriam, 2014; Patton, 2015; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012; Smythe, 2012). Moustakas (1994) maintained the three most widely used methods are ethnography, grounded concept, and phenomenological. Briefly, ethnography incorporated the usage of direct observation over an extended period while grounded concepts researchers, such as Strauss and Corbin, conducted focus group interviews to evaluate a phenomenon to advance existing knowledge of a problem, situation, or context (Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). An ethnographic approach was not appropriate due to the ethnography researcher's objective was to gain a greater understanding from a shared cultural context (Astalin, 2013; Denke & Barnes, 2013).

Grounded concepts and phenomenological were similar in that both methods were used to explore the participants' behavior and have comparable data collection techniques (Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). When

utilized, grounded concepts aided in assessing (a) the procedural investigation that

resulted in a greater awareness of specific experience; (b) used to produce a hypothesis

that aided in furthering knowledge associated with an individual's actions related to the

significance and or variation in conditions over time; and (c) or assist in explaining and

discovering social practices (see Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Farrelly, 2013; Maz, 2013).

Phenomenological differed in that I concentrated on gaining a greater understanding of

the experience of the phenomenon and the subjective nature of the experience (see

Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton,

2015). Patton (2015) maintained that qualitative not only provided rich background

information but participants' perspectives and experiences relating to a phenomenon. The

acknowledgment of the qualitative phenomenological recommended the technique as the

most appropriate method for exploring human experiences, thus potentially alleviating

the issue associated with attempting to clarify why a participant might experience a

phenomenon a certain way (Gill, 2014; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Rationale

Phenomenological is an exploration and investigation of the selected population's

perceptions of a lived experience (McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013; Seidman,

2013). The phenomenological methodology was appropriate for this study because it

aided in obtaining a greater understanding of subjective viewpoints and the perspectives

that potentially offer a thematic conceptualization of one's findings (Merriam, 2014). By

using a phenomenological study, the participants were able to use their voices and share

their understanding of their experiences during the transition and reintegration processes

(Finlay, 2013). In general, the purpose of this methodological approach was to understand better how female NCO veterans described military transition and overcoming the barriers of re-entering into the private-sector after separating or retiring from military service. Based on the focus of the study, the qualitative phenomenological materialized as the most appropriate instrument. The utilization of a qualitative phenomenological study aided in furthering the management discipline by advancing existing literature, influencing overall awareness, and providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

The design of the study was to examine the difficulties that impacted the process of securing post-military mid-level to senior-level management and leadership positions. It also highlighted the adaptive practices and experiences that potentially further the success of the female NCO veteran population efforts. I used a phenomenological approach to capture the personal and sincere meanings related to the phenomenon that adequately expressed the lived experiences of female NCO veterans' transition and private-sector reintegration (see Maxwell, 2013; Silverman, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) maintained that I served in the role as the primary instrument. Stake (2010) asserted that my role was potentially biased based on his or her experiences resulting in subjective interpretations. My role in this qualitative phenomenological study was to collect and interpret the data collected from 16 female NCO veteran participants to analyze that data to uncover associated themes and document any categories and themes (Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012;

Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). As the primary mechanism for collecting

the data, I aimed to access the thoughts and feelings of the participants and attempt to

transform the data to illustrative formatting representing their accounts of their lived

experiences (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Sutton and Austin (2015) emphasized

the importance of personal reflection, which does not mean that I overlooked or attempt

to avoid any biases. Sutton and Austin (2015) maintained that "reflexivity requires

researchers to reflect upon and clearly articulate their position and subjectivities (world

view, perspectives, biases) so that readers can better understand the filters through which

to ask questions, data were gathered and analyzed, and findings" (p. 226). As a

qualitative researcher, I attempted to adequately transcribe and record the essence of

those lived experiences in writing, resulting in a comprehensive description of the

phenomena (Sanjari et al., 2014).

I had significant previous experience as a female NCO veteran serving in the

military for over 30 years, making it imperative to conduct a self-assessment to

acknowledge viewpoints, philosophies, and preconceptions (see Sanjari et al., 2014).

Because I had personal and lived experiences, there was the potential presence of

preconceived bias making it vital that I made every effort to effectively bracket and

ensure not to allow any biases to shape the ways to view, understand, and interpret the

data (see Chan et al., 2013). Bias and partiality were not necessarily adverse but were

inescapable due to my previous experiences (see Chan et al., 2013). In a

phenomenological study, it was essential to recognize and reduce any potential bias as

well as understand the impact prior knowledge had during data collection and analysis

(O'Halloran et al., 2016). Chan et al. (2013) proposed bracketing to lessen the possibility of influencing the participant's perspectives or knowledge of the phenomenon. The findings could resonate with the reader, so the data needed to incorporate the participant's interpretation and verbiage describing their experiences allowing me to report vivid language and provide insight resulting in the transferability of the findings (van Manen, 2014). I maintained a reflexive journal to document my views and interpretations to ensure accuracy in presenting an unbiased explanation of the transition and reintegration experiences of female NCO veterans. Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, and Cheraghi (2014) maintained that in phenomenological research, one of my critical roles was to understand and capture the participants' experiences based on shared perspectives accurately transforming that data to report the participants' lived experiences. My role was to translate the participants' experiences into words and themes, documenting the essence in writing and an all-encompassing narrative of the phenomenon (see Sanjari et al., 2014; Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2011).

Ethically, I faced the challenge of managing the multiplicity of the participants' experiences while overcoming or alleviating personal bias and incorporating of partiality to a kind of data or analytical viewpoint (see Warr & Pyett, 1999). While, Elo et al., (2014) asserted it was critical to ensure to avoid bias or data impartiality when posing a descriptive question to take into consideration the desired outcome of data gathering and ensure to highlight data for that overall aim. As a researcher, it was necessary to openly and distinctly articulate how to safeguard the participants' data (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Sutton & Austin,

2015). I must be self-aware in a sense to ensure the interview questions were appropriate for collecting information-rich data that informed the subject and answer the proposed research questions to ensure credibility (Patton, 2002, 2015). It was also crucial that I did not influence or direct the participants as well as ensure that the interview questions were not to general or controlled (see Patton, 2002, 2015). Patton (2015) maintained that it is essential to honor the practicality of guarantees of confidentiality. The ethical background and viewpoints that informed the study ensuring respectability and understanding from the participants' perspective beyond that which was required by law (Patton, 2015).

Methodology

In this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of 16 female NCO veterans' transition from military services to reintegrate into private-sector employment (see Moustakas, 1994). I interviewed individuals until I achieved saturation. The sample size for this study was 16 female NCO veterans who transitioned from the military and reintegrated into the private-sector. In qualitative research, 16 participants were sufficient based on the concept of data saturation, which is a crucial point wherein data became cyclic (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). In this study, to determine data saturation, the interview data were analyzed until the repetition of themes was distinguished. Burmeister and Aitken (2012) maintained that 16 participants were usually adequate because saturation was not based on the selection or a large or small sample but rather on the complexity of the data. If I uncovered unique findings after I conducted the 16 interviews, plans to include additional participants were in place with the cooperation of the DAV.

I considered a quantitative approach, but the focus was on numerical data collected through the measurement and examination of the correlation amongst variables (see Yilmaz, 2013). The utilization of a qualitative approach was more appropriate than other approaches because it allowed me to gain greater insight into the significance of the participants assigned to a specific phenomenon (see Patton, 2015). My primary aim was to capture information-rich data, and quantitative data were restrictive in the degree of how detailed the obtained information provided (see Gordon, 2016; Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). A qualitative approach allowed for narrative in contrast to quantitative, which resulted in numerical data (Gordon, 2016; Isaacs, 2014).

Participant Selection Logic

The criterion used to select the participants was purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) maintained that qualitative researchers extensively used this method not only to uncover but to document information-rich participant's experiences adequately. Purposeful sampling was appropriate because it allowed me to successfully identify those participants who knew and or experiences related to the topic of interest (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2015). I selected purposeful sampling over random selection for the following reasons (a) to assist in ensuring the participants meet the specified criteria, (b) to aid in accounting for the variations in the participants' experiences, and (c) enabled me to answer the research question (see Palinkas et al., 2015; Robinson, 2014). The initial step of identifying the participants was to determine the type of population. Aiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017) described populations as general, target, and accessible.

In this study, the characterization of the general population was the entire female veteran population who shared at least one attribute of interest that results in their eligibility as a member of the specified population (Aiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017; Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; Bartlett, Kotrlik, & Higgins, 2001). Lazar, Feng, and Hochheiser (2017) defined participants' attributes as data relating to demographics, educational, professional background, or a compilation of any of the characteristics. The next step was to determine the targeted population by narrowing the group to those individuals (e.g., female NCO veterans) who had specific characteristics of interest and who contributed to the study (Asiamah et al., 2017; Bartlett et al., 2001). This group was unique in comparison to the general population and who did not have any traits that invalidated the research hypothesis, context, or objective (Asiamah et al., 2017). The accessible population was those individuals (e.g., 16 female NCO veterans) from which I collected data (Asiamah et al., 2017; Bartlett et al., 2001). Table 2 is a graphic illustration of a comparison of female veterans, their male veteran counterparts, and the nonfemale veteran population, specifically education, occupation, and class of work.

Table 2

Education, Occupation, and Class of Work Comparison

	Education level				Occupation & class of work		
	Female veterans	Male veterans	Non-female veterans		Female veterans	Male veterans	Non-female veterans
High school graduate or less	20.0	35.8	39.5	Management, professional	49.8	35.3	41.9
Some college	43.0	36.9	31.5	Sales, office	27.6	19.2	30.0
Bachelor's degree	22.1	16.1	18.4	Services	15.1	14.8	21.4
Advanced degree	14.8	11.1	10.5	Production, transportation	5.8	16.1	5.9
				All others	1.6	14.7	0.9
				Private	60.5	66.9	77.0
				Government	34.3	8.0	7.0
				Self-employed	5.1	8.0	7.0

Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018,February).

As of September 2016, the United States, Puerto Rico, and Territories/Foreign female veteran population were 2,051,484 with Texas, California, Florida, Virginia, and Georgia having the most significant number of female veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). I used purposeful sampling to select 16 participants who primarily resided in the eastern and southern regions of the United States specifically, Texas and Virginia due to several veterans, their accessibility, knowledge, and experiences with the phenomenon of interest (see Bryman & Bell, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). Purposeful sampling was also useful to gather information-rich data aligned with NCO female veterans' transition and reintegration experiences (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Another critical aspect of purposeful sampling was the participant's accessibility and whether they possessed the inclination to participate (Bernard, 2002; Suri, 2011). It was also crucial that the selected participants shared their experiences and clearly expressed their

interpretations related to their experiences (Spradley, 1979). Thus, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate technique for choosing the sample for this phenomenological study.

The basis of the criterion for selecting the participants was their military service, rank, and number of years of management and leadership experience at the time of separation or retirement. The participants served on active duty in the USAF, USN, USA, USMC, or USCG enlisted corps. By establishing and using this criterion, a heterogeneous sample was provided, thus fostering variability in the processes. Initially, the participants' identification was through personal and previous professional associations. I expanded the parameters to include veteran organizations. The use of snowball sampling assisted in identifying additional participants if needed (Frogner, Skillman, & Snyder, 2016; Robert, 2015). The process of snowball sampling entailed the solicitation of information, from identified participants or organizations representatives, about other potential participants (Frogner et al., 2016; Robert, 2015). They were also selected based on their transition and reintegration experiences and their ability or inability to secure management and leadership private-sector employment parallel to that held during military service. The participants were selected based on their willingness to openly share their experiences of serving in the military, transitioning, and reintegration to private-sector employment. The demographic questionnaire aided in verifying whether the participants met the established criterion.

I interviewed the group in work, medical, public, and or support organizations environments where they are comfortable and willing to share their experiences. In

Virginia, the interviews took place at the DAV, Virginia Beach, VA. The interviews

conducted in Texas took place in various locations, as indicated above. These settings

were environments that are familiar to the participants. For those individuals interested in

participating and were unable to conduct a face-to-face interview, they had the option of

SKYPE interviews. In this study, I used phenomenological research methodology and

concentrated on conducting interviews and reviewing documentation to gain greater

insight into the obstacles female enlisted veterans face when reintegrating into the

civilian culture.

The research population for this study included a small and diverse group of 16

female NCO veterans who are known to have shared experiences, share one or more

attributes of interest, and can provide the most useful information (Asiamah et al., 2017).

I focused on exploring the participants' insights and views of events and the

interpretations assigned to those encounters as communicated by the participants,

including the integration and adjustment to the unknown and unexpected occurrences.

The logic of selecting participants was to effectively identify and select information-rich

instances as well as comprehensive knowledge (Palinkas et al., 2015; Reybold, Lammert,

& Stribling, 2012). The participant's selection process incorporated a voluntary

participation strategy. I briefed the participants that they had the option of withdrawing at

any time during the process. I contacted the participants using direct contact, which

included face-to-face contact, SKYPE, phone, and the Internet. I also produced and

posted flyers that provided information about the inclusion guidelines, study processes,

and my contact information. I sent this information out via electronic messaging as
needed.

Seidman (2013) maintained that relatively small sample sizes were appropriate for
phenomenological interviews. It was essential to ensure that the selected sample size was
large enough that saturation was not achieved before the collecting enough data to ensure
that others can replicate the study, when I attained further data, or when I was unable to
advance the coding processes (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse, Lowery, & Steury, 2014).
One technique for achieving data saturation was to conduct interviews (Fusch & Ness,
2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) asserted that (a) data saturation was achieved at various
points depending on the methodology and design, and (b) I should not assume saturation
was achieved based on the thorough review of sources. Burmeister and Aitken (2012)
maintained that saturation was not based on the selection or a large or small sample but
rather on the complexity of the data. Although I used a small sample size, the use of
qualitative literature resulted in large volumes of information-rich participants' narratives
(see Morse, 2015). I achieved data saturation after collecting ample amounts of data that
(a) other researchers could repeat the study, (b) no additional data could be gathered, and
(c) it was no longer practical to continue the coding process (see Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, there were several instrumentation options (e.g., artifacts,
archived data, interviews, and focus groups). As a qualitative researcher, I elected to use
an acknowledged data collection instrument that was conclusively demonstrated (see
Porte, 2013). I could have also chosen to create a data collection instrument. I used semi

structured interviews for this study. I recorded the interviews in an audio recording

format. The participants documented their interpretations of their experiences. The

instrumentation for this study included me as the primary instrument and a list of

predetermined semi structured interview questions. All data were logged, compiled, and

transcribed. Qualitative data could be collected using various methods ranging from

questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, to observations (Patton, 2015).

The primary aim of qualitative phenomenological research was to explore, collect,

and analyze the narrative data to report the lived experiences associated with a specific

phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I used phenomenological research

methodology and concentrated on conducting interviews and reviewing documentation to

gain greater insight into the obstacles female enlisted veterans faced when transitioning

from the military and reintegrate into private-sector employment (see Moustakas, 1994).

The study centered on participants' insights and views of events and the interpretations

assigned to those encounters as communicated by the participants, including the

integration and adjustment to the unknown and unexpected occurrences. The data for this

study were collected utilizing semi structured face-to-face and SKYPE interviews,

documented records, and field notes. The reasoning for utilizing a variety of sources was

to ensure the unit of analysis was examined through various lenses to capture

information-rich data (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

A description of the procedures used to recruit the participants and collect the data

is in the following sections. The selection of participants was based on well-defined

reasoning and logic as well as achieved a precise objective that resulted in the fulfillment of (a) addressing a specific phenomenon, (b) answering a question(s), and (c) filling a gap in existing literature (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008). The procedure of determining who the participants were, and the number required to answer the research question(s) adequately was dependent on "what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what was useful, what had credibility" (Patton, 1990, p. 184). Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) maintained that I should select participants based on their experiences and understanding of a phenomenon. I selected a small group of 16 participants using purposeful sampling.

I used the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines throughout these processes. Because the text for each needed to be approved by the IRB, I submitted the text as a component of the IRB Application. I used recruitment flyers, internet postings, and or web pages to recruit participants. The flyers included my contact information and a volunteer invitation to those potential participants who transitioned from the military and reintegrated into the private sector and, in some cases, private-sector employment. Those interested in participating were able to contact me via e-mail, telephone, or SKYPE video calls. The participants for this research (a) were associated with the DAV, (b) had a previous association, or (c) were identified by a known associate. I contacted the DAV through a known associate requesting permission to conduct the research. Once I received permission, I requested a contact list of potential participants. I used the known associate to assist throughout this process. After receiving the list, I e-mailed the recruitment flyers to the DAV requesting that they be handed-out,

posted throughout the facilities, and on the DAV website. About two weeks before the interviews, I contacted each participant via e-mail to introduce myself and provide background information such as the reason and nature of the research study, the informed consent process, the techniques for confidentiality, any potential risks, and notification of a follow-up e-mail in one week. I also provided my contact information and a copy of the volunteer invitation. I also attached a copy of the consent form, explaining that the form was to be reviewed and signed during the face-to-face interview. For those participants not associated with the DAV, I contacted them via e-mail to provide this information. Before beginning the face-to-face interviews, each participant read the consent form and sign two copies. The participants received a signed copy and the second copy was maintained and used as confirmation that the participants agreed to participate in the interview process.

To prepare the participants for the interview process, I offered 30-minute SKYPE calls providing the participants some background information such as the reason and nature of the research study, informed consent process, the techniques for confidentiality, any potential risks, and to answer any inquiries before the interviews. For those interested in the preparation communication, I sent a list of proposed interview dates and times, after which time I scheduled the SKYPE calls, providing instructions and conference call code, highlighting the time and planned duration. I sent the five participants a reminder e-mail confirming their availability for the SKYPE calls. At the beginning of the session, I reminded, confirming approval, the participants about recording the calls.

Data Collection

As a researcher, I was the primary instrument of data collection. Before starting

the data collection process, I obtained approval, #11-21-18-0484180, from the Walden

University IRB. I used a demographic questionnaire, semi structured interviews, and

journals as the sources of data. I interviewed 16 female NCO veterans in Virginia and

Texas in environments that were familiar to the participants. Small sample sizes were

appropriate for phenomenological interviews because of the large amounts of available

information-rich narratives (Morse, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Bevan (2014) maintained that

I could collect, record, and document data by using handwritten notes as well as audio-

and or video-recordings that must be precisely transcribed. I used semi structured

interviews as the primary data source for this study. I used an interview protocol

illustrated in Appendix A, which included 33 open-ended questions to obtain data that

answered the research question. The findings of this study may be a valuable tool used to

improve transition and reintegration processes for not only female NCO veterans but

other female veterans as well as the overall veteran population. The military departments,

Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor,

other agencies that provided veterans' assistance as well as private-sector employers

could use the outcomes to advance knowledge and improve recruiting and hiring

initiatives. I recorded the interviews in an audio recording format.

In this study, I used phenomenological research methodology and concentrated on

conducting interviews and reviewing documentation to gain greater insight into the

obstacles female enlisted veterans face when transitioning from the military and

reintegrate into private-sector employment (see Moustakas, 1994). The study centered on

the participants' insights and views of events and the interpretations assigned to those

encounters as communicated by the participants, including the integration and adjustment

to the unknown and unexpected occurrences. The data for this study were collected

utilizing semi structured interviews, documented records, and field notes. The reasoning

for utilizing a variety of sources was to ensure the unit of analysis was examined through

various lenses to capture information-rich data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Neal, Neal,

VanDyke, and Kornbluh (2015) emphasized using audio recording during the interview

process enhanced the transcription and analysis of textual data and remained an

appropriate standard. Qualitative scholars maintained that translating and evaluating

audio-recorded data required extensive resources and could be time-consuming and

labor-intensive (Britten, 1995; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Tessier, 2012). The

purposeful sampling process drew from 16 female NCO veterans who separated or retired

from the military service transitioning from the military to secure management and

leadership roles equaled to those held while serving in the military. The data collected

were gathered from participants who were in various stages of their post-military lives

and careers to provide an overview of perspectives on military transition and private-

sector reintegration to private-sector employment.

Interviewing

The primary methods of gathering data for qualitative research typically

encompassed me either engaging in direct and one-on-one interactions with individuals

or creating a group environment in which he or she interacted directly with several

individuals (Patton, 2015). Interviewing is one of the most widely utilized qualitative data collection techniques (McDonald & Simpson, 2014). Interviewing was part of society and culture and was not a simple mechanism of gathering data about who and what people were; it was a fundamental, constitutive component of individuals' everyday lives (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Bevan (2014) maintained that although interviewing was the leading technique for data collection, guidance for effectively conducting an interview was minimum. Although interviews conducted in a focus group setting could prove to be more adaptable thus creating a free-flowing of ideas and exchange amongst the interviewer and the participants, the method was not appropriate for this study (Brockman, Nunez, & Basu, 2010; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Jayawardana & O'Donnell, 2009; Packer-Muti, 2010). The focus group method created the potential for groupthink resulting in an environment where the participants felt the need to align her perspectives to those of the group (Dimitroff, Schmidt, & Bond, 2005).

The types of interviews most used in management research were (a) structured, (b) unstructured, (c) semi structured, (d) narrative, and (e) focused groups (see Alsaawi, 2014; McDonald & Simpson, 2014; Oun & Bach, 2014; Stuckey, 2015). Alsaawi (2014) maintained that the main variations were the overall objective and my level of influence during the interview. Although qualitative interviews varied in the method employed, they were similar in that I could develop the questions to gain a better understanding of the participants' interpretations, viewpoints, and philosophies relating to a phenomenon (see Stuckey, 2015). Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) maintained that the best way to discover and gather the needed data was to establish a rapport with the

participants and overcome a perceived hierarchically structured. Seidman (2013) asserted that I did not conduct comprehensive interviews to answer the research question(s) solely or to address concepts but also to obtain and report a greater understanding of the participants' experiences and the meaning they assigned to those experiences (Seidman, 2013).

Jones (2013) used phenomenological interviews to collect data from three veterans at different levels in their degree programs, who transitioned from military service to higher learning institutions. The author's primary objective was to provide a greater understanding of each veterans' lived experiences relating to identity development. Maiocco and Smith (2016) interviewed eight female war veterans to uncover and capture themes associated with experiences ranging from personal relationships, the impact of numerous deployments, self-perceptions, and the process of seeking opportunities outside the military. Conard and Scott-Tilley (2015) used a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of female veterans to gain greater insight into how combat impacted their physical and mental health. The authors aligned their research with Husserl's philosophical framework, coupled with Colaizzi's methodology to analyze the data.

I used structured interviews and posed the same questions, in the precise sequence, and the same phrasing to all the participants (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The use of a structured interview allowed minimum flexibility because the primary aim is to gather similar data from a large group of participants (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The structured interview was typically used in conjunction with a statistical approach to data

analysis, making this method of collecting interview data inappropriate for this study (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Holloway and Wheeler (2013) maintained that the structured interview was useful in that the same time, decreased any bias, and allowed me to regulate the topic, formatting resulting inefficiencies concerning the data analyzing coding and comparison processes. While on the other hand, unstructured interviews allowed for more flexibility, and the questions were not predetermined (Brayda & Boyce, 2014; Schindler, 2019).

In qualitative research, semi structured interviews were the most typically used and allowed me to (a) incorporate the utilization of predetermined questions, and (b) openly ask the participants for further explanation of their responses (see Doody & Noonan, 2013; Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). The semi structured interview process required that I ask a prepared list of interview questions using a uniform and logical approach, allowing me to probe further to obtain additional data if needed (see Doody & Noonan, 2013; Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). Phenomenological techniques of qualitative research allowed me to explore a diverse grouping of themes to discover the deeper meanings the participants assigned to personal lived experiences (see Doody & Noonan, 2013; Holloway & Wheeler, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Through this process, I was able to validate the themes through the emerging, and all-encompassing exemplification of the participants' lived experiences. As a phenomenological researcher, I could utilize one, or more, methods of gathering information to develop a comprehensive picture to best inform the field of study.

Face-to-face interviews. I conducted the face-to-face interviews in settings and environments that were familiar to the participants to include work, medical, public, and or support organizations environments where the participants were comfortable and willing to share their experiences. I scheduled each interview for an hour. I worked with the DAV to develop an interview schedule that ensured maximum participation and availability. I developed a schedule to account for preparation and wrap-up times before and after each interview. Once the interview schedule was confirmed, I sent e-mail notifications and reminders before the scheduled interview, detailing pertinent information. For those participants not associated with the DAV, I contacted them via phone, with a follow-up e-mail, to work out the details for the interview.

SKYPE interviews. Because of various constraints to include geographic locations, cost, and time to name a few, scholars and organizations transitioned from using traditional face-to-face interviews to conducting interviews using online tools such as SKYPE (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). The SKYPE interviews were scheduled for an hour as well. Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour (2014) reported that in 2012 there were about 31 million SKYPE users. Janghorban et al. (2014) maintained that the procedures for conducting the various types of interviews could be simultaneously and nonsynchronous. SKYPE gave participants more flexibility and convenience, thus overcoming some of the obstacles associated with face-to-face interviews. The use of SKYPE aided in diminishing challenges associated with reaching potential vital participants, thus improving participation (Janghorban et al., 2014). Deakin and Wakefield (2013) emphasized that SKYPE interviews alleviated the potential of

choosing an inappropriate environment that distracted from the interview and impacted

the participants' contribution. I recruited these participants in the same manner used for

face-to-face interviews. Once I identified those participants who were unable to interview

face-to-face, I sent a list of proposed interview dates and times, after which time I

scheduled the SKYPE calls and provided instructions and conference call code,

highlighting the time and planned duration. I sent the participants a reminder e-mail

confirming their availability for the SKYPE calls. At the beginning of the session, I

reminded, confirming approval, the participants about recording the calls. I addressed any

potential ethical issues in the same manner as face-to-face interviews. I e-mailed the

consent forms and asked the participants to sign and return the forms via e-mail.

Interview Protocol

As part of the data collection process, I used the interview protocol included in

Appendix A of this study. The protocol development aligned with the overall purpose of

the study. The questioning process resulted in a conversational and inquiry-based

construct. I ensured each question aligned to the research question and reviewed each for

straightforwardness and transparency as well as the participants' ability to answer each

question adequately. Castillo-Montoya (2016) asserted that I could use the Interview

Protocol Refinement (IPR) tool to reinforce the reliability of the interview protocol.

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) maintained that by using the IPR, I developed a

common language to develop the interview protocol ensuring and achieved conformity

with the study. The IPR framework was useful throughout the development of the

interview protocol as well as for enhancing and aligning the interview questions

(Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Patton (2015) asserted the usage of an interview protocol as a tool to conduct an inquiry, ensuring to pose questions to obtain specific data relating to the study. Castillo-Montoya (2016) emphasized that interviewing was both an examination and a conversation which he termed an inquiry-based conversation. Castillo-Montoya (2016) asserted that to create an inquiry-based conversation successfully the interview protocol should incorporate "a) interview questions written differently from the research questions; b) an organization following social rules of ordinary conversation; c) a variety of questions; and d) a script with likely follow-up and prompt questions" (p. 813). It was essential to understand that interview questions were composed differently from the research question. Maxwell (2013) pointed out the functional difference between research questions and interview questions:

> Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding. The development of suitable interview questions (and observational strategies) requires creativity and insight, rather than a mechanical conversion of the research questions into an interview guide or observation schedule. It depends fundamentally on your understanding of the context of the research (including your participants' definitions of this) and how the interview questions and observational strategies will work in practice. (p. 101)

I opened the interview process with a brief introduction to establish rapport and to make sure each participant was comfortable. I started the topic and explained the primary objective of the research. I also provided a brief overview of Walden University ensuring

to cover the commitment to social change. I ensured to provide the participant's information relating to the interview setting. I explained the purpose of the interview. I also reminded the participant, re-gaining approval, about recording the interviews. I allowed for time to go over the consent form describing the nature of the study and any potential risks. Before beginning, each participant read the consent form and sign two copies. I provided the participants with a signed copy, and the second copy was maintained and used as confirmation that the participants agreed to participate in the interview process. I verified the participants understanding that I maintained the confidentiality of the data they provided throughout the process. For those interviews conducted at DAV, I requested a licensed professional counselor be on-site, but was not present during the interviews, during the interview process in the event the service was needed. I also requested the DAV to provide the professional counselor's contact telephone or a 1-800 number if available to provide to the study participants. The process of conducting interviews advanced, and the quality of the data enhanced by using field notes supplemented with audio recording (Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

The organization of the interview questions included the following major categories: (a) being a female in the military, (b) NCO status, (c) military transition, (d) private-sector reintegration, (e) translating skills, and experience, and (f) resources and services. I included 33 interview questions which were subject to change. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) asserted that developing probing questions assisted with further expanding on the participants' initial responses to obtain additional information.

The interview questions provided clarification of the participants' perspectives of military transition, private-sector reintegration, and translating military skills to civilian careers. I highlighted the use of concepts to further the participants' understanding and awareness, ensuring to emphasize the importance of their years of management and leadership experience and training.

Audio Recording and Field Notes

The advancements in technology resulted in a shift in the qualitative data analysis from handwritten field notes to audio-recording and transcribing of interview data supplemented with field notes (Markle, West, & Rich, 2011; Neal, Neal, VanDyke, & Kornbluh, 2015). Patton (2002) asserted, "the creative and judicious use of technology could greatly increase the quality of field observations and the utility of the observational record to others" (p. 308). Neal et al. (2015) emphasized using audio recording during the interview process enhances the transcription and analysis of textual data and remains an appropriate standard. Qualitative scholars maintained that translating and evaluating audio-recorded data required extensive resources and could be time-consuming and labor-intensive (Britten, 1995; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; Tessier, 2012).

Qualitative researchers using audio- or video-recording must precisely transcribe the audio- or video-recording data before beginning the data analysis stage. Moustakas (1994) asserted that field notes aided in validating audio-recorded data, specifically taking notes associated with participants' feelings, the settings, reactions, and nonverbal gestures not captured using the audio-recording. Field notes were an excellent source for obtaining contextual interpretation of the audio data and highlighted additional factors

that impacted data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) asserted

that field notes were an acknowledged method for collecting and analyzing qualitative

data and was used to document contextual data. Because of the advances in information

sharing and consequential data analysis, field notes provided an information-rich

background (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). A persistent gap exists in documented

qualitative guidance, although there was an acknowledgment amongst scholars (Phillippi

& Lauderdale, 2017).

Member Checking

Because I had significant experience relating to the topic of interest, it was

essential not to allow my beliefs and interests to negatively impact data collection or

analysis (see Mason, 2017). Miles and Huberman (1994) maintained that I acted in the

role of gatherer and data analyst, resulting in the potential for bias. Mason (2017)

emphasized the importance of not allowing my voice to overshadow those of the

participants. To address, manage, and or decrease any potential bias, I employed a

technique known as member checking to establish content validity. I lessened the

potential for bias by involving the participants during results verification and

confirmation. The definition of member checking is the technique of sharing the

interview and or analyzed data with the participants (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, &

Walter, 2016). Doyle (2007) maintained that member checking was the process of

substantiating, authenticating, or evaluating the qualitative findings' trustworthiness.

Upon concluding each interview, I asked the participants whether they had any interest in

receiving information about the results of the study (see Killawil et al., 2014).

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis process for this study primarily incorporated the use of an interview protocol augmented with field notes to aid in managing, organizing, and analyzing the collected data. Data were capably managed and analyzed by reviewing transcripts, memos, coding, and field notes (Groenewald, 2004; Janesick, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). The tools to capture, store, and analyze research data and artifacts included (a) MP3 Audio Recorder augmented by Windows Media Player for conducting and recording interviews, (b) Zotero for storing, organizing and tagging recordings, storing transcripts, field notes, memos, and reference materials used, and (c) NVivo for analysis, review, and graphically investigating the data. Coding, identifying themes, and data interpretation were the primary components of the data analysis process. The principal objective of this study was to gain greater insight into the lived experiences of 16 female NCO veterans, thus addressing the research question: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegration into private-sector employment?"

To aid my efforts to gain a greater understanding of the process of military transition and the challenges of securing private-sector employment from the participants' perspectives, I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In the 1990s, IPA was introduced as a methodology to evaluate psychology experiences in the health and clinical counseling discipline but were advanced schematized expanded by Smith (1999), Smith, Jarman, and Osborn (1999), Smith and Osborn (2003), and by

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) creating a theoretical foundation for future research in

fields such as management and leadership (Davidsen, 2013; Eatough & Smith, 2008;

Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) maintained the method "aims

at giving evidence of the participants' making sense of phenomena under investigation

and, at the same time, document the researcher's sense-making" (p. 11). Pietkiewicz and

Smith (2014) asserted that the primary objective of IPA was to understand better how

individuals find clarity in, comprehend, and recognize their experiences. I interpreted the

data using a five phases approach to include (a) bracketing and phenomenological

reduction, (b) delineating units of meaning, (c) clustering of units of meaning to form

themes, (d) summarizing each interview, validating it, and modifying it if necessary, and

(e) extracting unique themes from all interviews to develop a composite summary.

Bracketing and reduction. Sousa (2014) maintained that the process of

"intentionally engaging with what Husserl called the "epoche" (p. 31), and the practices

of "reduction" and "bracketing" (Chan et al., 2013, p. 1) are involved. Bracketing and

phenomenological reduction formed from Husserl hypothesis required me to omit any

predetermined assumptions to decrease or alleviate any data contamination resulting from

existing biases (Butler, 2016; Chan et al., 2013; Groenewald, 2004;). Chan et al. (2013)

asserted that the process of bracketing entailed my capacity to abstaining from

manipulating how the participants view and comprehend his or her experiences of a

phenomenon. Uncovering, understanding, and capturing the participants' experiences

during data collection aided in obtaining an interpretive understanding as well as

documenting evidence (e.g., the participants' accounts) of the participants' lived

experiences (Butler, 2016). I analyzed the data using the reduction process by breaking the data into more manageable parts. By doing so, it allowed for the procedure of uncovering the participants' meaning in the data, opposed to preestablished and biased assertations influencing the data analysis processes (Butler, 2016; Chan et al., 2013; Groenewald, 2004). Groenewald (2004) argued that by bracketing at this phrase in the process, I was better able to alleviate subjectivity from the verbatim transcription and interpretation of the data.

      Delineating units of meaning. Klenke (2016) emphasized "during this phase; the researcher was required to make a substantial amount of judgment calls while consciously bracketing his or her presuppositions to avoid inappropriate conclusions incongruent with the data" (p. 214). I thoroughly analyzed the units of relevant meaning with redundancies identified and removed (see Moustakas, 1994). Klenke (2016) highlighted the importance of transforming and aligning the participants' accounts with the field of study, in this case, management and leadership. This phase required meticulous evaluation and analysis of each statement and pinpointing the verbatim content ensuring to avoid prejudiced assumptions (see Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). Once the units of general meaning were determined, I then aligned them to the research question to establish whether the participants' responses informed the research question (see Edwards, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2015; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). By achieving this alignment, I was able to designate the units of general meaning as units of relevant meaning and delineate the relevant meanings for each of the interviews to determine whether the original unclear units of general meaning were vital to the research

question (see Edwards et al., 2015; Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). The next step in the data analysis process was clustering units of meaning to identify themes.

Clustering units of meaning to form themes. During this phase, a careful evaluation of the list of units of meaning to identify and develop a cluster of themes through the procedure of creating groups (see Groenewald, 2004; Klenke, 2016). One of the most critical aspects of this step was to effectively apply professional judgment to capture the essence of the meaning units from a holistic, contextual perspective (see Groenewald, 2004; Klenke, 2016). The continuous reference of the audio-recordings aided in verifying and alleviating redundancies to develop appropriate clusters of meaning (see Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016). By eliminating similarities amongst the clusters, I established the central themes that captured the essence of the clusters (see Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016). Once I streamlined the clusters, I contrasted the participants' account of their experiences with uncovering the essence of the management and leadership phenomenon associated with aligning years of military management and leadership experience to private-sector employment (see Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016). The cross-examination processes allowed for the application of objective characterizations aligned to the research question to discover similar ideas resulting in the substantiation of each theme void of any preconceived assumptions (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016). Once completing this step, the data were summarized, validated, and modified as needed.

Summarizing, validating, and modifying each interview. During this phase, I synthesized the data, I created the proposed final structure, and I captured the overall essence of the phenomenon based on the participants' perspectives. The themes identified were validated, and a synopsis created ensuring to include any specific factors associated with the theme(s) that directly aligned with the research question presenting a comprehensive understanding (see Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016). I used member checking to conduct a validity check to assess whether the participants' statements were adequately captured, making any modifications, by sharing the interview and or analyzed data with the participants (see Birt et al., 2016). Doyle (2007) maintained that member checking was the process of substantiating, authenticating, or evaluating the qualitative findings' trustworthiness. It was doing this phase that I planned to follow-up, if needed, to ensure that any preconceived bias did not exists.

Extract unique themes and develop a composite summary. During this phase, I reviewed the data to identify themes similar in the majority, if not all, of the interviews. I also pinpointed any accounts in which the variations were not standardized but allowed for the presentation of valid complementing or contrasting emerging themes (see Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016). The accurate interpretation of extant information required further exploration with the purpose of highlighting obscurities resulting in innovative understandings and perceptions as well as contradictions (Groenewald, 2004; Klenke, 2016). This step allowed for the discovery of factors not previously considered or explored.

Transcribing and Coding

The interview data and field notes were the primary sources of data. As a qualitative researcher, I collected, recorded, and documented data by using handwritten notes as well as audio- and or video-recordings that must be precisely transcribed (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Ranney et al. (2015) maintained that accuracy in qualitative data aids in achieving transparency in the data analysis. I used field notes to capture and document my immediate observations and thoughts, as well as any additional insights about emerging themes. I captured any new themes ensuring to highlight my interpretations, logic, and suppositions as to why I incorporated the new themes into the process for coding. With the permission of the participants, I audio-recorded each interview using an MP3 audio recorder and Windows Media Player (see Bailey, 1996; Groenewald, 2004). I assigned each interview a code (e.g., Participant, DD MMM YYYY; Groenewald, 2004). Because I conducted several interviews on the same date, I added an alpha character (e.g., Participant-A, DD MMM YYYY) to further identify each participant (see Groenewald, 2004). I labeled each audio-recording with the interview code.

A significant aspect of data analysis was to decide the transcribing and coding techniques ensuring to account for factors such as verbal articulations or enunciations (see Ranney et al., 2015). I transcribed the interviews and field notes, highlighting keywords, phrases, and statements to allow the voices of the participants to be heard. The process of transcribing the interviews verbatim was also vital to better understanding the data (see Patton, 2015). Sutton and Austin (2015) asserted that "the most important part

of data analysis and management is to be true to the participants. It is their voices that I

tried to hear to interpret and report on for others to read and learn from" (p. 227). Patton

(2015) maintained that analyzing the contents, including pinpointing, coding, grouping,

categorizing, and labeling the patterns in the data, aided in establishing what

observational or interview data were meaningful and relevant. Maxwell (2013)

maintained that by reviewing the data, I could discover words and phrases before

grouping the data into similar categories. I then developed codes and themes based on the

raw data (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013; Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas,

1994; Patton, 2015). The data analysis also included the procedure of further evaluating

the interview data conducting a comparison of the participants' responses to identify

likenesses and variations in the participants' responses.

Field notes aided in validating audio-recorded data, specifically taking notes

associated with participants' feelings, the settings, reactions, and nonverbal gestures that I

could not capture using the audio-recording (see Bevan, 2014; Davidsen, 2013;

Englander, 2012; Finlay, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Field notes were an excellent source

for obtaining contextual interpretation of the audio data and highlight additional factors

that might have an impact on data analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017). Because of

the advances in information sharing and consequential data analysis, field notes provided

an information-rich background (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

To thoroughly explore the military transition and private-sector employment from

the participants' perspectives, descriptive and holistic coding was appropriate. I used

NVivo, a timesaving, useful, and resourceful computer-based software coding tool, to

review, organize, and analyze all sources of data (see Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The

software aided in comparing participants' interview responses and previously identified

themes and patterns as well as uncovering underlying themes and interpret the data. The

media files were imported to and transcribed in NVivo, after which time, the coding

process began. I also imported the demographic information documents creating node

classifications containing defined attributes for each participant, creating nodes

associated with each source with relevant details. The coding process used to assist in

identify themes such as management and leadership terminology, military transition, and

private-sector employment, to name a few. As common themes emerged, they were

tagged and incorporated into the coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I played

and transcribed the audio-recording in transcribe-mode. I saved each of the transcriptions

as a transcript that contained text which described the content of the audio files. I made

any required annotations for the audio files and transcripts. As the analysis process

advanced, I developed a broader description and a visual representation of the data to test

the concepts adequately. During this advanced phase in the analysis process, I created

reports, queries, charts, and models as needed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The process of addressing the problems associated with trustworthiness varied

based on whether the research was quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method. In the

1980s, Guba and Lincoln shifted the paradigm from a process of attaining reliability and

validity to one that aligned with concepts of achieving trustworthiness that incorporated

four components that included credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The process of achieving reliability and validity in research was essential to developing research that was of value and repeatable (Amankwaa, 2016). Researchers' assertions in this area varied, suggested not to use reliability and validity when conducting qualitative research (Amankwaa, 2016). Some scholars asserted that the use of terms such as validation aligned with quantitative research (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Leininger, 1994). However, Morse (2015) believed that qualitative research value decreased when researchers inadequately addressed the significance of achieving reliability and validity in their research and maintained the ineffective and lack of value.

Regardless of the research approach, researchers typically developed some type of procedure to evaluate the trustworthiness of the data collected. The assessment measures were unique based on the approach and the rational and practical assumptions that drove the various approaches (Anney, 2014). For example, quantitative research assumptions aligned with the nature of reality. Quantitative researchers maintained there was only a single reality achieved through evaluation. The reality could be influenced and divided into shared components, such as a variable. While qualitative assumptions indicated no one, reality exists because reality comprised of interconnected aspects that do not impact other aspects (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014). Anney (2014) maintained that quantitative research was geared towards the creation of nomothetic knowledge and support the belief that absolute trust exists. Quantitative researchers maintained that an investigation that cannot be generalized is insignificant (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014). While qualitative

researchers asserted, there was no unequivocal truth, evaluations were not generalizable or employed to create idiographic understanding (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014).

Quantitative researchers assessed for reliability, objectivity, and validity, on the other hand, qualitative researchers evaluated the data for dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability to ensure the quality of the findings (Guba, 1981; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). This study was qualitative, thus resulting in the assessment of the data collected for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014; Morse et al., 2002). The quality must be assessed through a systematic process to incorporate data gathering, interpretation, and reporting to develop trustworthiness in qualitative research (Mays & Pope, 2000). Yin (1981, 1994, 2003, 2018) maintained that by assessing the trustworthiness, I was able to evaluate the quality of the design while Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained trustworthiness was an objective of the research.

I relied on existing findings and outcomes when conducting research and assessing the quality of that data was critical to determine trustworthiness. Existing literature served as a foundation for current research and assisted in assessing the process of conducting the research as well as the research value (Martensson, Fors, Wallin, Zander, & Nilsson, 2016). By not evaluating the accuracy of current findings, I could report erroneous data resulting in further misconceptions (see Waaijers & van der Graaf, 2011). Scholars such as Gummesson, Keen, Mason, Maxwell, Martensson, Rubin, and Sutherland recommended various techniques to employ to determine the quality of research (Martensson et al., 2016). There was no one acknowledged definition of the term

"quality," and some of the parameters overlapped (Martensson et al., 2016). Klein and Myers (1999) suggested philosophies that focused on establishing quality guidelines for interpretive field studies. Dube and Pare (2003) addressed quality concerning positivist case research. Other scholars maintained that specific parameters were more appropriate with Rubin and Rubin (2011), arguing that the quality of quantitative research was determined by assessing the validity and reliability but did not adequately address the quality of qualitative research. Keen (1991) asserted that when evaluating the quality of research that a uniqueness exists amongst rigorous and significance. Robey and Markus (1998) maintained that research was both rigorous and relevant, resulting in my ability to determine the quality, thus producing useable research. I maintained self-aware to ensure the interview questions were appropriate for collecting information-rich data that informed the subject and answered the proposed research questions (Patton, 2002, 2015). Once I assessed the quality of the research, the issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were evaluated. In the next section, I begin by discussing credibility.

Credibility

Credibility is the degree of certainty relating to the truth of the outcomes (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). Credibility determined if the findings characterized the conceivability that the data collected from the participants' reported information as well as an adequate understanding of the participants' opinions and viewpoints relating to a phenomenon (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2010). I determined the quality of the analysis by employing procedures to determine

credibility to include "prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity (field journal), triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview technique, establishing the authority of researcher and structural coherence" (Anney, 2014, p. 276). I used measures for reliability and validity to determine credibility (see Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Koch & Harrington, 1998; Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009). Another critical aspect of establishing credibility was the ability to effectively identify and describe the study participants (see Anney, 2014). I further enriched credibility by explaining understandings and occurrences, as well as the verification of the study outcomes. Qualitative research was credible when a participant instantly acknowledged their responses (see Anney, 2014). In the next section, I document the participants' interactions, observations, and all appraisals.

Transferability

Transferability determination is through the presentation of evidence that the research outcomes could be relevant to other circumstances, conditions, or sample groups. Transferability aligned with the research generalization. I could not prove that the research was applicable or had value but I must provide supporting evidence. Lincoln and Guba (1985) ascertained that "It is, in summary, not the naturalist's task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the database that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers" (p. 316). Leung (2015) maintained that transferability/generalizability was primarily unexpected because qualitative studies focused on exploring and or evaluating a specific issue or phenomenon relating to a population. Leung (2015) asserted that the achievement of a practical

methodology of evaluating generalizability could be through the usage of a procedure for validity. In other words, the development and implementation of a logical sampling method, triangulation, and consistent contrasting, audit trail and recording, and a multiple aspects concept (Leung, 2015). However, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) advocated for a more analytical focused generalization in which I assessed the degree to which the findings could be generalized to another study under like circumstances. Trochim and Kane (2005) asserted that the determination of the generalizability of one study to another study is by any parallels in time, location, population, and or other social situations.

Dependability

Dependability is the process of achieving consistency and repeatability of the data under diverse circumstances (Polit & Beck, 2010; Tobin & Begley, 2004). I could accomplish the dependability of the data when additional scholars agreed with the original conclusions or assertions during each phase of the research progression. Koch (2006) maintained that dependability was confirmed when the findings are repeated with participants who had comparable demographics and like experiences. By accomplishing data vitality over a period and variations in circumstances, I could confirm dependability in the data. Bitsch (2005) maintained that dependability referred to "the stability of findings over time" (p. 86). The process of substantiating dependability included the participants assessing the study findings, gaining understandings and suggestions of the assertions presented in the study ensuring each could be confirmed (Cohen et al., 2000; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Dependency can be verified by (a) creating an audit trail, (b)

implementing a plan to code and recode the data, (c) stepwise repetition, (d) triangulation

and (e) allowing others to evaluate the data or iterator reviews (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, &

Sorensen, 2010; Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985;

Schwandt et al., 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended the use of an audit

methodology that involved soliciting the assistance of a researcher who was not involved

in the research activity. I examined the data for accurateness as well as determined

whether the data sustained the outcomes, participants' understandings, and assumptions

(see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

Noble and Smith (2015) maintained that I could realize confirmability once I

determined the accuracy, reliability, and relevancy of the data. Baxter and Eyles (1997)

asserted that confirmability was the extent to which the outcomes of a research effort

could be substantiated or validated by additional researchers. Confirmability was

"concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments

of the inquirer's imagination but are derived from the data" (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p.

392). Other works maintained that confirmability of qualitative research was attained by

documented reviews, capturing reflectiveness through journaling and triangulation (see

Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Wallendorf and Belk (1989)

emphasized that the process of reflexive journaling allowed me to consider, tentatively

translate, and develop a strategy for data collection.

Ethical Procedures

Sanjari et al., (2014) maintained that existing associations and those potentially

established during the interview process "can raise a range of different ethical concerns,

and qualitative researchers face dilemmas such as respect for privacy, the establishment

of honest and open interactions, and avoiding misrepresentations" (p. 3). I expertly

communicated the procedures for maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. The

process of obtaining informed consent was acknowledged as a significant aspect of the

ethical component when conducting research (Sanjari et al., 2014). I provided each

participant with a copy of the informed consent form, ensuring to obtain each

participants' signature. I reviewed the informed consent form before conducting the

interview. I informed the participants how the data were collected, and the findings used.

Before beginning the interview process, I ensured that the participants understood and

agreed that the interview session was being recorded, notifying them when the recording

started. After I started to record, I went over the procedures again to document and record

the participants' verbal agreement. I included the informed consent process, which

provided information as to the nature of the study, the role of the participants and my

role, any monetary concerns, the primary purpose for the research, and how the findings

would be published and used (see Sanjari et al., 2014). The DAV granted my request for

an advocate to be present at the DAV facilities during the interview processes.

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Summary

</div>

I selected a qualitative phenomenological study design to explore the lived

experiences of 16 female NCO veterans during the military transition and private-sector

reintegration processes (see Moustakas, 1994). I collected the data by conducting semi structured interviews augmented with audio-recording and documented field notes. In the study, I sought to answer the question: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegration into private-sector employment?" The study may provide a greater understanding of the challenges, uniqueness, and associated complexities female veterans experience when attempting to use years of management and leadership experience to secure a private-sector position. This phenomenological study should serve to enhance policies and strategies associated with military transition and private-sector reintegration on a national and global level (Moustakas, 1994). The study had conceptual and practical implications informing management and leadership concepts addressing the gaps in current literature. I explored the gaps amongst military transition, before and after departing the military, providing a greater understanding of the phenomenon to inform future research.

I recruited participants from (a) the DAV, (b) existing association, or (c) a pool identified by a known associate. I requested that the DAV provide a targeted list of participants based on the participant's criterion provided. I captured the challenges of transitioning from the military and securing private-sector employment from the participants' perspectives. I e-mailed the participants with detailed instructions and consent forms before conducting the interviews. I conducted recorded face-to-face or video call interviews, which I transcribed, coded, and analyzed. I identified, documented, and analyzed any themes, patterns, similarities, or variations in the responses. In Chapter

4, I describe the research setting of this study, the demographic factors of the participants, and the methods used for data collection. I discuss the procedures used in the study to analyze the data and provided evidence of trustworthiness. I also include comprehensive discussions of the data analysis results, and finally, a summary of the participants' responses addressing the research question.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from military service and reintegration into private-sector employment (Moustakas, 1994). The purpose achieved by exploring military transition and private-sector reintegration lived experiences from the perspectives of female NCO veterans. The expectations were that the findings would identify accessible programs, services, and support systems that needed to be improved and or developed to serve better the needs of female NCO veterans who transitioned from the military and reintegrated into private-sector employment.

The interview data were appropriate for addressing one central research question: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegration into private-sector employment?" I answered the research question based on the findings, to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans during the military transition and private-sector employment reintegration (Creswell, 2013). As a result of the findings, five categories, and 17 emergent themes, emerged that were vital to the research question and included (a) choosing the military, (b) being in the military, (c) military transition, (d) private-sector reintegration, and (e) resources and services.

In this chapter, I describe the research setting of this study, the demographic factors of the participants, and the methods used for data collection. I discuss the procedures used in the study to analyze the data and provide evidence of trustworthiness.

I also include comprehensive discussions of the data analysis results, and finally, a summary of the participants' responses addressing the research question.

Research Settings

The appropriateness of the selected settings influenced the value of the research (Lune, & Berg, 2016). Virginia and Texas were the two most appropriate locations. I conducted interviews in environments familiar to the participants. In Virginia, the interviews took place at the Disabled American Veterans Organization, Virginia Beach, VA. The interviews conducted in Texas took place in various locations (e.g., work, medical, public, and or support organizations). I conducted and recorded, face-to-face and SKYPE interviews with 16 participants from March 10, 2019, to April 20, 2019, at agreed on and convenient interview times selected by each of the participants. I interviewed participants who were in various stages in their post-military lives and careers to provide an overview of perspectives on military transition and private-sector employment reintegration.

To establish rapport, I introduced myself and allowed each participant an opportunity to provide a brief introduction as well. Additionally, I completed a review of the reason and nature of the research study, the informed consent process, the interview process, and the member checking process. I reminded each participant that the interview was voluntary and that they could discontinue the interview at any time. Before asking the interview questions, I reminded the participants that the interviews were being recorded and asked if they had any questions or concerns before beginning the interview. At the time of the study, there were no individual or organizational conditions that

influenced participants or their experience that influenced the interpretation of the study results to include (a) modifications in personnel, (b) budgetary reductions or constraints, and or (c) other traumatic events.

Demographics

The participants were all volunteers who met the established criteria outlined in this study. The participants were (a) enlisted females who served on active duty in one of the uniformed branches of service, who had (b) achieved NCO status, and (c) separated or retired, resulting in veteran classification. They also had (a) military transition and private-sector reintegration experiences, (b) experienced challenges during the transition and or reintegration processes, and (c) attempted to and or secure private-sector employment in the management sector. The targeted sample size was 16 participants reported as PARTICIPANT-A to PARTICIPANT-P. The participants represented a diverse group of female veterans whose ages ranged from a minimum age of 43 to a maximum age of 68. The participants served in the military and encountered challenges while transitioning from the military and attempting to reintegrate into private-sector employment. The participants' served in one of the five branches of the military, with six (37.5%) serving in the USAF, with six (37.5%) serving in the USA, and four (25%) serving in the USN. Nine (56.3%) of the participants resided in the Eastern Region of the United States, and seven (43.8%) resided in the Southern Region. All the participants had higher education, with two (12.5%) having some college, one (6.3%) having an Associates, five (31.3%) completing their Bachelor, seven (43.8%) having a Masters, and

one (6.3%) had a Doctoral degree. I provide details of the of the participants'

demographic data in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Demographic Information for Study Participants (N=16)

Participant	Region	Age	Branch of service	Highest rank achieved	Years of management experience	Education	Military occupation	Current employment
PARTICIPANT-A	Eastern	43	USAF	E7	5 to 10	Bachelors	Chaplain assistant	Corporate action officer (G)
PARTICIPANT-B	Southern	46	USA	E7	15 to 20	Masters	Specialist	N/A
PARTICIPANT-C	Southern	57	USA	E7	15 to 20	Bachelors	Legal clerk	Deputy dir EEO (G)
PARTICIPANT-D	Southern	51	USAF	E8	10 to 12	Masters	Personnel	Business development
PARTICIPANT-E	Southern	56	USN	E6	5 to 10	Doctorate	Torpedo mate	Career services manager
PARTICIPANT-F	Southern	44	USAF	E7	12 to 15	Bachelors	Services	Teacher librarian
PARTICIPANT-G	Eastern	68	USA	E7	15 to 20	Masters	Data analyst	N/A
PARTICIPANT-H	Eastern	66	USA	E6	5 to 10	Bachelors	Personnel mgmt	N/A
PARTICIPANT-I	Eastern	60	USN	E7	More than 20	Some college	Medical	N/A
PARTICIPANT-J	Eastern	62	USN	E7	15 to 20	Bachelors	Computer specialist	N/A
PARTICIPANT-K	Eastern	51	USA	E5	Less than 5	Some college	Telecommunications	N/A
PARTICIPANT-L	Eastern	48	USAF	E7	15 to 20	Masters	Intelligence	N/A
PARTICIPANT-M	Eastern	55	USA	E8	More than 20	Masters	Clerk	N/A
PARTICIPANT-N	Eastern	52	USN	E8	More than 20	Masters	Undesignated sailor	Exec administrator (G)
PARTICIPANT-O	Southern	55	USAF	E6	12 to 15	Associate	Mgmt	N/A
PARTICIPANT-P	Southern	60	USAF	E6	12 to 15	Masters	Personnel	Education services (G)

Note: N = 16 n = number of participants. (G) = Government-related positions.

Data Collection

Using purposeful sampling, I recruited and interviewed a total of 16 female NCO

veterans, who transitioned from military service and reintegrated into the private-sector,

who participated in this qualitative phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). I

conducted six face-to-face interviews at the Disabled American Veterans Organization,

Virginia Beach, VA. I worked with the DAV representative to develop a draft interview

scheduled for Sunday, March 17, 2019, to Sunday, March 31, 2019. A copy of the

schedule was placed, with the recruitment flyer, on the DAV communication board, and

the organization website. I initially recruited 15 potential participants in Virginia, of

which six participants confirmed their participation via e-mail. I traveled to Virginia

Beach, VA, and conducted six face-to-face interviews from March 21, 2019, through

March 26, 2019. Additionally, one face-to-face interview was conducted in San Antonio, TX, at the participant's residence at her request on March 11, 2019. The remaining nine interviews were conducted via SKYPE from March 10, 2019, to April 20, 2019, from my place of residence in Fair Oaks Ranch, TX.

The use of a phenomenological approach aided in answering the research question, and the basis was a paradigm of the personal knowledge and subjectivisms of female NCO veterans (Moustakas, 1994). As such, by describing the perspectives and interpretations, a better understanding of the distinctiveness of the participants' experiences by capturing and reporting the female NCO veterans' inclinations and actions during and after the transitional stage of reintegration was provided (Moustakas, 1994). As outlined in Chapter 3, the data collection process included semi structured interviews that aided in collecting information-rich data. The participants answered open-ended questions allowing them to provide as much or as little information as they were comfortable doing so. The participants provided their understanding of the phenomena and expanded on their perspectives as needed (Moustakas, 1994). Probing questions allowed the participants to further expand on their initial responses. I asked clarifying questions to verify the participant's response (e.g., did I understand you when you said?). The participants' responses were concise, with few exceptions, but provided detailed and useful information in answering the research question.

The foundation of data collection was an IPA method that allowed for obtaining information-rich, detailed, and first-hand accounts of 16 female NCO veterans' transition and reintegration experiences through the usage of semi structured interviews

(Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The IPA method proved invaluable in the monitoring of the participants' emotional state of mind throughout the interview process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). To further aid in obtaining information-rich data, an emic approach assisted in obtaining additional information by asking probing and clarifying questions. Fetterman (2019) maintained that an emic perspective is "the insider's or native's perspective of reality" (p. 27). Gergen (1985) asserted that by using an emic approach, I could gain a greater understanding of how individuals viewed and described themselves, their environment, and their experiences in situations much like transitioning from the military and reintegrating into the private sector. The use of an emic concept can also aid in capturing how individuals,' such as female NCO veterans, understandings aligned to societal viewpoints (see Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017; Gergen, 1985). Coulacoglou and Saklofske (2017) also maintained that an emic approach aided in the process of seeing the phenomena through the perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and environments of a particular group, such as female NCO veterans.

As detailed in Chapter 3, I recorded the data using a demographic questionnaire, semi structured interviews, field notes, and journals. Zotero aided in the storing, organizing, and tagging recordings, storing transcripts, field notes, memos, and reference materials. The demographic questionnaire provided a data collection method that allowed for capturing information efficiently and effectively. The information gathered provided concrete characteristics. The obtainment of essential information relating to the participants' number of years in the military, highest rank achieved, work situation, and education level. A total of 16 interviews were conducted, which included six face-to-face

interviews, and ten via SKYPE. Before beginning each interview, I informed the participants about notetaking as needed during the interview. Field notes were an excellent source for obtaining contextual interpretation of the audio data and highlight additional factors that might have an impact on data analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

An interview protocol with open-ended interview questions was used (see Appendix A). The participants were asked 33 open-ended questions. The interview guide detailed the date and time of the interviews. The 16 participants voluntarily participated in their scheduled interviews at the agreed-on date and time. The timeframe of the interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in private locations to maintain privacy, alleviate interruptions, and minimal noise. The participants were allowed to provide as much or as little information as they were comfortable doing so. There were occasions when probing questions were asked to further expand on the participants' initial responses to obtain additional information. I posed clarifying questions to verify the participant's response (e.g., did I understand you when you said?). The participants' responses were concise, with few exceptions, but provided detailed and useful information in answering the research question (Moustakas, 1994).

An MP3 Audio Recorder augmented by Windows Media Player aided in recording the face-to-face interviews. The SKYPE interviews augmented by Call Recorder software, which was compatible with macOS and SKYPE, aided in the recording process. After each interview, I uploaded the audio files into Nvivo 12® qualitative data software. Nvivo 12® Transcription software aided in transcribing each

interview. The data interpretation process included listening to the data numerous times at a reduced speed, progressing to average speed, to ensure accuracy before forwarding to each participant for member checking. As discussed in Chapter 3, reflexive journaling was consistent throughout the study process. Reflective journaling allowed for personal reflection during the data collection process and served to capture data from my viewpoint (see Cook, Simiola, McCarthy, Ellis, & Wiltsey Stirman, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Reflexive journaling facilitated efforts to eliminate any bias as well as to support the process of documenting minor nuances missed during the interviews (see nBruno, & Dell'Aversana, 2017; Corbin Frazier, & Eick, 2015; Coulson, & Homewood, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Janesick, 2011; Mathieson, 2016). Following each interview, a descriptive narrative, using the participants' naming convention, was captured. The use of reflective journaling allowed for the documentation of observations, views, and mindsets from a researcher's perspective after interacting with each participant.

Additionally, the reflective journaling aided in documenting any changes or variations in voice pitch, rate of speed, notable pauses or periods of silence, hesitations by the participants when responding to an interview question, and any other spontaneous sounds such as clearing of the throat, laughter, and or sighs (see Bruno, & Dell'Aversana, 2017; Corbin Frazier, & Eick, 2015; Coulson, & Homewood, 2016; Creswell, 2013; Janesick, 2011; Mathieson, 2016). Furthermore, reflexive journaling aided in documenting my views and interpretations to ensure accuracy in presenting an unbiased explanation of the transition and reintegration experiences of female NCO veterans (Cook et al., 2018). Reflexive journaling was continued during data analysis and

throughout the conclusion of the study. At this phase in the study, the journaling process furthered the investigation of my interpretations, feelings, and any potential bias. Finally, reflective journaling was also critical in the developmental progression of identifying themes and subthemes.

Throughout the interview processes, there were no unexpected occurrences that took place that may have influenced the data analysis or data interpretation. The data collection processes transpired as outlined in Chapter 3, with one exception in the number of participants changing from 25 to 16. The audio files and transcribed data were stored on a password-protected computer or in a secure keylock file cabinet and lockbox. The next section contains the outcomes of the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this study primarily incorporated the use of an interview protocol augmented with field notes to aid in managing, organizing, and analyzing the collected data (Moustakas, 1994). The foundation of data analysis was an IPA method used to organize, code, and analyze the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This method proved invaluable in gaining a greater understanding of how the participants found clarity, greater comprehension, and recognize their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The interview data was in narrative form the study participants. The IPA method used during the data analysis process included employing a five phases approach. The approach included (a) bracketing and phenomenological reduction, (b) delineating units of meaning, (c) clustering of units of meaning to form themes, (d) summarizing each interview, validating it, and modifying it if necessary, and (e) extracting unique

themes from all interviews to develop a composite summary (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). To adequately capture the female NCO veterans' perspectives of military transition and private sector reintegration, it was essential also to understand how their insights aligned to their "emic perceptions as shared views of cultural knowledge from the insider's "normative" perspectives" (Fetterman, 2008, p. 249). The emic concept furthered the data analysis process providing a greater understanding of how female NCO veterans viewed themselves and how they would fit into a civilian society environment as well as their experiences during transition and reintegration (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017; Fetterman, 2008; Gergen, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Coulacoglou and Saklofske (2017) also maintained that an emic approach aided in the data analysis process by providing a conceptual lens into the phenomena through the female NCO veteran's perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and environments.

To thoroughly explore the military transition and private-sector employment from the participants' perspectives, descriptive and holistic coding was appropriate. I used NVivo 12®, a timesaving, useful, and resourceful computer-based software coding tool, to review, organize, and analyze all sources of data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The software aided in the process of (a) comparing participants' interview responses, (b) identifying patterns, (c) uncovering underlying themes, (d) and interpreting the data. Before conducting in-depth data analysis, each of the audio interview recordings was played in their entirety to embrace the participants' perspectives of their experiences.

Using NVivo 12®, I originally delineated the meaning of the statements, which assisted in recognizing the codes necessary for data analysis with the codes defined as

well as related terms and phrases. I then uploaded these codes, terms, and phrases for

sorting and grouping into NVivo 12®, which was useful in clustering the meanings of the

initial codes. The software also aided in counting the frequency of each code in each of

the participants' transcripts, highlighting the codes that appeared most often emphasizing

the participants' experiences. The meaning of the participants' experiences was then

thematically categorized, forming groups of codes. The next step included the process of

identifying and summarizing the thematic categories related to invariant constituents that

establish responses to the research question. The next step required the development of

the associated textual descriptions detailing the participant's experiences. Lastly, the

creation of the participants' experiences summarizing their understanding of the

phenomenon took place.

The next step was to review the field notes while replaying the audio files. The

audio files were then uploaded into NVivo 12®, replayed, and compared to the associated

notes documenting those areas where the participants emphasized a question and or

response. The field notes aided in validating audio-recorded data, specifically taking

notes associated with participants' feelings, the settings, reactions, and nonverbal

gestures not captured using the audio-recording (Moustakas, 1994). I transcribed the

audio files using NVivo 12® Transcription software. Then I saved the transcriptions as a

transcript that contains textual data that described the content of the audio files. I

assigned, labeling each interview, each a code (e.g., Participant, DD MMM YYYY;

Groenewald, 2004). Because I conducted several interviews on the same date, I added an

alpha character (e.g., Participant-A, DD MMM YYYY) to further identify each

participant (Groenewald, 2004).

Because the NVivo 12® Transcription software was not 100% accurate, each of

the transcripts was reread, highlighting keywords, phrases, statements, and any apparent

variations. The audio recordings were replayed at a reduced speed and compared to the

transcripts making the necessary changes at that time. They were repeating these steps,

aided in ensuring verbatim transcribing of the interviews to achieve 100% data accuracy

(Patton, 2015). Ranney et al. (2015) maintained that accuracy in qualitative data aided in

achieving transparency in the data analysis. I also created and uploaded an Excel

document containing the participants' demographic information. By taking these steps,

the data were organized and ready for initial coding.

The first step in the coding process involved reading the interview transcripts

several times to become more familiar with the interview data in transcribed formatting,

which allowed for a greater understanding of and appreciation for each of the

participants' experiences. The second step in the coding process consisted of identifying

and comparing categories during this phase of the process, labeling five categories for

highlighting meaningfulness and relevancy in the data (see Patton, 2015). The structure

aided in connecting the participants' responses to the real world with the thematic

knowledge that captured the participants' experiences. These categories became the

foundation for analyzing the data. The next step included identifying and capturing in an

Excel spreadsheet, emerging themes using open and axial coding. Open and axial coding

procedures assisted in generating initials codes from the transcripts and then were

grouped based on their similarities, respectively (Cassol et al., 2018). Axial coding aided

in identifying related codes by using inductive and deductive thinking while focusing on

exploring common patterns and emergent themes. These steps furthered the process

allowing for the identification of any correlation amongst the identified categories

(Patton, 2015).

The use of a line-by-line process resulted in the creation of descriptive themes,

and as common themes emerged, they were tagged and incorporated into the coding

while ensuring to focus on the regularity of keywords through comparison and

contrasting (see Miles et al., 2014). I replayed the audio recordings as needed to ensure

accuracy. The next step was to cluster the categories of themes, interpret and synthesize

the data to discover the actual meaning from each participants' perspective. Similarities

and differences were categorized to aid in developing any new themes founded in the

participants' verbiage using the participants' exact words. This practice aided in

decreasing any bias, as the perspectives of the participants were vital in recording and

transcribing, so themes merged the exact views of the female veteran participants. The

following sections reported on the process of determining preliminary grouping,

bracketing and reduction, and clustering units of meaning.

Preliminary Grouping

NVivo 12® aided in developing a list of keywords and phrases that emerged from

the participants' transcripts. For example, keywords/phrases identified in Interview

Question 8 included (a) unprepared, (b) had no idea, and (c) took it upon me [sic]. The

use of keywords and or phrases served as a guide in determining specific codes and code

grouping. For example, the keyword for unprepared identified as shocked, unplanned, and winged. Developing grouped codes aided in defining the themes. One of the advantages of NVivo 12® was the ability to identify sources that aligned the code with the participants' verbatim responses. At this stage of data analysis, preliminary groupings were coded based on a three-stage element including (a) before joining the military, (b) throughout military, and (c) after departing the military. The IPA method was used during this phase to enable the transformation of my observations, the field notes, and data from the participants' transcripts (see Moustakas, 1994; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) asserted that my primary objective "is to formulate a concise phrase at a slightly higher level of abstraction which may refer to a more psychological conceptualization" (p. 12). Table 4 below depicts examples of excerpts from the original transcripts and some of the emergent themes.

Table 4

Examples of Developing Emergent Themes

Excerpt from the original transcripts	Emergent themes
Interviewer: Why did you decide to join the military?	Seeking security/stability
• I was running for my ex, and my babies needed stability so I needed a stable position with job opportunities so I did not want anybody to give me anything I wanted to earn what I got so instead of doing the traditional going on welfare, not that there is anything wrong with that, I decided to join the military.	
• I was running for my ex my babies needed stability so I needed a stable position with job opportunities so I did not want anybody to give me anything I wanted to earn what I got so instead of doing the traditional going on welfare, not that there is anything wrong with that, I decided to join the military.	
• I was not ready for college, but knew I needed to do something productive besides work some random job.	
Interviewer: Where there any differences in the roles males and females held? Do you feel you were treated differently because you were a female?	Role/gender disparities
• In some instances, may be more so when I became senior NCO. I felt that male SNCO had a louder voice than female SNCOs. In some instances, I did not feel that I was taken seriously as a female SNCO. I had to prove myself more than the male SNCO in some instances.	
• The females were more so tolerated and utilized as picked on sexual objects…I did not see females being taken as serious leaders.	
• One of the first conversations…he asked me if I wanted to make some extra money… he was talking about prostitution.	
Interviewer: Do you feel you were prepared to transition from the military life/culture to civilian life/culture?	Feelings of uncertainty
• Yes, I knew what it would be out of the uniform and living a regular life but as far as going back into the working world I don't feel like I was prepared at all...I should say I was not fully prepared for what was about to happen.	
• Well I thought I was prepared until I got out. I was in for the shock of my life and so many things I just didn't know about.	
• I don't believe the military prepared me…what I did was to take it upon myself.	

Bracketing and Reduction

It was critical to determine whether the coded data were accurate and was a valid

representation of the phenomenon. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction formed

from Husserl hypothesis required me to omit any predetermined assumptions to decrease

or alleviate any data contamination resulting from existing biases (Butler, 2016; Chan et

al., 2013; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Chan et al. (2013) asserted that the process of bracketing entailed my capacity to abstaining from manipulating how the participant views and comprehends his or her experiences of a phenomenon. As described in Chapter 3, bracketing was employed to ensure objectivity and to minimize any bias. Because of my experience as a female NCO veteran, the utilization of bracketing lessened the possibility of influencing the participant's perspectives or knowledge of the phenomenon. I analyzed the data using the reduction process by breaking the data into more manageable parts. By doing so, it allowed for the procedure of uncovering the participants' meaning in the data, opposed to preestablished and biased assertations influencing the data analysis processes (see Butler, 2016; Chan et al., 2013; Groenewald, 2004).

To aid in the bracketing and reduction procedures, I evaluated these data by incorporating and verifying whether the participants' lived experiences and perspectives are essential and adequate to describe the phenomenon. For example, Participant-E shared that she went through the "TAP program but had no idea as to how to go through the job interviews or how to transition from the military to civilian," and Participant-P shared she thought she was "prepared until she got out." Although I described that both participants shared, they experienced difficulties; I did not incorporate how Participant-E described the personalities of the TAP facilitators. The only lived experiences descriptions highlighted were relevant to this study. Because those occurrences were vague, unclear, or ambiguous descriptions, the content was reevaluated and condensed, to identify more descriptive wording to present verbatim. For example, the phrases "did not

have much to go on" was shared by Participant-C and was broadly described. I

reevaluated the expressions of these types of phrases to ensure clarity in meaning. These

phrases, as communicated by the participant, implied that the participant was not

experiencing the necessary factors that would result in a successful transition such as

training, support, employment, income support, and housing, to name a few.

Clustering Units of Meaning

The next stage of the data analysis process was developing clusters of meaning.

The IPA method was employed to aid in analyzing the data and determining relations

amongst the emerging themes (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA was integral in

eliminating similarities amongst the clusters and establishing the central themes that

capture the essence of the clusters (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; Klenke, 2016;

Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Streamlining of the clusters aided in the contrasting of the

participants' account of their experiences resulted in uncovering the essence of the

management phenomenon associated with aligning years of military management and

leadership experience to private-sector employment (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985;

Klenke, 2016). Table 5 shows a sampling of examples of the clustered themes.

Table 5

Example of clustered themes

Reasons for joining the military
- Desire to travel
- Seeking assistance to pay for education
- Find resolution to martial and family problems
- Provide stability and financial security for themselves and their families

Experiences while servicing the military
- Being restricted to serving in traditional female roles only
- Exposure to sexual harassment
- Incidents of role and gender inequalities
- Attributing challenges to psychological distress and sexual trauma

Experiences during military transition
- Feelings of uncertainty associated with belief of unpreparedness
- Challenges of not having a support network
- Ineffective transition program and lack of resources

The next step was to identify and cluster the categories or invariant constituents of the experiences to develop specific themes. This analysis of the findings resulted in the creation of five categories, and 17 emergent themes, that were vital to the research question and included (a) choosing the military, (b) being in the military, (c) military transition, (d) private-sector reintegration, and (e) resources and services. The five categories associated emergent themes, and associated interview questions, are reported in Table 6 below. As indicated in Table 6 below, the first category titled choosing the military revealed that the participants enlisted in the military for various reasons to include seeking opportunities, seeking security/stability, tradition or culture, and service to the country. The findings also uncovered a second category titled serving in the military and the associated themes of occupational specialty and being a female and non-

commissioned officer. The third category was the military transition, and the associated themes were feelings of uncertainty, transitioning challenges, flexible transitioning experience, and recommendations. A fourth category, private-sector reintegration, had five aligned themes to include flexible reintegration experience, reintegration challenges, over-employed/underemployed, employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness, and transitional program effectiveness. There were two themes, accessibility, and barriers, and gender-specific resources availability and accessibility were associated with the final category titled resources and services.

Table 6

Categories, Emergent Themes, and Interview Questions

Categories	Emergent themes	Associated interview questions
Choosing the military		1
	Seeking opportunities	
	Seeking security/stability	
	Tradition or culture	
	Service to country	
Serving in the military		2 – 7
	Occupational specialty	
	Being a female and non-commissioned officer	
Military transition		8 – 14
	Feelings of uncertainty	
	Transitioning challenges	
	Flexible transitioning experience	
	Recommendations	
Private-sector reintegration		15 - 28
	Flexible reintegration experience	
	Reintegration challenges	
	Overemployed/underemployed	
	Employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness	
	Transitional program effectiveness	
Resources & services		29 – 33
	Accessibility & barriers	
	Gender-specific resources availability & accessibility	

The next section is a discussion of the evidence of trustworthiness that included

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The remainder of the

chapter includes the study results, to include highlighting emergent sub-themes,

validating the invariant constituents, formulating a textural-structural, and creation of the

synthesized descriptions of the meaning of the participants' experiences, and a summary.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was the degree of certainty relating to the truth of the outcomes (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013) and the degree of accuracy in the results of the study scope to which the results of the study were determined (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). I determined credibility when the findings characterize the conceivable that the data collected from the participants' reported information as well as an adequate understanding of the participants' opinions and viewpoints relating to a phenomenon (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2010). The process to determine the credibility of the results encompassed several approaches. An audit trail was established and maintained throughout the process. Comprehensive phases implemented at the start of this study continued to the reporting of the study findings phase was provided. Throughout the process, thorough dialogues relating to the study participants, methodology, as well as data collection and analysis techniques, were provided.

Steps were taken in the development of the interview questions to ensure that they not only aided in answering the research questions but were written and reviewed, in such a manner to ensure they were clear and concise and would provide clarification for any vague participants' responses. Because I have significant experience relating to the topic of interest, it was important not to allow my beliefs and interests to negatively impact data collection or analysis (see Mason, 2017). A member checking technique aided in determining the trustworthiness of results. I lessened the potential for bias by involving

the participants during results verification and confirmation in which each participant received a copy of the transcripts allowing them to make any corrections and provide any additional information deemed valuable for this study (see Birt et al., 2016).

Upon concluding each interview, I asked participants whether they had any interest in receiving information about the results of the study (see Killawil et al., 2014). Member checking assisted in substantiating, authenticating, or evaluating the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings (see Doyle, 2007). Also, measures for reliability and validity aided in determining credibility (Emden & Sandelowski, 1999; Koch & Harrington, 1998; Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009). Another critical aspect of establishing credibility is the ability to effectively identify and describe the study participants (Anney, 2014). Consideration was given to my understandings and experiences to enrich the credibility and verification of these study outcomes. The next step was to document each participants' interactions and observations. Finally, steps ensured that participants instantly acknowledge their responses (Anney, 2014).

Transferability

By presenting evidence, I determined transferability that the research outcomes could be relevant to other circumstances, conditions, or sample groups. Leung (2015) maintained that transferability/generalizability was primarily unexpected because qualitative studies focused on exploring and or evaluating a specific issue or phenomenon relating to a population. Transferability was the degree to which I used comparable research practices to create related research (see Anney, 2014). To ensure transferability in this study, I presented comprehensive and rich specifics of the research methodology

and data collection procedures. Purposive sampling and thorough accounts of inquiry facilitated the process of achieving transferability. Additionally, the development and implementation of a logical sampling method, triangulation, and consistent contrasting, audit trail and recording, and a multiple aspects concept was employed (Leung, 2015). The process of recruiting participants included presenting comprehensive descriptions of the recruitment methods used, coupled with purposive sampling, which ensured transferability (Anney, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability was defined as the process of achieving consistency and repeatability of the data under diverse circumstances and entailed establishing consistency and repeatability in the data (Anney, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2010; Tobin & Begley, 2004;). The substantiation and dependability included a step in which the participants assess the study findings to ensure understandings and suggestions of the assertions presented in the study were confirmed (Cohen et al., 2000; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Dependency highlighted the steps completed to evaluate and interpret the findings of the study to make sure they supported the data provided by the participants (Anney, 2014). Dependency was verified by (a) creating an audit trail, (b) implementing a plan to code and recode the data, (c) stepwise repetition, (d) triangulation and (e) allowing others to evaluate the data or iterator reviews (see Ary et al., 2010; Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt et al., 2007).

An audit methodology involved soliciting the assistance of a researcher (e.g., peer examination) who were not involved in this research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This individual examined the data for accurateness and aided in determining whether the data sustained the outcomes, participants' understandings, and assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also discussed the research process and findings with several peers to ensure the appropriateness of analysis and interpretation of collected data. Comprehensive details of the research procedures include data collection and analysis.

Confirmability

Noble and Smith (2015) maintained that confirmability is realized in the data when I determined the accuracy, reliability, and relevancy of the data. The use of reflective journaling aided in ensuring that I did not consider, tentatively translate, and develop a strategy for data collection (see Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). I achieved confirmability through the process of verifying that my thoughts did not influence the results attained in qualitative research and interpretations of the findings (Anney, 2014). To ensure confirmability in this study, integrity, ingenuousness, and directness in the presentation of the results were sustained. The basis of the findings of this study is the participants' responses and not my own beliefs and perspectives.

Study Results

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans,' with years of management and leadership experience, the transition from military service and reintegration to private-sector employment (see Moustakas, 1994). A diverse group of characteristics impacted the participants' experiences with military transition and private-sector reintegration. For instance, the participants' ages, demographics, serving in the military, transition-related occurrences,

and private-sector reintegration experiences, of the female NCO veterans were broad and wide-ranging. Despite the challenges they experienced being a female in the military and a female veteran, all the participants felt it was a privilege to serve their country. The narratives shared by the participants provided a detailed representation of their feelings and perspectives. The organization of the results section aligned with the research question.

The data provided by the study participants proved to be information-rich. The participants' responses aligned to female NCO veterans' military transition and private-sector reintegration experiences. The responses also aligned to the participants' inability to translate years of management and leadership training and experience to the private-sector employment. The questions used during the interviews were critical in addressing the research questions that guided the study. The basis of the key findings presented in this study is the prevailing themes developed from participants' interviews. The results section was aligned to the central research question and organized based on the categories, themes, and sub-themes. The findings, categories, themes, and sub-themes aligned with the interview questions and aided in answering the central research question. The data presented was supported by quotes taken directly from the participants' responses.

Central Research Question

The central research question that guided this study was: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegrate into private-sector

employment?" The details of the interview questions that addressed the central research question are in Appendix A of this study. The interview questions served as the foundation for creating categories, themes, and sub-themes that addressed the participants' experiences while serving in the military, transitioning from the military, and reintegrating into the private-sector workforce. In the following sections, I describe the findings, categories, associated interview questions, themes, and subthemes. Because some of the questions were similar, some were combined and I did not include all of the questions in the following discussions.

Category 1: Choosing the Military

Based on the findings, the first category emerged as choosing the military. Most of the participants in this study enlisted in the military within a few years of graduating high school. At the time of their decision, two of the women attended recruiting events offered while they were in secondary school. The themes that emerged provided details associated with their reasons for choosing the military and the impact their decision has had on them and their families. The participants cited specific reasons for joining the military. Based on the findings of this study, women's thoughts and reasoning for enlisting in the military and their actualities are diverse, but all the participants felt that joining the military would have a significant and positive impact on theirs and, in some cases, the lives of their family members. The first finding describes the participants' reasons for enlisting in the military.

Interview question. The associated interview question was Question 1: Why did you decide to join the military?

Finding 1. The findings associated with research question one indicated that the participants enlisted in the military for various reasons, primarily seeking better opportunities as well as job security and stable life for them and their families. Based on the analysis of the findings, four themes emerged to include: Seeking opportunities, seeking security/stability, tradition or culture, and service to the country. Based on the participants' responses, six (37.5%) participants shared they joined the military because they were seeking better opportunities, and four (25%) noted joining because they were experiencing either martial or financial issues. Five (31.3%) shared they decided to join the military because of friends or family members as well as serving in the military was a longstanding family tradition, and they felt they had no other choice, and one (6.3%) shared for as long as she could remember she had the desire to serve her country. In the following sections, data presented detailing the findings. Based on the findings, the associated emergent themes, sub-themes, the number of participants who had comparable feelings and views, and associated percentages are in Table 7. Based on the analysis of the findings, four sub findings emerged to include:

- Finding 1a. Seeking opportunities.

- Finding 1b. Seeking security/stability.

- Finding 1c. Tradition or culture.

- Finding 1d. Service to the country.

Table 7

Responses to Category Title Choosing the Military

Emergent themes	Sub-themes	n	%
Seeking opportunities			
	Travel	2	12.5
	Education	4	25
Seeking security/stability			
	Escape family issues	2	12.5
	Financial and economic stability	2	12.5
Tradition or culture			
	Influenced by others	3	18.8
	Family tradition	2	12.5
Service to country			
	Self-identity	1	6.3

Note. $N = 16$. n = number of participants who mentioned the theme. % = percentage of participants.

Finding 1a. The first sub-finding aligned to the theme seeking opportunities. The sub-themes for this emergent theme were travel and education. A total of six out of 16 (37.5%) participants had similar reasons for joining the military, with two (12.5%) sharing they felt the military would afford them the opportunities to travel the world. While four (25%) wanted to attend college but doing so would create a financial burden for their parents, so they enlisted in the military because the military would pay their college tuition. For example, PARTICIPANT-K shared, "I did not want my Mother to have to put me through college. I wanted to do it on my own."

Finding 1b. The second sub-finding was associated with the theme titled seeking security/stability. The sub-themes for this emergent theme was escaping family issues and financial and economic stability. A total of four (25%) participants shared their reasons for joining the military were to provide a more safe, secure, and stable life for

themselves and or their families. Participants G, H, J, and M shared their beliefs that joining the military would fulfill the need for security and stability as well as alleviate their martial and or financial problems. For example, PARTICIPANT-M shared, "I was running for my ex, and my babies needed stability, so I needed a stable position with job opportunities. I did not want anybody to give me anything I wanted to earn what I got, so instead of doing the traditional going on welfare, not that there is anything wrong with that, I decided to join the military." PARTICIPANT-J had similar thoughts and mentioned, "My reason for joining the Navy is I was having difficulties in my marriage with my husband and my mother in law. So, the best way to get out of Arkansas was to join the Navy, so on that note, I did that."

Finding 1c. The third sub-finding was associated with the tradition or culture theme and aligned to the sub-themes of influenced by others, with three (18.8%) of the 16 participants sharing their decisions to enlist in the military stemmed from encouragement by a family member and or friend. For example, PARTICIPANT-P stated, "I decided to join the military because of my friend. We were in college, and she was my roommate, and she had joined the military before me, and so she said it was such a great opportunity you should come and join the military." Additionally, two (12.5%) followed in the footsteps of a family member.

Finding 1d. The fourth sub-finding was related to the participants' desire to serve her country. The sub-theme was self-identity, with one (6.3%) participant stated as her reason for enlisting in the military. PARTICIPANT-B shared, "Well, as a kid growing up, I always said I wanted to join the military, but I wanted to join the Army. There were

not any reasons why besides, of course defending my country. As a kid, I did not know about serving my country; growing up, it was just something that I wanted to do, and I just pursued it."

Category 2: Serving in the Military

Based on the findings, the second category emerged as serving in the military. These study participants experienced while serving in the military were exposed to similar views of women in the military. The emergent themes were an occupational specialty and being a female and non-commissioned officer. The next section included discussions from the types of roles they enlisted into and their treatment while serving. The emergent themes, sub-themes, the number of participants who shared perspectives and feelings, and associated percentages as presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Responses to Category Title Serving in the Military

Emergent themes	Sub-themes	n	%
Occupational specialty			
	Traditional female occupations	14	87.5
	Nontraditional female occupations	2	12.5
Being a female and noncommissioned officer			
	Role/gender disparities	14	75
	Psychological distress and sexual trauma	6	37.5

Note. $N = 16$. n = number of participants who mentioned the theme. % = percentage of participants.

Interview question. The associated interview question was: What was your military occupational specialty or specialty code?

Finding 2. The findings associated with the above research question aligned with the theme of occupational specialty. As indicated in Table 8, two of the participants enlisted in nontraditional female specialties. These participants shared that they experienced challenges and were only allowed to perform limited duties because of their gender. Each of the military services had a defined list of enlisted jobs. The USA had 190 Military Occupation Specialties (MOSs); the USAF had approximately 176 USAF Specialty Codes (AFSCs); the USMC had 80 MOSs, and the USN had about 71 Navy Ratings. The six sub findings are:

- Finding 2a. Traditional occupations.

- Finding 2b. Nontraditional occupations.

- Finding 2c. Being a female and non-commissioned officer.

- Finding 2d. Role disparities.

- Finding 2e. Gender inequalities.

- Finding 2f. Psychological distress and sexual trauma.

Finding 2a. The first sub-finding aligned to the sub-theme traditional occupations. The findings revealed most of the participants enlisted in traditionally female occupations. As indicated in Table 8 above, most of the participants enlisted in jobs considered as traditional female occupations. For example, 14 (87.5%) of the 16 served in administrative, medical, or personnel roles.

Finding 2b. The second sub-finding was associated with the sub-theme nontraditional occupations. The findings revealed that only two (12.5%) of 16 served in nontraditional female roles such as torpedo mate and intelligence. Although

PARTICIPANT-E was initially in what was a nontraditional female role, she still experienced challenges because of her gender. She shared "the females' big task was to stay on the ship and just watch and say it is coming this way or do not move. We were not in charge. That was our job just to stand there and look."

Interview questions. The associated interview questions were: Where there any differences in the roles males and females held? Do you feel you were treated differently because you were a female? What was it like being a female NCO veteran?

Finding 2c. The findings were associated with the theme of being a female and non-commissioned officer. The findings revealed that the participants consistently reported experiencing challenges throughout their entire military careers. From the participants' responses, 12 participants (75%) noted the challenges of being a female and female NCO, and 4 participants (25%) mentioned no challenges. Some of the participants worked in more than one occupation and might have positive experiences in one job but had negative experiences in another. For example, although PARTICIPANT-P shared "in personnel, you know it is probably an even mix" she did mention while working as a flyer, "there was a difference because the field was male-oriented. In flying, I could see the differences because it was more male-dominated and Caucasian males." Despite the significant number of participants sharing they experienced challenges, there were contrasting responses from other participants who shared they did not experience any challenges. For example, PARTICIPANT-P shared, "I do not think I was treated [sic] differently because I was a female. No, I do not feel that way, and I did not feel that way when I was in the military."

Finding 2d. This sub-finding aligned to the sub-theme titled role disparities. Throughout the interview process, the participants discussed their anxieties relating to role inequalities they experienced during and after their military service. Based on the findings, indicated in Table 8 above, the participants overwhelming, (75%), shared there were noticeable differences in their roles throughout their careers with some mentioning that after becoming an NCO the disparities increased despite having the same and in some cases more, rank, training, and educational background as their male counterparts. For example, when asked if there were any differences in the roles males and females held PARTICIPANT-L responded, "of course, especially when I was in Intel. When I was enlisted [sic], they looked down upon you. Furthermore, when I was an Intel, it was this one particular time where I had to give a briefing, and it was a Navy officer, and the Navy officer looked down upon me." Comparably, PARTICIPANT-A mentioned, "in some instances may be more so when I became senior NCO. I felt that male SNCO had a louder voice than female SNCOs. In some instances, I did not feel that I was taken seriously as a female SNCO. I had to prove myself more than the male SNCO in some instances. Mainly when it came to making decisions on various events and activities, I felt like males were taken [sic] more seriously." PARTICIPANT-K reported, "At the Comms Center, our head supervisor was a male…we could never get a female in that position which was disturbing. It did not just experience-wise, and in fact [sic], at one time, one of the other supervisors who was a female had to train him on how to do the job, but they would rather have a male over that job instead of a female."

Finding 2e. This sub-finding is associated with sub-theme gender inequalities. Throughout the interview process, the participants discussed and displayed a degree of anxiety associated with their experiences, relating to gender inequalities, during and after their military service. In Merriam-Webster's dictionary, inequality is "an unfair situation in which some people have more rights or better opportunities than other people" ("Inequality," 2020, para. 1). The participants' understanding of and experiences throughout their military careers and still today, their gender had a profound influence during their military service that impacted how they served and the women they are today. The participants in this study served at varies times, held ranks ranging from E5 to E8, had different occupations and positions, but shared similar descriptions of their lived experiences with some crossing over into being sexually harassed. For example, PARTICIPANT-M shared "The females were more so tolerated [sic] and utilized as picked on sexual objects kind of way of speaking I guess I should say, but I did not see females being taken [sic] as serious leaders but more so as playthings there appeared to be not many questions being asked [sic] but going along with the flow." The participants felt that others expected them to serve in more of a babysitting role and that men were more respected and those opportunities that were considered high visibility. For example, PARTICIPANT-D reported, "I mean the expectation was as a female I would be the one taking care of them. Adult babysitting issues. They were more called upon for their technical expertise in leadership and decision making as far as the mission was concerned. The guys were primitive. I think its cold wartime; that is, the expectation was that we would trust the guys to meet and comply with the regulation. Some roles were of

high visibility. They tended to go towards the men with things like Commanders Call and to give briefings they pushed the men out even if they could not speak eloquently or present themselves as well. They made them more far more visible."

Additionally, PARTICIPANT-I stated, "Oh, yes. They pushed the men to move up because, at that time, they were trying not to send women to the front line. When it came to specialty positions or specialty schools, they would always say well we got to send him, and they would say you can go next time. Next time was always further and further down the road and even in leadership positions. I was the female, and I was always in a tough competition with men and always had to work harder, run faster, and jump higher."

Finding 2f. This sub-finding is related to sub-theme psychological distress and sexual trauma. The impact of role and gender disparities compounded the experienced psychological distress and sexual trauma. The findings revealed that most of the participants either witnessed and or experienced psychological distress or sexual trauma directly. For example, PARTICIPANT-I was approached by a superior, during her first meeting with him, who asked her if she wanted to make some extra money. She immediately thought he was referencing an off-duty job. Instead, it was an unexpected traumatic experience that resulted in symptoms of anxiety and feelings of emotional distress that impact her currently. In an emotional state, PARTICIPANT-I shared "One of the first conversations he had with me was, he introduced himself, and asked me how was my trip and everything and then he asked me if I wanted to make some extra money and I said how am I going to make some extra money? Because I am thinking, maybe they

have some jobs like aviation, but at the time, I did not know about aviation, with special incentive pay. He was talking about prostitution. Over in Korea, they did not have a lot of African American women over there and the ones they did have over there they wanted to see if they would prostitute themselves out to the GIs that were there so the guys would not have to deal with the Korean women and some women prostituted themselves out."

Another study participant shared that she survived two traumatic experiences of sexual violence. She continued to deal with "feelings of anxiety, stress, or fear" (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2019), which consistently hinders her ability to function day-to-day, resulting in a medical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her experiences are still impacting PARTICIPANT-N life. She shared, "now I had a seizure into that everything and then the PTSD and then I started fighting my husband. I had two military sexual assaults in the military career, and back then, harassment happened all the time, and people felt that it was your fault because you could not handle your business. There is a reason for it being protected [sic] now because it happened so much and so often, and I never reported it. I thought I had to identify the person, and I never knew that I did not have to, so I never reported it until the PTSD started for years." The third category that emerged was a military transition, discussed in the following section.

Category 3: Military Transition

Interview question. Do you feel you were prepared to transition from the military life/culture to civilian life/culture?

Finding 3. Based on the findings reported in this study, military transition emerged as the third category. Based on the findings reported in this study, military transition emerged as the third category. The findings uncovered that the lack of an effective transition program that efficiently contributed to successful transition continued to be a shared management problem that spans beyond the military departments and the Department of Defense to other government agencies and private-sector organizations (Cronk, 2015; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). Finding 3 revealed that overwhelming the participants felt that the TAP assistance provided prior to transition lacked effectiveness. Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below. The sub findings associated with this finding are indicated below:

- Finding 3a. Feelings of uncertainty.

- Finding 3b. Transition challenges.

- Finding 3c. Flexible transitioning experience.

- Finding 3d. Recommendations.

These study participants transitioned, from the military, from 1972 through 2016. Despite having years of management and leadership experience, female NCO veterans experience an enduring inability to transition from the military service successfully. These findings aligned to Schlossberg's transition model in that the various perspectives supported the assertations that the effectiveness of the military transition programs, resources, and support did not provide adequate assistance, thus resulting in a negative outcome (Flowers, Luzynski, & Zamani-Gallaher, 2014).

The findings revealed that most of this study participants had 15 to 20 years of management and leadership experience. Three (18.8%) of the participants reported having more than 20 years; six (37.5%) had 15 to 20 years; two (12.5%) reported having 12 to 15 years of experience; one (6.3%) participants had 10 to 12 years; three (18.8%) had 5 to 10 years, and one (6.3%) had less than five years of management and leadership experience. The participants reported similar perspectives concerning the transition from the aspects that they felt because of (a) their roles as NCO; (b) the number of years of management and leadership experience; and (c) their experience and education that the transition process would not be as challenging as it was. Based on the participants' responses, four themes emerged: Feelings of uncertainty, transitioning challenges, flexible transitioning experience, and transition recommendations.

Finding 3a. This sub-finding is aligned with the theme titled feelings of uncertainty. The findings revealed that the participants felt they received a lack of support from their respective branch of the military and their military leadership before transition and during transition particularly about providing adequate preparation for civilian life and ensuring they had the necessary information as well as was aware of the available resources and how to access them. Schlossberg's concept of adult transitioning provided a conceptual lens to evaluate the career transitioning of female NCO veterans throughout the various phases that transpired over time. The findings aligned to Schlossberg's model of transition in that there are both internal and external aspects that enabled or hindered successful transition. Schlossberg's model of transition incorporated the factor of support entails what sources of support are in place to influence the transition process. Support

can derive from numerous sources such as family units, networks of friends, intimate relationships, and institutions/communities (Anderson et al., 2012; Anderson & Goodman, 2014; Schlossberg, 2011). Because the process of transitioning began during military service, the participants felt that support from the military services and military leadership was imperative to prepare the participants before transition and during the transition as well as provide support post-transition.

PARTICIPANT-E reported, "I had no idea. I mean, I went through the TAP program, but I had no idea as to how to go through the job interviews or how to transition from the military to civilian." Some of the participants expressed because they did not have clear guidance on how to transition successfully; they had feelings of uncertainty about their future outside of the military. The findings in this study revealed that the participants felt unprepared to transition successfully. PARTICIPANT-A responds, "Yes, I knew what it would be out of the uniform and living a regular life, but as far as going back into the working world, I do not feel like I was prepared [sic] at all...I should say I was not fully prepared [sic] for what was about to happen." While PARTICIPANT-P reported, "Well, I thought I was prepared [sic] until I got out. I was in for the shock of my life; there were so many things I just did not know about." Similarly, PARTICIPANT-I revealed, "So during the time of transition it can be stressful, especially when you know for so many years that my job is there." Some of the participants felt their process was self-directed. For example, PARTICIPANT-M reported, "I do not believe the military prepared me…what I did was to take it upon myself."

The findings uncovered that the feelings of uncertainty did not have the same impact on one individual as it has on another in which case the process of changing careers could be an emotional experience and cause psychological distress, particularly when losing years of job and financial security. For some of the participants, this life-changing transition caused stress and psychological distress. Some of the participants reported feelings of depression and stress. PARTICIPANT-F shared, "The first two years were super stressful; even though I had a beneficial job (M-F, good pay), I was still stressed [sic]. I was playing the "What if" game with myself while studying to become a teacher and had to take some risks with my then job to pursue my career. Leaving work for interviews, whether the time off was approved or not; it was stressful." While PARTICIPANT-H reported, "Depression set in because it was like transitioning from being in charge to suddenly not being in charge and let me take a little time off. I was sending in my resume, but I forgot that I got four rejection letters. When I got those four rejection letters I gave up because they made me feel like my fear, I was like OK let me take a break, you know. I forgot about that I did send, and I did apply for my jobs. I took a break. And then I was told that you could not take longer than two years to get back into the workforce because it looks kind of bad."

Interview question. What challenges, if any, did you face during your transition from the military to civilian life?

Finding 3b. This sub-finding aligned with the transition challenges theme. The findings revealed that the participants overwhelmingly experienced challenges during the transition process. I used Schlossberg's model of adult transitioning, which provided a

conceptual lens to evaluate career transition challenges experienced by the participants throughout the various phases that transpired over time (see Schlossberg, 1981). These findings aligned to Schlossberg's transition model which was extensively utilized particularly concerning the complications and struggle that veterans encounter as they transition from military service (see DAV, 2014; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Johnston et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2011).

Based on the participants' responses, 11 participants (68.8%) mentioned the challenges, and 5 participants (31.3%) mentioned no challenges. Of those who experienced challenges, PARTICIPANT-F reported, "think the biggest challenge I faced during my transition was not having a network to depend on to ask questions to like during a PCS when I moved to a new city while on terminal leave. Sometimes you do not know what you do not know, so I was nerve wrecked wondering if I was doing things properly to prepare for retirement with kids in tow. Similarly, PARTICIPANT-E shared, "I would say employment. Looking for employment, especially with the pay you were used to getting, and then you came out not making that type of money, and that was a total shock."

When asked, PARTICIPANT-M replied, "it seems like you know we look back and we go all those years you know dedicating yourself to something you know all the management and leadership experience and then you get out, and you know it is like you are lost you looking around. You know everybody thinks bad of you. Everybody thinks the rest of the Department of Defense is so much like the military when it is not. What do you do to cope with all of that?" Comparably PARTICIPANT-C shared, "I did not have

much to go on as what to expect. When I decided I was going to work, I was freaking out because I did not know how to write a resume. Or [sic], you know I did not need a resume. I have been in the military all this time." PARTICIPANT-E communicated, "I can tell you my first interview as a civilian I bombed it so bad because I had no clue and if I knew then what I know now I would be on easy street." The participants attributed their challenges to a variety of factors from the ineffectiveness of the transition program to the lack of knowledge relating to writing resumes, interviews, and applying for jobs.

For most of the participants, they joined the military right out of high school and had never gone through the process of applying for a private-sector job. Despite the implementation of the new GPS program, which included a three-day workshop focused on resume development, job interviews, and searches exercises, this study participants experienced challenges associated with successfully developing a resume and conducting an interview. For example, PARTICIPANT-L reported, "I went to the TAP class. And [sic] even though I went to the TAP class, they still do not focus on the resumé and an interview like they should." While PARTICIPANT-O shared, "I must have applied for over 40 positions and only got hits on a few. Then of the few, none came to be." Additionally, PARTICIPANT-A reported, "and I did not have the skills to...I never had to do an interview, I never had to do a resume, and I did not even know what kind of clothes to wear into work. It was nothing I had to think about the 20 years. I was in the military, and yes, it was a big culture shock."

Finding 3c. The theme associated with this sub-finding is flexible transitioning experience. Although most of the participants reported that the transition process was

challenging, five (31.3%) reported feelings of being prepared. Amongst the participants who perceived the transition as a seamless process, they revealed that their network of veteran counterparts and planning resulted in their transition being more flexible and nonchallenging. For instance, PARTICIPANT-B stated, "I was prepared [sic] because I had a plan. I initiated my request, which was a year out I took that time by a different training for different classes that they had offered. I went to resume classes and to civilian transition classes to prepare myself." Also, PARTICIPANT-C reported, "No, none that I could think of." Similar feelings and thoughts were reported by PARTICIPANT-G, who responded, "Yes because I was still taking college courses while I was in the military. I did not just well; my life was just not the Army." Finally, PARTICIPANT-J shared, "I did not have any challenges because I had seen other people's challenges or struggles, so that minimized mine."

Interview question. What suggestions would you give other female veterans transitioning into the civilian workforce?

Finding 3d. The theme associated with this sub-finding is recommendations. The projection is these findings will be of vital significance to the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and others in the management field in the process of continuous improvements needed about transition assistance and veterans hiring programs. This study's findings provided awareness of first-hand accounts and perspectives of the challenges associated with the military transition. When asked for recommendations, the participants provided invaluable advice to not only future veterans but military and

government officials as well as private-sector employers. For example, PARTICIPANT-F reported, "Write it out! Your goals, your financial plan, your fall back. Look to see what the job market is like for the job you are pursuing and have a fallback. Do not be too good to entertain a job offer temporarily until what you truly desire comes along. Network! Do not be afraid to talk about what you want for your future; you never know who may be in the position to help you or know someone that is."

Additionally, PARTICIPANT-E shared, "Well, be better prepared [sic] to do the research. If you are moving to a certain area, visit that area first. See what the job market is like [sic]. See what the cost of living is like to make sure you can survive if you do not get a job right away because they are very picky about whom they want to represent a company. Just look around, look at the area see this really where you want to be, and if that is the case once you do your research, you all have everything in hand because I did not do that. I wish I had, but that is what I would tell them now to do the research."

PARTICIPANT-G highlighted the importance of finances considering that if you separate your income stops entirely and if you retire, it is cut [sic] in half. She shared, "Well, first, financially. I would suggest that they take care of all their financial obligations and bills before they get out because if you get out and you do not have a source of income, then mental health and a whole lot of issues going to set in." While PARTICIPANT-B shared, "your paycheck is going to decrease drastically, and just to be mindful of you cannot spend more than you are getting in. If she decides to go to work, I suggest to her to secure a job before she gets out. To start her networking, start doing her research to see what is out there. It is not like being in the military where you get your

orders the chain to let you know this is your next duty station. See what the job market is like, what the pay for that job market, and start looking at the housing."

Furthermore, PARTICIPANT-P recommended that future female veterans "make sure they have everything they need before they get out to make sure their education records are up to par and make sure that if you are trying to get a job in the civilian sector that you have some type of degree when you get out of the military because most of the jobs are going to require you to have some type of education." PARTICIPANT-P also shared she "stressed to my [sic] students to make sure you have your CCAF. If you do not have anything else before you get out of the military, do not get out of the military without having some type of education, and that is when I see the most out of everything that I see in the military because education is the most important thing in the civilian sector." The fourth category, private-sector reintegration, is discussed in the next section, followed by a summary of Chapter 4.

Category 4: Private-Sector Reintegration

Interview question. What are your experiences reintegrating into private-sector employment?

Finding 4. These findings related to the fourth category that emerged as private-sector reintegration emerged as the fourth category. Kirchner, Coryell, and Yelich Biniecki (2014) emphasized the importance of acknowledging the challenges of reintegrating into a civilian culture and the obstacles of becoming student veterans. Although this literature focused on student veterans, the finding of this study expanded the literature from the perspectives of acknowledging and understanding the challenges

not only female NCO veterans faced, but veterans in general, during reintegration. Gould

and Obicheta (2015) maintained that of the 256 female veterans surveyed, 82% reported

difficulties readjusting to the private-sector, and only 37% believed private-sector

employers acknowledged their military service and experience. Additionally, McAllister

et al. (2015) asserted that "veterans are having a difficult time reintegrating back into the

civilian sector following their service, with nearly 44% reporting some type of problem"

(p. 93). These bodies of literature were confirmed by these study findings that revealed

that 81.3% of this study participants reported experiencing difficulties during

reintegration and adjustment to private-sector. This finding has five sub findings as

indicated below. Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically

extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below.

- Finding 4a. Flexible reintegration experience.

- Finding 4b. Reintegration challenges.

- Finding 4c. Over-employed/underemployed.

- Finding 4d. Private sector employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness.

- Finding 4e. Transitional program effectiveness.

- Finding 4f. Skills and experience translation challenges.

The process of reintegration could be reassuming one's age, sex, domestic and

communal ethical responsibilities as well as transitioning from one professional role to

another (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.). The reasoning for offering

descriptions of reintegration experiences allowed for the discovery and description of the

conceptual paradigms under which the transitioning program effectively or ineffectively

works. These study findings aligned to the conceptual reintegration model used to evaluate the private-sector reintegration process, which encompassed transition, readjustment, and community integration (Elnitsky et al., 2017). These study findings revealed that based on the participants' responses, three themes emerged to include reintegration challenges, transitional programs' effectiveness, and translating management skills and experience challenges. As detailed in the conceptual reintegration model, the findings confirmed that a lack of an effective transition program that efficiently contributed to successful reintegration into private-sector employment was a shared management problem that spanned beyond the military departments and the Department of Defense to other government agencies and private-sector organizations. The findings uncovered that one of the most challenging aspects of transitioning out of the military, particularly after serving for numerous years, was giving up the security and quality of life the military provided as well as the possibility of not securing private-sector employment. Kintzle et al. (2015) focused on identifying the reasons that both service providers and veterans believed that veterans were unprepared to search for and secure private-sector employment successfully. Kintzle et al. (2015) highlighted the reasons as "unrealistic expectations for the kinds of job opportunities veterans qualify for, as well as salary, the veteran perception of having to 'start over' as a civilian, and difficulty understanding how military experience translates to civilian employment" (p. 1).

The participant's responses varied with 13 (81.3%) reporting having difficulties, and three (18.8%) reported having a flexible and positive experience reintegrating into

private-sector employment. It was essential to highlight that although eight (50%) of the

16 participants employed, five (62.5%) of the eight were employed by the government

while only three (37.5%) of the eight employed in the private-sector employment. The

participant's post-military employment history ranged from 7 months to 7 ½ years. As

previously reported, most of this study participants had 15 to 20 years of management

and leadership experience. Three (18.8%) of the participants reported having more than

20 years; six (37.5%) had 15 to 20 years; two (12.5%) reported having 12 to 15 years of

experience; one (6.3%) participants had 10 to 12 years; three (18.8%) had 5 to 10 years,

and one (6.3%) had less than five years of management and leadership experience. At the

time of reintegration, all of the participants had higher education with two (12.5%)

having some college, one (6.3%) having an Associates, five (31.3%) completing their

Bachelors, seven (43.8%) having a Masters, and one (6.3%) awarded a Doctoral degree.

Despite having years of management experience, executive-level management, and

leadership skills, and higher education, only two (25%) of the eight worked at the

management level. These study findings and the below sub-findings aligned to

Nicholson's work-role transition model, which was useful in describing the work-role

adjustments the female NCO veteran population contended with during reintegration into

a private-sector workforce.

Finding 4a. The theme of flexible reintegration experience supports these study

findings. Although most of the participants had challenges, some, 3 (18.8%) of the 16,

reported having flexible experiences. For example, PARTICIPANT-F shared,

"Employers tend to enjoy having prior military personnel because we are very detail-

oriented, rarely call out, we show up on time and have a great work ethic. The job I got

fresh out of the military was due to my being a veteran; they actively seek out veterans

for employment. In my training for that job, 5 out of 19 of us were prior military. I feel

the one significant action that contributed to my success was not being afraid to apply for

jobs that did not fit into what I knew I wanted to do for a lifetime. Sometimes people are

unwilling to do a job they do not want to do because it is not where they see themselves

at." While PARTICIPANT-D reported, "One is I wanted to do something completely

different from what I did on the military which it did and to I had an employer that was

open to new ideas and different ways of being competitive when it came out to

contractors. Those are the two things that made it flourish and nice, and you know not

military regulated." Although PARTICIPANT-N reported having a positive reintegration

but noted it was "a culture shock because I joined the military two weeks after I

graduated High School." Not all the participant's reintegration experiences were flexible,

as described in the following section.

Finding 4b. The associated theme for this finding is reintegration challenges.

Elnitsky et al. (2017) maintained that the basis for successful reintegration was the

veterans' degree of certainty, willingness, and preparedness to adapt to the private-sector.

Reintegration required an understanding of the overall circumstances or environments in

which the procedure of reintegration occurs (Elnitsky et al., 2017). The findings

discovered that the majority, 13 (81.3%), of the participants reported a difficult

reintegration grounded in various causes and or factors. For example, PARTICIPANT-E

shared, "It was difficult because the military had trained me when things were supposed

to happen and when it happened what to do. When you are working with people who work at their own pace and who take all these smoke breaks, it was frustrating. I kept backtracking a lot because I kept saying this is not going to work. I kept trying to put a military spin on it and that I had to get away from that." Another participant struggled to find private-sector employment and even struggled to find civilian minimum wage employment on her local military installation. PARTICIPANT-O reported, "I had just served this country for over 20 years, but I could not get a position on the base. I wanted a position on the local military base; however, that did not immediately happen. I must have applied for over 40 positions and only got hits on a few. Then of the few, none came to be." PARTICIPANT-M reported, "it seems like you know we look back and we go all of those years dedicating yourself to something you know. All the management and leadership experience and then you get out, and you know it is like you are lost, you are looking around, and everybody thinks bad of you. You think the rest of the Department of Defense is so much like the military when it is not, and what do you do to cope with all of that."

PARTICIPANT-F shared, "My biggest challenge is the lack of camaraderie and networking. It sounds like something so minor, but it is strange to me that once work is done [sic], everyone just goes their way. There have not been any check in's, which as a first-year teacher baffle me! My supervisor has asked me if there is anything that I need, so I'm not entirely out in the cold. As I stated, networking was a big part of my current success, so hopefully, I can find a way to get in the "know" as an educator as well." PARTICIPANT-J shared that her military experience and the leadership traits she gained

while serving became a hindrance. She reported many people do not get know about

delegating. It is hard because I am self-sufficient, independent, and I will forget. I try to

mentor people. Some people want you to tell them what they are going to do, and I am

like, are you here to learn because you can do this on your own." While PARTICIPANT-

C stated, "Well, I could say it has been a challenge just as it was in the military because

coming in with integrity seems to be a hindrance for me. Integrity is not what they

wanted; at least not when it came to me. And so [sic] even now today as a Director

Deputy of EEO, the integrity piece is still a problem. No one wants, or a lot of [sic]

individuals, to do things the right way. They do not want things within the law the lawful

things. It is a struggle, but I just keep doing what I am supposed to."

Additionally, PARTICIPANT-P shared, "I was thinking that we would transition

from the military and go into the civilian sector that it was going to be the same. I was not

expecting it to be any different, but it is different when you are in the civilian sector

because like I said you were in the loop with everything you knew what was going on but

when you get into the civilian sector you do not have all of that responsibility so you

might not even know what is going on at the next level in the military." Some of the

participants described their experiences as stressful due to being considered over-

employed and underemployed.

Finding 4c. The associated theme was over-employed/underemployed. The

findings revealed that during the process of seeking and securing employment, some of

the participants stated that they were either overqualified or underqualified, resulting in

not securing employment or working in positions that were not comparable to those held

in the military. PARTICIPANT-B retired from the military four years ago and began her job search after being out for nine months and had yet to secure employment. She highlighted the fact that employers felt that she was overqualified for the jobs applied for, but after being out for four years and applying for numerous jobs at all levels, but she simply wanted to work. PARTICIPANT-B reported, "I think for me, I am overqualified for the positions I am applying for [sic]. I am applying, knowing that I am overqualified for them. It is not just applying blindsided; I just want to work. I am not looking for a high-end job; I do not have to have the top line that is not where I am at in my life. I am applying not for the low levels job but those mid-level jobs. I am not getting the jobs because when they look at my qualifications, I am overqualified, so that is one of my barriers."

Although PARTICIPANT-E had a doctoral degree, ten years of management experience, and 20 years of service, the only jobs she could find were "the little $10 to $11 an hour jobs that were about 30 days after I am out. I would write down what I was getting in the military, and they would say oh, you are not going to make that here. Soon to find out one person doing three people's jobs and getting that amount of pay that was not just. I wish the military would have said be prepared [sic] for this." Some of the participants reported that it took years to find employment where their salaries aligned to what they were making in the military and or based on their experience and education, For example, PARTICIPANT-E shared "has taken 11 years to earn comparable pay, even with college degrees." While PARTICIPANT-X reported, "I have applied for the high-level jobs, but the response that my resume was referred to the hiring manager and then I

get the e-mail saying that I did not get the job and that is with the mid-level jobs, but yes

I have applied for the high-end jobs, and I get the message that my resume was forwarded

to the hiring manager, but I do not get the call for an interview." She made inquiries

attempting to figure out what she is doing wrong. She shared, "I have been applying for

jobs throughout the whole four years but applying for different jobs, and I have not been

able to find a job. It is something that I am missing. I have been asking some of my

friends and collegians. How did you transition? To try and help me figure out what I am

missing from getting much from transitioning and use of my managerial skills and

leadership skills to get a job." As previously discussed, private-sector employers intensify

the reintegration process by labeling veterans, particularly female NCO veterans, with a

range of adverse characterizations and prejudiced perceptions relating to competences

and abilities to serve in mid-level to senior-level management roles (DAV, 2014). The

following section provides the participants' reflections on private-sector employers'

misperceptions and lack of awareness.

 Finding 4d. The associated theme was employers' misperceptions/lack of

awareness. As reported in this study, female NCO veterans faced many challenges to

include a lack of "understanding how the skills, occupational experience, and

qualifications gained during military service translated into skills, experience and

qualifications relevant and appropriate to civilian jobs" (Kintzle et al., 2015, p. 6). These

findings confirmed previously reported data revealing that private-sector employers

intensify the problem by labeling veterans, particularly female NCO veterans, with a

range of adverse characterizations and prejudiced perceptions relating to competences

and abilities to serve in mid-level to senior-level management roles (DAV, 2014). Female

NCO veterans served in the role of followers, managers, leaders, mentors, and coaches

throughout their military career and possess the talents that private-sector employers seek

when building a manager and leader cadre. The skills and experiences female NCO

veterans offered were similar, and translatable, to private-sector management, leadership,

decision-making, resilience, (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2017). This study participants

were no different and faced the challenges associated with private-sector employers'

misperceptions and lack of awareness. For example, PARTICIPANT-A reported that "It

was a little bit difficult going into the workforce. Everything was going so slow for me,

and I questioned a lot of things and was told that is how we do things. If you questioned

things, they felt like you were demanding and trying to take charge of something that was

not yours." While PARTICIPANT-H reported, "They felt so threatened by my military

background. They saw you had gone back to school. Some in the private sector did not

want to receive advice and learn from your experience."

Additionally, PARTICIPANT-L reported, "I have all this military experience, and

even though I substitute I have this job where even in the civilian world, they look at

titles because I am a substitute. They do not look at my background, and they see

substitute, and they look down on you." Moreover, PARTICIPANT-K interactions with

civilian employers resulted in a male manager informing her she "was not a VET because

I did not retire. I told him you could be a VET and not retire. He said no, you could not."

PARTICIPANT-I shared that she felt her military background "hindered you or people

viewed it as being negative. Because I mean, I can say that you know when I first became

a civilian, I was told this is not the military anymore, and you cannot be so direct and to

the point with people. And [sic] one of my sayings when I was NCO and SNCO I always

tell people your hesitation or lack of motivation and initiative can get you one day.

Someone heard me say that and went back and told my supervisor, and then he brought it

to my attention. I said, but this civilian organization is still doing a mission that impacts

people that you deploy because civilians do deploy." Finally, PARTICIPANT-H

reported, "You go into work and use a chain of command, and you knew who that person

was, and now you meet this person in the private sector like you know, and some of them

would say this is not the military, and you cannot do things like that. I would say yes; I

do understand because respect is the same. The two most important things are awareness

and preparation. You must be aware that things can change, and things will come up, and

are you prepared."

  Interview question. What are your experiences with various transitional

programs in preparing you to enter the civilian workforce?

  Finding 4e. The linked theme was transitional program effectiveness. The

findings revealed that the majority of the participants were not required to attend the TAP

courses because it wasn't until President Obama signed into law the Veterans'

Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act mandating that all military members

transitioning from the military participate in TAP. In 2013, the White House

Economic and Domestic Policy Council restructured the program and the

Department of Labor also revamped its transition workshops to develop a more

comprehensive design; however, the programs did not adequately strengthen and

systematizes services, training and counseling women received before, during and after separation or retirement (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). As previously discussed, the new Transition GPS program, implemented in 2013, was a restructuring of the TAP program (Department of Defense, n.d.-b; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs revamped the program to better aid in the transition and reintegration processes for retiring or separating military members. The new program was developed to span across the service member's entire career and well into retirement or separation and was titled the Military Life Cycle (MLC). The MLC intended to provide resources to ensure successful civilian careers by better aligning the participants' military path with a desired private-sector career path (Department of Defense, n.d.-b; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b).

The enactment, on August 13, 2018, of the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act authorized additional changes to the TAP program to ensure better effectiveness and progress towards providing better assistance and resources as well as better preparing service members for transition and reintegration (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018). Although the authorization of these updates was in 2018, the Department of Defense did not incorporate the guidelines into the Department of Defense TAP instruction until September 26, 2019 (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c), resulting in further delays in preparing veterans for transition and reintegration. It is important to note that military service members are not allowed to enroll in the new program until 365 days before separation or retirement unless the event is unexpected.

Approximately 32% of the study participants were still serving in the military during the implementation of the new program. The Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs leadership maintained that the new structure incorporated adequate levels of education, career technical training, and entrepreneurship that better aligned to civilian occupations (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). When asked if she agreed with these assertions, PARTICIPANT-A shared, "I attended, but I cannot say it was overly useful." The new program was supposed to aid in accomplishing long term outcomes (e.g., secure employment, obtain a degree or certificate, and or start a business or nonprofit; Department of Defense, n.d.-b; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). While PARTICIPANT-B reported, "it was more of a broad overview of what to expect, but it was a good program, but I think it should be something that retirees have to go to two years before retirement, one year before retirement and then go back six months before retirement. That needs to be a requirement, especially for those that plan to work. It should not be a onetime class. It should be a multiple-time because going the first time you don't get everything and by going multiple times, you will get it the next time and the next time." PARTICIPANT-F communicated, "I took the TAPS [sic] class before retirement, which was not useful for securing employment." When asked if the program was useful, PARTICIPANT-M stated, "No."

Although these study participants left the military with translatable management and leadership skills and experiences, they continued to face challenges and reported that the transitional assistance resources did not adequately prepare them or aid in securing private-sector employment (DAV, 2014; Komives & Wagner, 2016; Strauss, 2016). For

example, PARTICIPANT-P shared, "I think I did TAPS [sic] one time or a program like

TAP probably about six months to getting out. The TAP program they had back then is

not like the TAP program they have not. Probably the biggest thing that was beneficial to

me with the TAP program was the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs part because they

help you get your records together so you can file your claim, so that was the biggest

beneficial thing about going to TAP. But as far as preparing you for a job or anything like

that that I don't think it was useful." While PARTICIPANT-M reported, "I think they

made us all attend what that was called TAPS [sic], and that was it." When asked if the

program was useful, PARTICIPANT-M stated, "No." Also, PARTICIPANT-E reported,

"I think with TAPS [sic] yes I went to that. That was one of those things where they just

gave you the information. This [sic] is what the military is and what you can do, and

some of it was just was not as clear cut. Instead of them just focusing on the fact that now

you are transitioning out of the military, they should let you know that everything is not a

cookie-cutter. I know the program that you stick with that script, and this is what you do

but if they can break it down to see who's going to be staying, who is going to be doing

what, what is the best job market so that you know what the opportunities are out there. I

think that would have been a lot more helpful."

PARTICIPANT-D shared that in the TAP classes, "they concentrated on

personnel stuff instead of transitional stuff, so I would say that they were not useful.

Currently, the VA continues to be a challenge." Additionally, PARTICIPANT-F

communicated, "I took the TAPS [sic] class before retirement, which was not useful for

securing employment. I used the Veteran's Choice through Texas Workforce to help get

employment post-retirement, Troops to Teachers, and Vocational Rehab Program."

Furthermore, PARTICIPANT-C reported, "I did the TAPS [sic] because you had to, so

you had to schedule your TAPS [sic], and through them, I found out about my Purple

Heart. I think I did not have any faith in the VA, so I was not expecting anything, and I

did everything they asked me to. I did take the resume writing class." PARTICIPANT-B

shared, "The program I went to was a weeklong class, and it was informative, and it gave

you pointer and key things, but of course, you had 10 to 15 induvial who was retiring and

one instructor. So of course, that instructor can't give you that one-on-one time, so it was

more of a broad overview of what to expect, but it was a good program, but I think it

should be something that retirees have to go to two years before retirement, one year

before retirement and then go back six months before retirement. That needs to be a

requirement, especially for those that plan to work. It should not be a onetime class. It

should be a multiple-time because going the first time you don't get everything and by

going multiple times, you will get it the next time and the next time."

PARTICIPANT-A recounted, "the Family Support Center had a mandatory

reintegration or transitioning program that you were required to attend before you

checked out. I attended it, but I cannot say it was overly useful." PARTICIPANT-L

stated, "I went to the TAP class, and even though I went to the TAP class, they still don't

focus on the resumé and an interview like they should. Even though we go through it,

they show us, and they give us the book answer on how to write a resume."

PARTICIPANT-J described that she went to TAP "twice. At least a year out and again

within your six months range. I went to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services,

which is the state program. I went to the Veterans Affairs Office, and they review your record by appointment only, and those people have been there 30 or 40 years, and I mean they are no joke. They can go through your record in a minimal amount of time and tell you where this is because that is there career, and it just rolls right off their tongues. The VA Medical Center will help you when you file a claim."

Not all the participants had a negative experience with the transition resources, PARTICIPANT-N reported, "I had a very good experience with the transitions assistance programs. But you have to go more than once." Some of the participants did not attend the classes offered. PARTICIPANT-K shared when asked which transitional programs she attended, she stated, "None." When asked why she reported, "When I got out, that was just it. I got out."

Interview question. What are your experiences translating your military management and leadership skills and expertise to private-sector management and leadership roles and or positions?

Finding 4f. The related theme translation challenges. The findings represented an overwhelming response that participants expected their military experience and training, as well as higher education achievements, to translate into meaningful private-sector employment. Often it did not, and those participants found the process of translation of skills and experience difficult. The participants expected that their job training, coupled with their years of management/supervising experience and higher education achievements, would be invaluable to private-sector employers. The skills and experiences female NCO veterans offered were similar, and translatable, to private-sector

management, leadership, decision-making, resilience, (DAV, 2014; Hardison et al., 2017). As previously reported, eight (50%) of the 16 participants had employment; the government employed five (62.5%) of the eight while only three (37.5%) of the eight worked in the private-sector primarily due to the inability to translate their military skills and experiences comparable to a private-sector job. The participant's post-military employment experiences varied with PARTICIPANT-N, reporting that her biggest challenge was "translating my evaluations into a resume was a challenge."

Although the participants were unable to secure comparable private-sector employment, some were able to use their management skills and experience in some capacity. For example, PARTICIPANT-E shared that although she initially worked minimum wage jobs and as an elementary school teacher, she recently started working as a career service manager and was able to use some of the management skills specifically those focused on managing and leading junior sailors. She reported she used "the majority of them because having to deal with a lot of the younger kids in the military and always being aware of what they are doing and making sure they are doing the right thing. Even with adults now, I still had to do the same thing, making sure they are doing the right thing, making sure they are waking up on time, do you have your ID. That is the babysitting side of the job. I think that dealing with the young guys in the military is what is helping me get through what I am doing right now. Kind of watching over them was what helped me get through this right now."

Although PARTICIPANT-F reported that "my management skills have helped me keep affairs for my current job, coming in as the new person in charge of technology and

not having any previous cataloging information on what was on hand, etc., I was able to get items located, signed out to proper personnel, and accounted for properly. Had I not had prior military experience of having to have unknown people account for items, I would have been more intimidated, or may not have known/understood the importance of accounting for these items. The prior experience gave me the tools to handle my new position delicately and still get my job done," the level of her position, as a teacher-librarian, was not comparable to her status as a manager and supervisor in the military. While PARTICIPANT-B reported, "Though I think it was One Net where you can look at your job and put it in there, and it would tell you what civilian jobs were similar to what we did in the military. So there were other things that one website was something I held onto and was key for me to know what jobs I could apply for because when you saw HR, there were many facets of HR, which is my background, and of course, trying to translate from military garda to civilian garda was a challenge. I may look up Administrative Specialist, but when you look it up for civilian, it is not what it says it says, Secretary. So that website was beneficial in translating my military to civilian."

Additionally, PARTICIPANT-J initially secured employment, an entry-level position, with a bank where her responsibilities were "annotating a thousand accounts when people used their credit card you had to process it, type up whatever it is they may have used their credit card for [sic]. I was told by Bank of America that, with my experience, I was over-qualified, but I needed to work." She eventually volunteered for the DAV and was able to use her skills. She also shared that "as the DAV Commander, my first year was a struggle. I was already doing the work and was supposed to train, but

you know you can only get so much information or training from a person that's in a

position that they're not ready to give up yet versus I had some outside sources that

showed up they would come in and give me the pearls of the DAV. They gave me the

knowledge of how to succeed at this job, DAV guidelines, Constitutions, Bylaws, the

rules of Robert's Rules of Order, etc." Also, PARTICIPANT-N shared "the challenge of

not being in charge was big, but as stated earlier, I learned to adjust and move on.

Translating my evaluations into a resume was a challenge. The biggest challenge was

resume writing. Taking my evaluations and translating into a resume was a challenge."

PARTICIPANT-G shared that "I was military Personnel and that's a little different

because we were more focused on ranks, certificates, and decorations. But as a social

worker, that was not our focus more, so it was the mental status." PARTICIPANT-D

retired from the military in 2009, with about 12 years of management experience, was

unable to secure comparable employment, and used her skills and knowledge, for more

than seven years before being hired as a Business Development Executive. Since 2016,

she shared, "I'm able to translate them to the civilian job that I do now in commercial,

corporate work. I think where I run into the challenge is people trusting and embracing

that you know what you're doing because of your skills not because you are in the

military."

     Two of the participants were able to secure government employment in the same

field as their military occupations with one, PARTICIPANT-C, of the two noting

difficulties in translating her management skills and experience. PARTICIPANT-C, who

eventually secured a government job, shared "because she went back into the same field

as a Deputy Director of EEO" some difficulties were translating her skills as a military

EEO officer. She stated, "it differs being an EEO officer in the military and an EEO

officer as a civilian," she thought that because she was "successful in the military, I

thought I would be able to translate them over to my new role and be successful as well. I

see the opportunity there for one I've got to help folks and the folks under me who are

wanting to advance and do better." While PARTICIPANT-M was able to secure, after

several years, comparable employment and use her skills, still, within the government

environment, she shared, "because I was already military EEO, I was able to secure

employment and had access to getting external education related to the field." The

following section is a discussion of the fifth category focused on the availability of

resources and services for transitioning military members.

Category 5: Resources and Services

   Interview questions. Do you access any veteran services? If so, which ones?

How did you identify the available resources, support systems, and services that impacted

your ability to meet your individual needs?

   Finding 5. Resources and services emerged as the fifth category. Schlossberg's

model incorporated four key factors that influenced the process of transition and provided

a conceptual lens for exploring and evaluating female NCO veterans transition from the

military services. The model also served as a mechanism for broadening the contextual

perspectives relating to military separation or retirement highlighting the critical need for

the transformation of existing programs, counseling, resources, and joint transition

initiatives tailored to meet the needs of female NCO veterans and the U.S. veteran

population (Anderson et al., 2012; Elnitsky et al., 2017). The sub findings associated with

finding 5 include:

- Finding 5a. Accessibility and barriers.

- Finding 5b. Availability of services.

- Finding 5c. Participant's recommendations.

Finding 5a. The theme linked to this sub-finding is accessibility and barriers.

When asked if they had access to the veteran and other services, the participants'

responses varied with most of the participants asserting they were unaware of the services

and only found out after transitioning. For example, PARTICIPANT-M stated, "VA

medical and Wounded Warrior," which she became aware of through the DAV. While

PARTICIPANT-O shared "yes, the VA," and she also reported that she learned about the

program in TAP and from personal networking." PARTICIPANT-A shared, "currently,

my PCM is at the VA on Fort Meade. I also use some of the counseling services" she

went on to state that she was unaware of the available services and identified them

through "my network of co-workers and friends as well as websites like the VA."

Although PARTICIPANT-H reported "I use the VA hospital and the DAV," she was not

aware of the resources until after she had separated, and she obtained the information

through the "VA and DAV Websites."

PARTICIPANT-E reported, "I just use VA about every six months. I go in and do

my check-up and do my health and wellness, and that is about it" she went on further to

share that she did not use them more frequently "because it just seems like a pain in the

butt and not what I used to in the military. I do not have the patience to wait for int he

long lines." When asked how she identified the resources, she stated, "I pretty much

found it out on my own and for some whenever I go to the military base I always read the

signs they have posted" and when asked if the military could do a better job of sharing

that information, she reported "yes. I think it would be great. I mean even in that

transition phase, and even after we get out there should not be a limit for 30 days or 90

days it is like good luck you are on your own. There should be some type of follow-up."

PARTICIPANT-K shared, "my medical claim is still going through. I am on disability

right now. I am on State Disability for my multiple sclerosis, and I also have a fracted left

hip, arthritis, and fibromyalgia. It does not stop me. I also have a disk in my back, and

unfortunately, I cannot work." When asked does she use the medical and other services at

the VA, she stated: "I have never been to the VA" and when asked why, she reported

"Unfortunately, right now I cannot work because of disability because if you make so

much, I will lose my health insurance. I do have TRICARE because I am married, so

TRICARE and MEDICARE cover everything. I can't afford to lose that." She went on

further to state, "I didn't know I could until I came to the DAV because I was told [sic] I

wasn't a veteran so after going through all of that." Additionally, she reported, "I have

been out since 1993 and didn't know I could use the VA until 2018 because I had no clue

and we need to educate people."

      The findings revealed that some of the participants shared they did not use the

services, while others used the VA and other resources as well. When asked,

PARTICIPANT-A stated, "I can't say that I did. Because I have heard horror stories, and

I can't relate to them which people have gone through." PARTICIPANT-J reported, "yes.

I did go to the VA and the Virginia Employment Commission," and she went on further to state she learned about the programs through "TAPS [sic], others, like the DAV, family, and friends. PARTICIPANT-F reported that she primarily used "Vocational Rehab, DAV, Veteran's Choice TX Workforce, Troops to Teachers" and noted, "some resources were talked [sic] about at TAPS [sic], others, like the DAV I heard from family and friends." She went on further to share, "I still have not been able to change over my DAV chapter from Hawaii to TX, the website isn't very user-friendly. The Troops to Teachers did not provide much assistance when trying to find a pathway to getting my teachers certification. I guess they could have been if I had not done ANY research, but everything they told me, I had already researched. Vocational Rehab has been the greatest resource I've used."

While one of the participants was an advocate for using the services and shared the information as often as possible, PARTICIPANT-N shared "I do. I am an advocate for those who do not. I am on the Board for Mental Illness Awareness and Breast Cancer Awareness pretty much trying to help folks understand not to wait until you are damaged before you recognize you need to take care of yourself," and she also noted that she identified the resources through "the contacts in my network." As previously discussed, the need for tailored and gender-specific services was a critical aspect of the transition and reintegration processes. The following section described the perspectives, thoughts, and experience of this study participants.

Interview question. Are there any gender-specific services that you access? If not, is that something you would be interested in, why or why not?

Finding 5b. This sub-finding aligned with theme availability and accessibility. The findings revealed that in comparison to their male counterparts, women veterans faced additional complexities due to distinctive gender-specific needs (Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013). As previously discussed, this study participants' experienced role and gender disparities, sexual harassment, etc. while serving in the military and continued to experience challenges and problems after departing the military to include being provided resources and services tailored to meet their specific needs whether that is securing comparable employment to gender-specific medical care. Choy et al. (2015) conducted a study relating to the existence of Women's Health Centers (WHCs) reported that of the top 50 ranked Hospitals for Urology "Sixteen of 50 (32%) promoted some type of MHC, compared to 49 of 50 (98%) offering a WHC. Eight of the top 15 ranked institutions (53%) had an MHC compared to eight of 35 (23%) remaining programs. Six of 16 MHCs incorporated providers from a variety of medical disciplines, including urologists, internists, endocrinologists, cardiologists, and psychologists, while another six of 16 MHCs were staffed solely by urologists. Eight of 16 provided services for exclusively urologic issues, four of 16 offered additional services in the treatment of other medical conditions, and four of 16 did not specify" (p. 170). Although there have been significant advancements towards establishing gender-specific women's health resources, the gender-specific resources available to female veterans are not comparable, these study participants reported varied experiences.

When asked, PARTICIPANT-M stated, "I agree that those are necessary." When asked whether she was aware of any gender-specific resources, she was aware of a

"female-only group ran by a female psychologist" but found the support not to be useful because it was "focused on whoever had the worst problems and whoever came with the biggest tragedy then a psychologist saw them." While PARTICIPANT-G shared that she had "recently became aware of a new women's clinic in Hampton, VA." She reported "that the women's clinic is brand new, and it addresses all female veterans. They have come along way but not that far." PARTICIPANT-Q reported "they only have a few services, this is in my opinion, that I have seen specifically for females. They do have a female clinic on base if you need to go there, but they don't have a whole lot of services geared specifically for women, and I'm assuming that's just because women can go to the hospital just like anybody else and get the services there, but I would like to see more services geared specifically for women."

Additionally, PARTICIPANT-N recounted, "when I first existed [sic], I had no idea of the services of how the system works in, and I suffered as a result of that, so it was tough. Be prepared for those folks that are transitioning, and when you move from state to state or these folks that are transitioning that you must re-engage your medical process, you have to reengage a new VA. That was probably one of the most disturbing things for me is that there was not a smooth flow that each VA Center, and they do not always talk to each other. I was traumatized repeatedly trying to get help in the VA and having to explain it over and over every time I moved, and you can see how many times I moved." Some of the participants' experiences were not always positive. For example, PARTICIPANT-E shared that "I don't see them when I go to the VA. I was specific when I asked for a female doctor. Male doctors are fine, but I want a female, and they just put

down a list of doctors, and I might want a female. I can only speak to the one here in

Dallas Fort Worth; they are quick just to assign you a person and you even though you

request a female doctor. They just look at you like you are just a veteran, and you have no

gender, and we all fit into one box." PARTICIPANT-C shared, "I have been out here in

Monterey, so I don't recall hearing of any. I have been asked [sic] questions about if I

experienced any sexual assault or anything like that. But I do not know that it was

necessary just because I was a woman. I don't know if there are some programs out there

or if they have something set up to ask specifically [sic] when you come in." When asked

if she felt that gender-specific resources and services would be beneficial, she responded:

"I think so."

Furthermore, PARTICIPANT-F reported, "I did not use any gender-specific

services. I would be more than open to using any that may be available, but I am not

aware of any that suit what my current/past needs are." PARTICIPANT-D stated, "they

lack gender-specific services. I would say that there is also sexual harassment while they

were in the military, but there's no sense that their mindset because I do see that women

that come back from deployment have PTSD and some other coping challenges it's like

it's just a boilerplate and they don't even look at them as women as you know dealing

with certain things differently. It is just that they just classify depression or PTSD, and

they just treat it as if we are men. I would say that it is one of the frustrations that I hear

from a lot of wounded women is that they don't get gender-specific services. We look at

things very differently. We're not saying that we can't do the same job, but we do respond

in different ways."

PARTICIPANT-B reported that "no, I have not had that experience." While PARTICIPANT-H conveyed, "I'm glad they did a women clinic. I got tired of seeing men coming in and setting up a female clinic. They have women in key roles." When asked if she had utilized or was aware of any gender-specific resources in the Maryland area, PARTICIPANT-A described, "I can't say that I did. Because I have heard horror stories, and I can't relate to them which people have gone through." While PARTICIPANT-G expressed, "the only thing, it was the women's clinic before they just had just general clinics. You know that took care of everybody, but now they have women's clinics, and they specialize in women's needs female needs as far as the medical or mental. GYN and Hampton have a building now, which is the women's clinic, and that is what they focus on women's needs." Based on their experiences with veteran resources and services, the participants provide invaluable recommendations. The next section described the participant's suggestions relating to classes, programs, services, and support systems they felt would aid in improving the overall military transition and private-sector reintegration processes for the veteran population.

Interview question. What classes, programs, services, and support systems do you feel need to be added or enhanced to meet the needs of female veterans as they transition into civilian leadership and management roles?

Finding 5c. When I asked for the participant's recommendations, PARTICIPANT-E stated, "wow, that is a good question. I would probably say that one of the biggest ones making the resources available to female veterans. We can sit and talk about it in TAP class, but truth be known that once you get out, things are geared more

towards males. Creating a database for females when they get out showing these are the resources that are available to you. If I had someone who sexual [sic] assault counseling does [sic], you go back to the military to talk about that. With PTSD, it seems like it is all for males, but females need to talk about and know how PTSD affected them. Just getting the resources set up so that so it doesn't seem like it is just for veterans and have a good resource center for females so it not to isolate us or separate us but just more resources available to us." PARTICIPANT-C felt that the TAP program could be improved and offered "you get that one little TAP class. This many months before you get out, and that is it. Should it be something that spans a little bit across a person's career?" While PARTICIPANT-F reported, "I think for female veterans there should be a specific transitioning course offered to address female-specific questions, concerns, ideas that they may be too uncomfortable or embarrassed to ask in a regular TAPS [sic] class. Stressors being a mother, wife, etc. Dressing for success, and avenues they can take or resources available to get clothes for the civilian workforce."

PARTICIPANT-D recommended "focus groups or support groups that speak to women veterans. But when you go into those groups, they do not seem like they understand what they're speaking to women. Include someone with life skills who is a social worker and deal with the issue but not through the lens of challenges. So, I would say that they need to investigate deeper how effective or ineffective the resources are. And for the other thing, I would say is start while the person is on active duty. Programs that educate women and get them talking about rape and sexual harassment. So that females feel comfortable honestly sharing because that is a big issue too. You know when

you are military because you're so afraid that you know it's going to be held against you."

When asked if she felt the existing programs and services could be improved,

PARTICIPANT-B shared, "I think they can improve the transition course. It is weeklong,

and if it were longer, I think other veterans would be or have a better opportunity to

transition to civilians and the civilian sector."

PARTICIPANT-J felt that those programs and services that were effective in one

area would be effective nationwide to improve the overarching effectiveness of veteran

services. She shared the "Virginia Employment Commission; Disabled Veterans

Outreach Program; Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) Programs," and

she went on further to share that she ensured the veterans who used her chapter of the

DAV were fully aware and participated in other organizations' programs. She shared that

"every Tuesday VEC has a Job Fair. As the DAV Commander, whenever I had a Job

Fair, I would contact the VEC and take a DVOP Representative with me so that they

could find people into the system. They ask questions about your specialty. They almost

have your resumé set up right there on the computer. That is what they get paid to do."

While PARTICIPANT-O communicated, "a Leadership, Success, and Executive

Coaching Programs would be good for the mental breakthroughs needed when

Transitioning from uniform to civilian life" would be beneficial. PARTICIPANT-H

revealed "sexual trauma initiatives and outside counseling and referrals. There need to be

more advertisements and an environment to make them feel comfortable enough to where

they can go because otherwise, they hold on to that, and they even will kill themselves or

something. Finally, PARTICIPANT-M recommended "a veteran's center. They get paid

and are supposed to help veterans, but I am finding a lot of the veterans are coming here

to the DAV. Even in the V. Medical Hospital, if they have someone there that can help

and assist with veterans' needs or you have classes or something like that because a lot of

these employment classes that I see are from other organizations not from the VA

specifically that I know of."

Before closing out the interview process, I asked the participants if they had any

additional information or recommendations they wanted to share. PARTICIPANT-N

shared "probably the biggest piece of information of the biggest thing that I wanted to say

was you no further for the folks that are transitioning is in a hold your head up. I would

like to add are is even if you come and I prayed everybody has to know the hidden

physical injury with a disability, it can be very trying and tough, especially as it relates to

psychological and don't be shy about asking for help educate yourself. I'll talk to

somebody that may not be in it's in the system to help you that somebody has been

through it already and there are people out there that can help you be surprised there is

this thing called Beauty and Booths on Facebook join Beauty and Boots because now you

can just go out there and whatever name you have, and people are giving love out there

without any judgment." While PARTICIPANT-E communicated "getting us all prepared,

that is the biggest thing being better prepared. If we know when where and how and what

to expect once we get out, especially if you have been in over ten years to 15 years, you

are expecting things to be like before you came in, but you are in for a culture shock. It

just knocked the sail out of me. TAP is good, but it is going to take more than a three to

four-day class. Resources to help us get set up go that we are not failing or ending up on

the streets. Knowing what to do. Better medical outreach. I mean, I see some of the veterans and think maybe if they had more before getting out, they might not be as bad as they are. Just know the decrease in pay. I know they leave that up to us to know our finances, but it would be good to know that you need to have this much in your savings to offset the cost. Thank God I was a penny pincher because I would have had to look into how you get food stamps. When you are not prepared [sic], I just know that it is going to be bad." Finally, PARTICIPANT-A stated, "I said it previously, and the thing that has worked the absolute best for me is networking. The number one thing that female veterans, because some time they have a hard time, your networking base. My networking base is what has made it so smooth even though there were some bumps in the road networking made it, so descents and not made it such a bad trip."

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study answered the formulated research question. The participants offered detailed information to the semi structured interview questions, during face-to-face and SKYPE interviews, which aided in responding to the research question. The participants shared their perceptions, accounts, and experiences, whether positive or negative, relating to their reasons for joining the military, their skills while serving in the military, transitioning from the military, reintegrating into the private sector, and the post-military resources and services. The central research question was: "What are the lived experiences of female NCO veterans, with management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from the military service and reintegration into private-sector employment?"

There were five categories and several themes and sub-themes identified for each of the interview questions. The participants shared their viewpoints and reflections relating to the challenges they experience during service while transitioning and reintegrating—the findings from the interview questions aided in answering the central research question. The first category was choosing the military, and the associated emergent themes included seeking opportunities, seeking security/stability, tradition or culture, and service to the country. The participants shared their reasons for joining the military. The second category was serving in the military, and related emergent themes were an occupational specialty and being a female and non-commissioned officer. The participants shared their experiences of serving in the military and the challenges associated with being a female and NCO in the military, the role and gender disparities, as well as having to deal with sexual harassment, abuse, and trauma.

With the third category being military transition and the identified emergent themes were feelings of uncertainty, transitioning challenges, flexible transitioning experience, and recommendations. The participants shared their experiences during the transition process and expressed their feelings of insecurity in the face of losing years of financial and employment security and stability. The fourth category emerged as private-sector reintegration, and the associated emergent themes were flexible reintegration experience, reintegration challenges; over-employed/underemployed; employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness; and transitional program effectiveness. Additionally, the participants shared that they experienced difficulties in securing comparable private-

sector employment as well as their feelings of anxiety associated with translating years of management and leadership experience.

The fifth and final category was resources & services, and the linked emergent themes were accessibility & barriers and gender-specific resources availability & accessibility. The participants shared their thoughts on the availability, accessibility, and effectiveness of the resources and services provided to them post-military. Notably, this study revealed that female NCO veterans felt that the transition assistance provided was insufficient in preparing to separate or retiring military members to reintegrate into comparable private-sector employment successfully. I discuss these findings in detail in Chapter 5, along with concluding statements and recommendations for future research and application.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from military service and reintegration into the private-sector. The reason for conducting this study was in response to the identified need for further research of the interpretations and personal meanings female military NCO veterans assigned to their challenges, coping strategies, and survival associated with their experiences to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid to senior management and or leadership levels (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). To address this gap in the existing literature, I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study utilizing semi structured interviews. Department of Defense may use the key findings of this study, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, policymakers, communities, corporate management, private-sector employers, and others in the management field to gain a greater understanding of, and improve awareness, the challenges associated with military transition and private-sector reintegration as well as aid in tailoring and transforming existing transition assistance programs better to meet the needs of the U.S. veteran population. This study may result in positive social change within the military, government agencies, and civilian organizations where female NCO veterans may share their experiences through networking, mentorship, and coaching to aid in developing both social support and effective coping strategies for addressing military transition and private-sector reintegration. The exploration of the problem assisted in conducting an in-depth evaluation and analysis of the interview data collected

from 16 female veterans who shared their experiences of military transition and private-sector reintegration. This study's key findings were based on five prevalent categories to include (a) choosing the military, (b) being in the military, (c) military transition, (d) private-sector reintegration, and (e) resources, and services. These five categories, as well as 17 emergent themes, substantiated the central research question that guided the study. The new information presented in this study related to the intersection of transitioning (see Anderson et al., 2012; Hachey et al., 2016; Kintzle et al., 2015) and reintegration (Elnitsky et al., 2017) amongst female NCO veterans may generate a new area of management and leadership research not addressed in the extant literature.

Interpretation of Findings

The impetus for this study originated from the work of the Burkhart and Hogan (2015), DAV (2014), Herman and Yarwood (2014), McAllister et al. (2015), Vogt et al. (2016), and others who reported on the challenges women veterans encountered when transitioning from the military and reintegrating back into civilian society and the private-sector workplace. Researchers including Burkhart and Hogan (2015), Herman and Yarwood (2014), and McAllister et al. (2015) explored military transition and civilian society and employment reintegration challenges over a broad range of subject matters as discussed throughout this study. Nonetheless, a persistent gap in the literature exists in understanding the unique meanings of the lived experiences of female NCO veterans who transitioned from the military and reintegrated into civilian society and private-sector employment with 5 to 20+ years of management experience and higher education ranging from Associates to a Doctoral degree as reported in this study findings.

Two concepts informed the analysis of the themes that emerged from the lived experiences of female NCO veterans who transitioned from military service and reintegrated into the private-sector. Schlossberg's concept of adult transitioning and Nicholson's work-role transition concept provided insight into this study participants' military transition and private-sector reintegration experiences. Schlossberg's concept of adult transitioning provided a conceptual lens to evaluate the career transitioning of female NCO veterans throughout the various phases that transpired over time. While Nicholson's work-role transition concept was useful in describing the work-role adjustments when reintegrating into a private-sector, or other nonmilitary, workplace, as a conceptual lens having driven this study, Schlossberg's transition model enabled 16 female NCO veterans to describe, giving them a voice, and highlight the phenomena as defined by their lived experiences (Flowers et al., 2014). This study allowed female NCO veterans to communicate their lived experiences of transitioning from the military and reintegrating to the private-sector in such a way that expanded on the phenomena of transitioning and reintegrating in this unique environment.

The findings aligned to the conceptual framework used in the study since I explored the lived experienced female NCO veterans, as well as the associated challenges and the strategies employed during military transition and reintegration into the private-sector. The conceptual framework used in this study was framed by two conceptual models to include Schlossberg's transition model and Nicholson's work-role model. These models allowed for the exploration of the challenges female NCO veterans encounter during the transition from military service and reintegrating into new private-sector work-

role (Drebing et al., 2007; Glover-Graf et al., 2010). The findings aligned to the conceptual framework, which supported the process of identifying the practices that could assist in minimizing or alleviate challenges associated with military transition and private-sector reintegration. The study findings were consistent with Schlossberg's transition model in that none of the participant's transition experiences were exactly alike (Coll et al., 2012; Coll & Weiss, 2016). These study findings aligned to Schlossberg's transition model as the participant's provided first-hand accounts of their experiences associated with psychological distress and depression during the transition and attempting to reintegrate into civilian society and workforce (see Koenig et al., 2014). The authors found that "veterans' experiences resulted from an underlying tension between military and civilian identities consistent with reverse culture shock. Participants described challenges and strategies for managing readjustment stress across three domains: intrapersonal, professional/educational, and interpersonal" (Koenig et al., 2014, p. 414). The findings also aligned with the conceptual framework and Schlossberg's transition model. In that, the participants reported being unprepared to search for successfully and secure private-sector employment highlighting the reasons as 'unrealistic expectations for the kinds of job opportunities veterans qualify for, as well as salary, the veteran perception of having to 'start over' as a civilian, and difficulty understanding how military experience translates to civilian employment' (Kintzle et al., 2015, p. 1).

The conceptual framework, which was also framed by the reintegration model and Nicholson's work-role model, was aligned to the findings in that the participants reported that reintegrating from a military community to a civilian population required the

individual to alter personal, relational, participation in community groups, as well as societal, components (Elnitsky et al., 2017). These factors enabled or hindered advantageous reintegration. The ability to cope with stressful life events, such as private-sector reintegration, was a critical aspect of successful reintegration. The findings also aligned with Nicholson's work-role transition model, which was useful in describing the work-role adjustments when reintegrating into a private-sector workplace. The results advanced existing literature in that participants reported, displaying a degree of anxiety associated with their experiences, gender inequalities, during and after their military service. The participants' understanding and skills obtained throughout their military careers and in the private-sector, exposed the profound influence of their gender on their lives and careers.

The transition from military service to civilian life is a foreseeable but stressful life event. Not all individuals (a) experience transition in the same way; (b) manage associated challenges effectively; and/or (c) can apply the resiliency, adapted while serving, to ensure success as evident in the findings reported in this study. While the research on the female NCO veterans is minimal, the findings reported in this study aligned to previous literature on the challenges veterans encountered when attempting to transition from the military service successfully and reintegrate into private-sector employment (see Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; DAV, 2014; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015; Vogt et al., 2016). The findings reported in this study provided greater insight into, as presented in Chapter 2, the enduring inability of many female NCO veterans with years of management and leadership experience to transition and

reintegrate into private-sector employment. As reported in Chapters 2 and 4 of this study, there was a wide range of challenges associated with military transition and private-sector reintegration.

Finding 1. The findings associated with research question one indicated that the participants enlisted in the military for various reasons. Based on the analysis of the findings, four sub findings emerged to include:

- Finding 1a. Seeking opportunities.

- Finding 1b. Seeking security/stability.

- Finding 1c. Tradition or culture.

- Finding 1d. Service to the country.

Finding 2. Describes the various occupational specialties that the participants held at the time of enlistment. The six sub findings are listed below. Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically aligned to the recommendations in this chapter and warrants further details as discussed below.

- Finding 2a. Traditional occupations.

- Finding 2b. Nontraditional occupations.

- Finding 2c. Being a female and non-commissioned officer.

- Finding 2d. Role disparities.

- Finding 2e. Gender inequalities.

- Finding 2f. Psychological distress and sexual trauma.

Findings 2a and 2b. Another factor that impacted female NCO veterans' ability to transition from the military successfully and reintegrate into private-sector

employment was the deep-seated stereotypes that women could only hold specific roles. Bensahel et al. (2015) maintained that women consistently faced challenges if attempting to gain employment in positions other than medical, explicitly nursing, retail, administration, and or as an educator, to name a few. As discussed in Chapter 2, in the early 1990s, the roles of female enlisted personnel shifted to meet the needs of military operations and mission objectives (see Robertson et al., 2014). This study's participants overwhelmingly reported being exposed to similar stereotypes when enlisting and throughout their military careers. Upon joining, they were encouraged to enlist in, and because of the engrained perceptions accepted, what were considered traditional female roles as reported in previous literature. This study findings, 2a and 2b, confirmed the conclusions of existing research with 14 (87.5%) of the 16 participants serving in administrative, medical, or personnel roles. Of the female NCO veteran participants, only two (12.5%), who dared to go against traditions, and enlisted in nontraditional female roles as a torpedo mate and an intelligence analyst. But both experienced gender-related challenges with one female NCO veterans sharing "the females' big task was to stay on the ship and just watch and say it's coming this way or don't move. We were not in charge. That was our job just to stand there and look."

In 2013, women were granted opportunities equivalent to those of their male counterparts and allowed to serve in combat roles and other occupational roles historically held by men (McGraw et al., 2016; Prividera & Howard, 2014). Despite these documented changes, 75% of this study participants reported role/gender inequalities throughout their entire military careers. Although 62.5% of this study participants

deployed during their military careers, these women also reported being degraded and demeaned by their superiors and male counterparts. In one instance, a participant said that a superior asked her to prostitute herself. In contrast, others reported psychological distress and sexual trauma challenging Prividera and Howard's (2014) arguments highlighted that by setting the above historical precedents, the value of women's contributions to the military and this country.

  Finding 2e and 2f. The BLS (2017) reported that acknowledged role assignments played a significant role in determining an individual's career path. Bem (1981) asserted that engrained perceptions always impacted an individual's communicative and approachability behavior. Existing literature extended further, as reported in finding 2e, with the participants reporting the exacerbation of their issues with stereotypes by the exposure to role/gender disparities throughout their careers. The findings included a statement such as "the females were more so tolerated [sic] and utilized as picked on sexual objects;" "they pushed the men to move up. When it came to specialty positions or specialty schools, they would always say well we got to send him, and they would say you can go next time. Next time was always further and further down the road and even in leadership positions," and "in some instances may be more so when I became senior NCO. I felt that male SNCO had a louder voice than female SNCOs."

  Additionally, these findings became even more complicated with the subjection of two of the participants to sexual trauma first-hand, and on more than one occasion, with one participant sharing, as discussed in finding 2f, her first conversation with a superior result in "he introduced himself, and he asked me how was my trip…he asked me if I

wanted to make some extra money and I said how am I going to make some extra

money? Because I am thinking [sic], they have some jobs like aviation, but at the time, I

did not know about aviation, with special incentive pay. He was talking about

prostitution."

Finding 3. One of the most critical factors, and key findings, to successfully

transition is the availability of adequate resources. Based on the findings reported in this

study, military transition emerged as the third category. The findings uncovered that the

lack of an effective transition program that efficiently contributed to successful transition

continued to be a shared management problem that spans beyond the military

departments and the Department of Defense to other government agencies and private-

sector organizations (Cronk, 2015; Kamarck, 2018; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

2015b). Finding 3 revealed that overwhelming the participants felt that the TAP

assistance provided prior to transition lacked effectiveness. Although all of this study's

findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants

further details as discussed below. The sub findings associated with this finding are

indicated below:

- Finding 3a. Feelings of uncertainty.
- Finding 3b. Transition challenges.
- Finding 3c. Flexible transitioning experience.
- Finding 3d. Recommendations.

Despite the implementation of the new Transition GPS, finding 3 revealed that

most of the participants found that both programs were ineffective. The new program

included subject matters ranging from financial planning, family concerns, to the U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs allowances (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c;

Kamarck, 2018). Additionally, a Department of Labor career workshop that provided

services such as resume development, job interviews, and searches exercises, as well as

social media use to college, career, and business-ownership planning (Department of

Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018). Cronk (2015), Kamarck (2018), and the U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs (2015b) addressed the lack of an effective TAP program

that efficiently contributed to successful transition continued to be a shared management

problem that spans beyond the military departments and the Department of Defense to

other government agencies and private-sector organizations.

Finding 3a. This key finding uncovered that a sense of unpreparedness was a

significant hindrance to successfully transitioning and reintegrating. Despite having years

of management experience and higher education, 68.8% of the female NCO veterans

reported they were unprepared for transition and reintegration. One female veteran

reported that she "had no idea as to how to go through the job interviews or how to

transition from the military to civilian," while another stated, "as far as going back into

the working world I don't feel like I was prepared [sic] at all." These findings are

consistent with other studies conducted by Bem (1981), Bensahel et al. (2015), BLS

(2017), DeGroat and Crowley (2013), Kintzle et al. (2015), and others who examined the

causes, and resulting outcomes, associated with female veterans, as well as service

providers, believes that veterans were unprepared to successfully transition and

reintegrate into private-sector employment.

Finding 3b. Additionally, findings presented in Chapter 4 of this study confirmed the findings in previous literature, as reported in Chapter 2, Crampton (2018), Morin (2011), Routon (2014) and others maintained that today's veteran population struggles were more complicated than previous generations of veterans who transitioned from the military and reintegrated to civilian life. McAllister et al. (2015) reported that 44% of veterans reported experiencing some type of problem during transition and reintegration. This study finding 3b expanded this literature, with 68.8% of the participants reporting they experienced challenges throughout the process and, in some cases, beyond. Moreover, published literature (see DAV, 2014; Gould & Obicheta, 2015; Strauss, 2016; Szelwach et al., 2011) highlighted an additional obstacle of translating management skills to comparable private-sector employment but none addressed the challenges female NCO veterans, with years of mid to senior-level management and leadership, encountered.

Finding 4. Finding 4 is related to the participants' experiences reintegration into the private sector. Kirchner, Coryell, and Yelich Biniecki (2014) emphasized the importance of acknowledging the challenges of reintegrating into a civilian culture and the obstacles of becoming student veterans. Although this literature focused on student veterans, the finding of this study expanded the literature from the perspectives of acknowledging and understanding the challenges not only female NCO veterans faced, but veterans in general, during reintegration. Gould and Obicheta (2015) maintained that of the 256 female veterans surveyed, 82% reported difficulties readjusting to the private-sector, and only 37% believed private-sector employers acknowledged their military service and experience. Additionally, McAllister et al. (2015) asserted that "veterans are

having a difficult time reintegrating back into the civilian sector following their service, with nearly 44% reporting some type of problem" (p. 93). These bodies of literature were confirmed by these study findings that revealed that 81.3% of this study participants reported experiencing difficulties during reintegration and adjustment to private-sector. This finding has five sub findings as indicated below. Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below.

- Finding 4a. Flexible reintegration experience.

- Finding 4b. Reintegration challenges.

- Finding 4c. Over-employed/underemployed.

- Finding 4d. Private sector employers' misperceptions/lack of awareness.

- Finding 4e. Transitional program effectiveness.

- Finding 4f. Skills and experience translation challenges.

As discussed in Chapter 2, many private-sector companies, to include General Electric, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Walmart to name a few, recruitment initiatives focus on attracting and hiring commissioned officer over NCO veterans thus making clear distinctions in private-sector career paths (O'Keefe, 2015; So, 2012). By focusing on hiring commissioned officer's veterans, companies overlooked valuable assets with years of experience, education, and management training and expertise, confirmed in finding 4 of this study. Most of this study participants had 15 to 20 years of management and leadership experience with three having more than 20 years; six had 15 to 20 years; two had 12 to 15 years; one had 10 to 12 years; three had 5 to 10 years, and only one had less

than five years of management experience. At the time of reintegration, all the

participants had higher education with two had some college, one had Associates, five

had Bachelor, seven had Master's degrees, and one had a Doctoral degree. The findings

also revealed that only 25% of the participants secured employment at the management

level.

Finding 4c. This key finding expanded existing literature with some of the

participants' perspectives being "I took the TAPS [sic] class before retirement, which

was not useful for securing employment." When asked if the program was useful, one

participant shared "the only thing beneficial to me with the TAP program was the VA

part;" to "they just gave you the information. This [sic] is what the military is and what

you can do, and some of it was just was not as clear cut. Instead of them just focusing on

the fact that now you're transitioning. I know the program that you stick with that script,

and this is what you do but if they can break it down to see who's going to be staying,

who is going to be doing what, what is the best job market so that you know what the

opportunities are out there. I think that would have been a lot more helpful" and "they

concentrated on personnel stuff instead of transitional stuff, so I would say that they were

not useful."

This study finding also revealed that most of this study participants had 15 to 20

years of management and leadership experience with three having more than 20 years;

six had 15 to 20 years; two had 12 to 15 years; one had 10 to 12 years; three had 5 to 10

years, and only one had less than five years of management experience. At the time of

reintegration, all of the participants had higher education with two had some college, one

had Associates, five had Bachelor, seven had Master degrees, and one had a Doctoral

degree while only 25% of the participants secured employment at the management level.

These findings were consistent with Bensahel et al. (2015) assertions that women could

obtain corporate management and leadership roles, making comparable salaries as their

male counterparts despite equal, or in some cases surpassing, talents, and experience.

These assertions were further confirmed by finding 4c with one participant stating, "I got

the little $10 to $11 an hour jobs…I would write down what I was getting in the military,

and they would say oh, you are not going to make that here. I am just now making what I

was making in the military." It took this female NCO veteran, with a doctoral degree, ten

years of management experience, and 20 years of service, 11 years after retiring to secure

comparable wages to those she earned in the military.

Finding 4f. As discussed in finding 4f of this study, the participants reported that

one of the critical factors that contributed to their challenges of securing employment was

the inability to translate military management skills and experience to private-sector

employment. These findings indicated that 8 (50%) of the 16 participants were employed

which also aligned to earlier results reported by Zoli et al., 2015, in which research,

indicated that 39% of service members transitioning from service to civilian a life as well

as other findings in previous literature (see DAV, 2014; Hardison, & Shanley, 2016;

Hardison et al., 2015) relating to the challenges of translating management and

leadership skills.

Coll and Weiss (2016) and Gonzalez et al. (2014) maintained the primary issue,

associated with translating military skills to the private-sector workforce, was the

variation in the organizational structure in the private-sector versus the military resulting

in female NCO veterans having insufficient experiences. These study participants shared

"taking my evaluations and translating into a resume was a challenge," while another

reported "when you saw HR, there were many facets of HR, which is my background,

and of course, trying to translate from military garda to civilian garda was a challenge. I

may look up Administrative Specialist, but when you look it up for civilian, it is not what

it says it says, Secretary. So that website was beneficial in translating my military to

civilian," and one participant believed that being "successful in the military, I thought I

would be able to translate them over to my new role and be successful as well."

In 2015, 71.5% of working-age (e.g., 17 to 64 years old) female veterans were in

the labor force compared to 70.1% for nonveteran women, with 34% secured

employment in the government sector compared to their counterparts with 16% (U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017b). The findings, specifically finding 4f, challenged

existing findings, thus providing a greater understanding of the challenges female NCO

veterans face attempting to secure private-sector management employment at a

comparable level held while serving in the military. The findings revealed that 50% of

the participants were employed with five holding government positions leaving only

three securing private-sector employment. The findings furthered expanded existing

literature with two of the female NCO veterans reporting that it took them 7 to 11 years

after retirement to secure comparable private-sector employment; while another

participant, who retired four years ago, remained unemployed; and others reported

working minimum wage jobs despite their management experience, higher education, and training.

Finding 5. Resources and services emerged as the fifth category. Schlossberg's model incorporated four key factors that influenced the process of transition and provided a conceptual lens for exploring and evaluating female NCO veterans transition from the military services. The model also served as a mechanism for broadening the contextual perspectives relating to military separation or retirement highlighting the critical need for the transformation of existing programs, counseling, resources, and joint transition initiatives tailored to meet the needs of female NCO veterans and the U.S. veteran population (Anderson et al., 2012; Elnitsky et al., 2017). Although all of this study's findings has significance, some specifically extends the existing literature and warrants further details as discussed below. The sub findings associated with finding 5 include:

- Finding 5a. Accessibility and barriers.

- Finding 5b. Availability of services.

- Finding 5c. Participant's recommendations.

Finding 5a and 5b. Another gap in existing literature was the lack of gender-specific resources provided to female NCO veterans and the U.S. female veteran population. Although there were significant advancements towards establishing gender-specific women's health resources, this study's findings revealed, as reported by the participants, that the gender-specific resources available to female veterans are not comparable (DAV, 2014; Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013; Street et al., 2009; Vogt et al., 2016). In comparison to their male counterparts, women veterans faced

additional complexities and barriers associated with a set of unique issues (e.g., female related service-connected risk factors and inadequate transitioning education, counseling, and preparation focus on dealing with their problems) and distinctive gender-specific needs (DAV, 2014; Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013; Street et al., 2009; Vogt et al., 2016) calling for the need for gender-specific resources for not only female NCO veterans but all female veterans. Choy et al. (2015) conducted a study relating to the existence of Women's Health Centers (WHCs) reported that of the top 50 ranked Hospitals for Urology "Sixteen of 50 (32%) promoted some type of MHC, compared to 49 of 50 (98%) offering a WHC" (p. 170). This compilation of literature was expanded in this study findings, specifically finding 5b, described how participants reported experiencing challenges and problems after departing the military to include being provided resources and services tailored to meet their specific needs. Existing literature expanded the findings presented in this study, which documented the participants varied experiences with most agreeing there was a lack of knowledge, awareness, and accessibility calling for the need for greater understanding and allocated resources for gender-specific services provided to female veterans. The findings ranged from perspectives that female experiences "with depression and PTSD were not the same as male veterans and healthcare providers tended to treat women like they were men." This finding also advanced the literature in that participants reported: "that a lot of wounded women did not have access to gender-specific services, and in some cases any services, nor were they afforded the opportunity to seek them out."

Furthermore, literature expanded this research documenting the participant's perspectives that "they were not saying that they could not do the same jobs successfully but felt that it was important to share that women respond in different ways. For example, the impact and aftermath of combat and military service in some cases affect women differently, particularly in those experiences associated with sexual trauma." Additionally, finding 5a revealed that most of the participants reported they were "unaware of the services and only found out about available services and resources after transitioning through networking and visiting the VA website."

Limitations of the Study

This study presented several limitations. These study limitations included the issue of trustworthiness, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, that emerged throughout the research process. The limitations previously addressed were credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Although credibility was a limitation, an audit trail was maintained to ensure credibility. The limitation of dependability was addressed, through detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected, using an audit trail as well. Additionally, I used member checking as a validation technique to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The use of reflexive journaling and taking steps ensured that my perspectives did not influence the results, aided in providing confirmability (see Anney, 2014; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). These techniques ensured the presentation of accurate data and findings and the misinterpretation of the intended meaning of the participants' responses.

Another limitation of this study was the inclusion criteria that applied restricted boundaries to the validity of the study, hindering generalizability and transferability. Because qualitative research produced transferable results as opposed to generalizable findings, the findings were representative of other female veterans who are not NCO or not enlisted members of the military because of purposeful sampling. There was no impact on the study data because the participants communicated their experiences and thoughts articulately, expressively, and reflectively (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Additionally, there were study limitations based on the fact that I was the primary data collection instrument (see Patton, 2015). The process of bracketing was employed to ensure that my frame of reference and experiences did not influence the interpretation of the participants' lived experiences (see Gearing, 2004) as well as lessen the possibility of changing the participant's perspectives or knowledge of the phenomenon by acknowledging and mitigating any personal presumptions and the potential for bias (see Lomangino, 2015; O'Halloran et al., 2016; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Another limitation was the ability to overcome any participants' perceived vulnerabilities relating to predetermined assumptions, sociocultural, and current employment status. The steps employed (e.g., ensuring them their names do not appear in the reported findings, briefing them on how the data would be secured, etc.) reassured the participants that confidentiality of their participation and information were protected (see Killawil et al., 2014). Furthermore, the transferability of the findings also presented a limitation because the female NCO veterans were from the Eastern and Southern parts of the country resulting in the conclusions potentially applying to other female NCO

veterans, as well as the U.S. veteran population, across the United States or around the

world. Also, the findings included comprehensive explanations of the participant's

selection and recruitment processes. By providing the details of the purposive sampling

methodology used for selecting the participants, the use of the findings in other

environments, and research settings with comparable participants. As described in

Chapter 1, another limitation was the usage of snowball sampling technique. As reported,

snowball sampling assisted in identifying additional participants (Frogner et al., 2016;

Robert, 2015). The process of snowball sampling entailed the solicitation of information,

from identified participants or organizations representatives, about other potential

participants (Robert, 2015). The participants were selected based on their transition and

reintegration experiences and their ability or inability to secure management and

leadership private-sector employment parallel to that held during military service as well

as their willingness to openly share their experiences of serving in the military,

transitioning, and reintegration to private-sector employment. The study was limited

using the interviewees to identify other potential veterans to take part in the study. The

strategies employed in this study served as the basis to define any possible shortcomings

and weaknesses of the findings obtained and reported in this study.

Recommendations

In September 2019, the U.S. veteran population totaled over 19 million, with

enlisted veterans accounting for well over 17 million (U.S. Department of Veterans

Affairs, 2019). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2019) reported the total number

of female veterans was over 1.7 million. The veteran female population is the fastest-

growing and represented about 9% of the U.S. Veteran population and projected to

account for 15% by 2035 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018b). Most of these

veterans' exposure to societies, traditions, and experiences that their civilian counterparts

have not, which resulted in treatment and mindsets that may cause additional challenges

when transition and reintegrating into civilian society and workplaces. Although the

participants in this study resided in the Eastern and Southern parts of the U.S., military

veterans reintegrate across the U.S. each day making it critical to advance partnered

efforts to develop a sufficient baseline to aid in efforts to provide a greater understanding,

better prepare future veterans, and better serve the current veteran population.

In this study, I explored how factors inherent to military transition and private-

sector reintegration may impact an individual's ability to successfully transition from the

military and reintegrate into a private-sector workplace environment. This research

addressed a gap in the literature revealed in a review of the existing literature. There is a

need to, first, acknowledge the extent of, understand the factors (e.g., effective transition

programs, employers' awareness, skills translation, resources, etc.) and challenges that

influence the military transition and private-sector reintegration experiences, to better

understand and support female NOC veterans. Scholars and decision-makers agreed that

additional research was needed to further situational awareness and knowledge relating to

these factors and other likely difficulties and negative consequences associated with

persisted unemployment and economic issues faced by the veteran population (Council

on Veteran Employment, 2015; DAV, 2014; Kintzle et al., 2015).

By providing an in-depth, rich understanding of how female NCO veterans experience military transition and private-sector reintegration, there is the potential to obtain a more precise recognition of this phenomenon. Furthering knowledge and awareness about the lived experiences of 16 female NCO veterans supported greater understanding and acknowledgment of the challenges they faced, how they managed their experiences, and the similarities in events, stressors, and coping strategies that exists amongst the participants. There is an abundance of opportunities for further research associated with advancing the amount of qualitative, and possibility quantitative, research relevant to military transition, private-sector reintegration, and the field of management. Although the analysis of the data from this qualitative phenomenological study is not exhaustive, the data and findings uncovered several specific opportunities for future research (Moustakas, 1994). The recommendations discussed in this section are result-driven and data-driven and emerged from the findings reported in this study. This study addressed the perspectives of female NCO veterans during military transition and reintegration into civilian society and, in some cases, private-sector employment. As described in this study findings, transitioning and reintegration can be challenging, stressful, and cause insurmountable uncertainty (Anderson et al., 2012; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Hachey et al., 2016; Kintzle et al., 2015).

In 2011, the TAP model redesign revamped the program from an optional 3-day model to a mandatory five-day workshop, with additional days of optional training, that included a collaborative model evolving to a series of GPS-based curriculum, services, and processes (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014; Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck,

2018). Although the new program represented a meaningful step towards enhancing the

transition and reintegration processes, officials and policymakers continued to challenge

the overall effectiveness; communicated the need for continued process improvements;

and agreed a more integrated approach was needed (Cronk, 2015; DAV, 2014;

Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-a; Kamarck, 2018). The GPS was structured to

enhance skills to prepare service members for private-sector reintegration, ensuring

members depart the military as 'career-ready' as possible regardless of the branch of

service (Department of Defense TAP, n.d.-c; Kamarck, 2018).

Further improvements should be made to the transition assistance program to

incorporate the necessary training and support. It is imperative to adequately implement

the changes as indicated above to ensure that not only female NCO veterans, but to

prepare all military veterans and family members before the transition. To ensure they are

prepared to reintegrate, secure comparable employment, and obtain adequate housing to

become productive members of civilian society (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

2015b). Approximately 32% of this study participants were still serving in the military

during the implementation of the new program. They felt that the new program was not

useful and did not aid in preparing them for employment outside of the military nor did it

align to the "Military Life Cycle (MLC)," see Figure 4, and provided structured

milestones that spanned across their military careers (Department of Defense, n.d.-b; U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015b). The participants reported the need for

"resources to help us get set up so that we are not failing or ending up on the streets and

knowing what to do — better medical outreach. I mean, I see some of the veterans and

think maybe if they had more before getting out, they might not be as bad as they are," as well as "You get that one little TAPS [sic] class many months before you get out and that's it. Should it be something that spans a little bit across a person's career?" The participants felt there were not ample opportunities to better align their military paths to better plan for civilian careers.

As previously highlighted, the study findings were consistent with the narratives in existing literature, with the findings capturing the variations in the challenges and obstacles individuals experienced. For example, most of the participants described a sense of unpreparedness and uncertainty, which caused stress and depression. In contrast, others reported their transition as being more flexible and nonchallenging, citing reasons such as "I didn't have any challenges because I had seen other people's challenges or struggles so that minimized mine." Therefore, further research is needed to explore the area of transitioning challenges not only better to understand the process but to determine the underlying reasonings, and root causes, for most veterans consistently reporting a lack of success but to also learn from the experiences, procedures, and practices of those whose transition was more flexible and nonchallenging. This knowledge can also aid in improving existing transition programs and resources as well as highlight the importance of developing initiatives that start when a member enlists and provide effective programs, support groups, networking, social media platforms, etc. that are available to veterans indefinitely. It is also essential that these resources involve veterans in the development, implementation, and sustainability processes. Another recommendation is to take a shared-approach to execute fact-based transition and reintegration models better tailored

to meet the female veteran population needs. Consistent reviews and assessments and findings are published, ensuring widespread accessibility. The models should also include the ability to provide real-time feedback as well as continuous process improvements. By improving the TAP resources managers, leaders, government officials, and policymakers may be able to minimize, if not alleviate, ineffectiveness.

Further improvements to the transition assistance resources are possible through partnered efforts and the alignment of the following recommendations to the recommended transition model. Kintzle et al. (2015) reported that service providers and veterans believed that veterans were unprepared to search for successfully and secure private-sector employment highlighting the reasons as "unrealistic expectations for the kinds of job opportunities veterans qualify for, as well as salary, the veteran perception of having to 'start over' as a civilian, and difficulty understanding how military experience translates to civilian employment" (p. 1). This study's participants overwhelmingly reported that they expected their military experience and training, as well as higher education achievements, to translate into meaningful and comparable private-sector employment, which in most cases did not occur. As a result, the recommendation is a partnership between the military, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, government agencies, and private-sector employers, be forged bringing together knowledgeable, educated, and vested individuals who will establish focus groups to evaluate existing veteran employment programs and services for effectiveness. Another recommendation is the establishment of working groups that will concentrate on improving existing resources, if possible; develop and implement continuous process improvement; develop

policies detailing specific roles and responsibilities ensuring buy-in and accountability;

design innovative programs, and plans of execution, that establish milestones at relevant

and critical phases of a female NCO veteran's career and beyond. Future research should

focus on determining what skills are marketable and private-sector employers seek. This

focus might offer comprehensive results and insight into suitable training, education,

experience, and skills that assist veterans in coping with civilian life and securing

employment. Additional research might also help veterans better understand what civilian

employers, recruiters, and hiring managers desire in military veterans, particularly female

NCO veterans who are managers with years of management experience and higher

education, enabling widespread accessibility to employment opportunities for all veterans

as they reintegrate into private-sector employment.

Finally, there is a need for further examination of the lack of gender-specific

services and resources provided to the female NCO veteran population. In comparison to

their male counterparts, women veterans faced additional complexities due to distinctive

gender-specific needs (Smith, 2014; Stein-McCormick et al., 2013) calling for the need

for gender-specific resources for not only female NCO veterans but all female veterans

and male veterans spouses who require services as well. Another recommendation is that

civilian and private organizations, policymakers, government officials, communities, and

the Department of Defense executed a partnered effort to conduct a comprehensive

evaluation of the availability and accessibility of gender-specific services across the

veteran population. The findings ranged from perspectives that female experiences "with

depression and PTSD were not the same as male veterans and healthcare providers

tended to treat women like they were men" and "a lot of wounded women did not have access to gender-specific, and in some cases any services, services nor were they afforded the opportunity to seek them out." By researching and examining those programs that have proven and documented effectiveness and best practices, will better position managers and leaders to develop and implement programs nation-wide and elsewhere as needed to address this study participants' challenges experienced when attempting to identify and gain access to resources and services tailored to meet their specific needs.

Implications

In this section, I provide a summary of the potential impact of the study contributions to positive social change at not only the individual level but organizational and societal levels as well that are consistent with the study findings. Other topics discussed in the following section are implications for practice and concepts.

Social Change Implications

The findings of this study provide useful information and may impact positive social change through the valid documentation of the first-hand accounts of the lived experiences of female NCO veterans. This positive social change implication provides a greater understanding of the phenomenon and acknowledgment of the female NCO veterans' sphere of influence on advancing transition policies, programs, and practices. The findings may influence social change in that they revealed that the female NCO veterans' personal and professional qualities could be furthered through military professional development programs cultivating those qualities sought after by private-sector human resource and hiring managers.

The findings attained in this study may contribute to social change by increasing the attention focused on further enhancing and restructuring existing transition and reintegration initiatives that ultimately contribute to fair use of a misunderstood, underutilized, valuable, and experienced population, thus directly impacting the sustainability of private-sector and government organizations. Managers and leaders can use the findings across the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, corporations, communities, and private-sector employers who have an awareness of this unique population. To enhance their understanding of the impact that female NCO veterans make, resulting in an additional focus on producing more effective support to female NCO veterans' transition and reintegration experience. The findings are essential to military leaders and policymakers as well as senior management team who manage, serve as advocates, recruit, and hire veterans.

The study's findings increase awareness of the perceived challenges associated with military transition and private-sector workforce reintegration. By sharing female NCO veterans' problems experienced during transitioning and reintegration into the private-sector workforce, offered valuable and practical data to management and leadership in the military, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private-sector, as well as policymakers, who provide services and can influence the development of appropriate policies that not only impact female NCO veterans but all veterans as well as all other employees. The collaborative efforts of the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, policymakers, communities, corporate management, and others in the management field in the development or restructuring of transition

assistance and veterans hiring programs to better assist female NCO veterans in securing private-sector employment. These study findings may have social implications in that they capture the processes and behaviors employed by those female NCO veterans who did not, as well as those who experienced some degree of success, secure comparable private-sector management roles. The Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and private companies can benchmark these processes to enhance further transition assistance programs, developmental training, and reintegration education programs.

At the individual level, the female NCO veterans' experiences, which provide informative and practical knowledge, can be used by other veterans who are unable to (a) identify the necessary information relating to employment opportunities and (b) secure private-sector employment. Most employers recruit and hire potential employees with skills that align with a company's needs (Anderson & Goodman, 2014), resulting in the study findings being valuable in that they may aid private-sector employers and hiring managers during the recruitment and hiring processes. The findings reported in this study can provide them invaluable information in gaining a greater understanding of this population of experienced managers as well as the challenges they experience that hinder their successful transition and reintegration.

At the Department of Defense-level, the findings can impact positive social change across the military departments encouraging the usage of more innovative approaches to develop collaborative, amongst the military services, Department of Defense, and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, post-transitional programs and

policies that have an impact not only female NCO veterans successful transition and private-sector reintegration well into the future but the veteran population. At the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and other governing bodies, level, the findings can aid in improving programs and practices at local, state and national levels as well as influence perspectives and provide the necessary information and resources thus improving the accessibility to employment resources for female NCO veterans and the U.S. veteran population. At the private-sector level, the findings can be used to not only provide greater understanding but also advance reintegration education and recruitment programs that have national and global influence through increased interdisciplinary and results-driven management research initiatives. At the societal level, the findings provide new knowledge that may aid in taking a more collaborative approach by employing collective behaviors to address the challenges (e.g., unemployment, medical, PTSD, homelessness, etc.) faced by veterans from a global perspective.

The findings have social implications because of the potential to facilitate more progressive and collaborative behavior, aiding in the reform of existing policies. As well as the development of strategies focused on providing education and training throughout, as opposed to immediately before discharge, separation, or retirement, the female NCO veterans' military career to better prepare them potentially creating more private-sector employment opportunities, particularly at the mid to senior management level. Social innovations and their relation to positive social change impact social integration and improve social equality to aid in the long-term sustainability of society in general (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017). The findings of this study have potential usage to assist in

advancing the approach to management and leadership development across the military

departments through collaborative efforts with other government service providers and

private-sector organizations, thus fostering positive social change.

Practical Implications

These study findings provide valuable information to not only separating or

retiring female NCO veterans but the veteran population. The primary aim for conducting

this study was to explore the lived experiences of female NCO veterans during military

transitioning and private-sector reintegration and their inability to translate years of

management experiences and skills to comparable management positions in the private

sector. The findings present necessary implications and may broaden the awareness of

other veterans, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs,

policymakers, communities, corporate management, and other organizations, associated

with the participants' perspectives of the criticality of developing and implementing

effective transition and reintegration programs and policies. The military and U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs transition counselors, HR, and hiring managers, as well

as recruiters can use the study findings to improve existing services and better understand

the veterans' frame-of-mind and practical preparedness to transition and reintegrate into

private-sector employment (see Robertson & Brott, 2014).

The Department of Defense, the Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs, private-sector employers, communities, families, and other agencies

must understand that transitioning from the military and reintegrating into the private-

sector workforce is a lengthy and complicated process. From a business and professional

practice standpoint, the findings provide a foundation to develop further business initiatives and policies that could aid in addressing the disparities amongst commissioned officers and NCOs. Many private-sector companies, including General Electric, Booz Allen Hamilton, and Walmart, to name a few, recruitment initiatives focus on attracting and hiring commissioned officers over NCO veterans, thus making clear distinctions in private-sector career paths (see O'Keefe, 2015; So, 2012). By focusing on hiring commissioned officer's veterans, companies overlook valuable assets with years of experience, education, and management training and expertise.

Concepts Implications

Considerable literature exists on U.S. military or veterans' transitioning and reintegration primarily focused on the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related issues, mental health issues, and higher learning (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015). However, gaps persist in existing literature relating to female NCO veterans seeking to reintegrate into the private-sector workforce at the mid-level and senior-level management and or leadership level encountered significant challenges in securing employment (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015).

The findings in this study provide an understanding of the increased complexities and challenges female NCO veterans face when reintegrating into the private-sector. An evaluation of existing literature revealed that there was no use of Moustakas (1994) empirical phenomenological design to explore the female NCO veterans' population transition and reintegration lived experiences. The phenomenological research aided in

obtaining comprehensive descriptions that served as the source for a reflective

exploration to describe the essences of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The study findings aligned to Schlossberg's model of adult transitioning, which provided

a conceptual lens to evaluate the career transitioning of female NCO veterans throughout

the various phases transpiring over time. The findings also aligned with Nicholson's

work-role transition model, which was useful in describing the work-role adjustments

when reintegrating into a private-sector workplace. The research design offered

contributions to transition and reintegration research through the use of Lincoln and

Guba's (1985) model for evaluating the validity, reliability, and research quality.

Conclusions

This study was conducted based on existing literature that revealed a gap resulting

in the exploration of the lived experiences of female NCO veterans with years of

management and leadership experience, regarding their transition from military service

and reintegration into private-sector employment and inability to translate years of

management skills and expertise (DAV, 2014; Gould & Obicheta, 2015; Strauss, 2016;

Szelwach et al., 2011). I focused this research on military veterans' transitioning and

reintegration, highlighting the impact of combat-related disabilities, medical-related

issues, mental health issues, higher learning, and male veterans and female officers (see

Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Herman & Yarwood, 2014; McAllister et al., 2015).

Female veterans transition more frequently, are considered the fastest-growing

veteran population, and represented about 9% of the U.S. Veteran population and are

projected to account for 15% by 2035 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018a).

Women will continue to enlist, serve in combat, and transition from the military and the impact on them and their ability, and the psychological impact, to reintegrate into civilian society and private-sector employment, requires further research and not only incorporated into military policy and new programs but implemented and executed. It is vital to take immediate steps and adopt measures, that will guarantee that females veterans who, and will, the transition from the military are prepared, provided adequate services, and are given equal consideration, aligned to that of their male counterparts and military officers, as experienced managers. It is also imperative that female veterans' service to this country and their sacrifices are acknowledged, and respected in service environments, higher education institutions, private-sector workplaces, and in their communities for their service to this country and their sacrifices. A united stand is required to empower these women through consistency in obtaining a greater understanding, advancing awareness, and education.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Date: _____

Start Time: _____

End Time: _____

Interviewee Code Number: _____

Interviewer: Wanda E. Floyd

Introduction

Good morning (afternoon). Thank you for taking the time to participate in this

research effort. Before we begin, I want to take a few minutes to introduce myself. My

name is Wanda Floyd and I am a student in the Walden University PhD in Management

with a specialization in Organizational Leadership Change. The interview process will

begin with a brief demographic questionnaire which will serve as a tool to capture

information relating to your branch of service, highest education, number of years in the

military, etc. Once that information is collected, we will move to the interview process

where you will be asked to share your experiences (a) serving in the military, (b) before

and during transitioning, (c) reintegrating to the private-sector and (d) relating to whether

you were successful in securing management and leadership roles. The primary aim is to

learn from your experiences by capturing your perspectives about military transition and

private-sector reintegration. Please relax and freely express your thoughts and feelings. If

needed, a follow-up interview will be conducted by phone.

Purpose of the Interview

The purpose of this study is to examine and understand the military transition and

private-section reintegration experience of female NCO veterans focusing on the ability

to translate years of management and leadership skills and experience. Your participation

is extremely important and appreciated. For privacy concerns, your identity will not be

revealed and will remain confidential. An interviewee's code number will be used to not

only protect your privacy but to ensure that you are not referred to by name. You may

choose to stop the interview at any time; all information obtained will be discarded.

Audio Recording Instructions

As a reminder, this session will be recorded. Audio-recording your interview will

serve several key purposes to include (a) to allow me to focus on the conversational

aspect of the interview as well as your responses, (b) to ensure that I can capture all

information in detail, and (c) to ensure our discussion remain confidential with no

reference to your identity.

Consent Form

Before we move forward, I invite you to carefully review the letter of consent

before providing your signature and confirm your agreeance to participate in this

interview. Do you have any concerns or questions before we begin?

Demographic Questionnaire

As previously noted, please take a few minutes to provide your responses to the

questions on the demographic questionnaire.

Interview Questions

The major categories and interview questions follow.

Being a Female in the Military

1. Why did you decide to join the military?

2. What was your military occupational specialty or specialty code? Did you select that specialty? If so, why?

3. Where there any differences in the roles males and females held?

4. Do you feel you were treated differently because you were a female? If so, do you have the experience to share?

Non-Commissioned Officer Status

5. How long were you in an NCO status?

6. What was it like being a female NCO veteran?

7. How many years of management and leadership experience did you have as an NCO?

Military Transition

8. Do you feel you were prepared to transition from the military life/culture to civilian life/culture?

9. What experiences, while serving in the military as a female NCO, prepared you for your transition to civilian life?

10. If you feel your transition was successful, what was the one significant action, behavior, and factor that contributed to your success?

11. What challenges, if any, did you face during your transition from the military to civilian life?

12. What specific coping resources enabled you to successfully transition to the civilian workforce?

    (a) How did these coping resources enable you to successfully transition to the

civilian workforce?

13. Who or what have been your sources of support during your transition from the

military to the civilian workforce?

14. What suggestions would you give other female veterans transitioning into the civilian

workforce?

Private-sector Reintegration

15. What was your experience reintegrating into private-sector employment?

(a) If you feel your reintegration was successful, what was the one significant action,

behavior, and factor that contributed to your success?

(b) If you feel your reintegration was unsuccessful, what were the most significant

factors do you feel resulted in your being unsuccessful?

16. What factors have helped you to reintegrate back into society and life roles since

being back in the private sector?

17. What management and leadership traits and abilities do you feel have benefitted, or

hinder, you in the private-sector?

18. What challenges, if any, did you face during your reintegration from the military to

the private-sector workforce?

19. What was your experience with various transitional programs in preparing you to

enter the civilian workforce?

(a) What specific programs did you use?

(b) If none, could you please elaborate further?

20. How does it feel being out of the military and being successful, or unsuccessful, in

the private sector?

Translating Management Skills and Experiences

21. How many years of management experience did you obtain while serving in the military?

22. How do you define management and leadership?

23. Do you feel that effective managers and leaders possess different talents and skills?

24. What were your experiences translating your military management and leadership skills and experience to private-sector management and leadership roles and or positions?

25. What challenges, if any, did you face when attempting to translate your years of management and leadership experience?

26. Looking across your recent military work experiences, what key knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences would you say are most valuable?

27. Setting aside the specific job you were required to do, what activities do these knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences prepare you to do?

28. How did you incorporate your military leadership and management practices into your role today?

Resources and Services

29. Do you access any veteran services? If so which ones?

30. How did you identify the available resources, support systems, and services that impacted your ability to meet your individual needs?

31. Are there any barriers that you can identify that make it difficult for you to access services?

32. Are there any gender-specific services that you access? If not, is that something you would be interested in, why or why not?

33. What classes, programs, services, and support systems do you feel need to be added or enhanced to meet the needs of female veterans as they transition into civilian leadership and management roles?

Transition to Debrief Question

Before we conclude are there any additional comments or thoughts you would like to add to this discussion? Again, I would like to thank you for your time and participation.

Debriefing

Your participation and insightful perspectives are valued and appreciated. The primary aim of this interview was to capture and gain greater insight into your lived experiences associated with military transition and reintegration to private-sector employment. I was especially interested in your perspectives relating to your ability to translate years of management and leadership experiences to private-sector employment. It is important to understand that the interview was not intended to evaluate your performance during or after military service but to allow you to share your perspectives by answering the interview questions to the best of your ability. The findings of this research will inform decision- and policymakers, community leaders, and private-sector employers on military transition and private-sector employment to improve programs and services. I would also like to assure you that your confidentiality will be respected and

maintained, and your personal information will not be incorporated or published, in my dissertation research.

Debrief Question

Is there any additional information that you would like to share that you feel will be useful to this research?

Are there any final questions that you would like to ask me before we close?

Closing

Again, your participation is critical and invaluable to this research. Thank you again for taking the time to participate.

Appendix B Demographic Questionnaire

What branch of the military did you serve in?

____U.S. Air Force ____U.S. Army ____U.S. Navy ____U.S Marines ____U.S. Coast Guard

What is your current marital status?

____Single ____Married ____Divorced or Separated ____Widowed ____Never Married

What is your age? _____

Do you have any children? ____ yes _____ no

Please indicate your highest level of education

____Some College ____Associate ____Bachelors ____Masters ____Doctorate

What is your
Major?_____

How many years of management experience do you have?

_____Less than 5 _____5 to 10 _____10-12 _____12-15 _____15 to 20 _____More than 20

What was your highest rank achieved? _____

When did you transition from the military? _____YYYY _____MMM

How many years did you serve in the military? _____

Did you receive an honorable discharge? _____Yes _____No

Are you currently employed? _____Yes _____No

If so, when did you reintegrate into the private-sector? ____YYYY ____MMM

If you are employed, what is your current job title? _____

How long have you been employed in your current job? _____

Is your current job related to military service? _____ yes _____ no

Have you been deployed? _____ yes _____ no _____