



School of Social Work
and Behavioral Sciences
springfield.edu/swbs

I hereby guarantee that no part of the research project that I have submitted for publication has been heretofore published and/or copyrighted in the United States of America, except in cases of passages quoted from other published sources; that I am the sole author and proprietor of said research project; that the research project contains no matter which, if published, will be libelous or otherwise injurious, or infringe in any way the copyright of any other party; and that I will defend, indemnify, and hold harmless Springfield College against all suits and proceedings which may be brought and against all claims which may be made against Springfield College by reason of publication of said research project.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Shawn Saylor", written over a horizontal line.

Shawn Saylor, Author

A handwritten date "4/9/2020" written over a horizontal line.

Date

Copyright © 2021 Shawn A. Saylor



School of Social Work
and Behavioral Sciences
springfield.edu/swbs

August 2021

We recommend that the thesis/dissertation prepared under our direction by Shawn A. Saylor entitled *Exploring Identity from Military to Civilian Life: A Phenomenological Study* be accepted as fulfilling the research for the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Psychology.

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sally M. Hage", written over a horizontal line.

Sally M. Hage, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "S. Danish", written over a horizontal line.

Steven J. Danish, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Elaine Walen", written over a horizontal line.

Elaine Walen, Psy.D.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Wesley Church II", written over a horizontal line.

Wesley Church II, Dean of School

Exploring Identity from Military to Civilian Life: A Phenomenological Study

By

Shawn A. Saylor, M.A.

A Dissertation Submitted to

Springfield College

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Psychology

School of Social Work and Behavioral Sciences

Department of Psychology

2020

Dissertation Committee: Sally M. Hage, Ph.D., Chair

Steven J. Danish, Ph.D.

Elaine Walen, Psy.D.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the brave men and women who serve in the U.S. Military and protect our freedoms every day. I have had the distinct privilege to be able to work with both active duty soldiers and veterans and it has been a sincere pleasure to be able to learn more about who they are as people. Through various roles and responsibilities, I have had the opportunity to meet wonderful people through my time working with the military and my view of life has changed because of these interactions. Thank you for your sacrifices and for serving our nation.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the assistance, compassion, and patience of so many individuals. I am very fortunate to have had the support of my dissertation committee, Dr. Sally Hage, along with Dr. Steve Danish and Dr. Elaine Walen, throughout this process. Your continuous encouragement, knowledge, and belief in me are greatly appreciated and I could not have done this without you. I would like to also thank my friends and family who have been there for me every step of the way. Specifically, my mom, sister, dad, and Sharon have been guiding lights throughout the process and I could not have done this without them. Lastly, I am in gratitude forever to all of the brave men and women in uniform who serve our country. This project would not have been possible without the relationships made over the years working with the Army and I truly appreciate all the knowledge you bestowed upon me about how to be a better man. Thank you.

May 2021

S.S.

Table of Contents

	Page
Dedication.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	9
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	10
Background and Context	10
Statement of the Problem	13
Statement of Purpose.....	13
Research Questions.....	14
Rationale and Significance	14
Role of the Researcher	15
Assumptions and Biases	16
Definitions of Key Terminology	19
Summary	19
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	21
Overview	21
History of Identity	22
Identity Models.....	24
Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development	24
Berzonsky’s Social Cognitive Model of Identity	27
Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory	29
McAdams’s Life Story Model of Identity	31

Transition Models.....	33
Bridge’s Transition Model	33
Schlossberg’s Transition Model.....	36
Military Transition Theory	38
Soldier Life Cycle Transition Model	40
Athletic Identity and Transition.....	41
Military Culture	43
Challenges of Adjustment and Transition	45
Risk Factors	45
Protective Factors.....	47
Gender Differences	48
Summary.....	50
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	52
Research Design	52
Participants	53
Sampling Procedures	55
Theoretical Foundation.....	57
Data Collection Procedures	58
Data Sources	60
Trustworthiness	63
Data Analysis	65
Ethical Considerations.....	67
Limitations.....	69

Summary.....	70
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	71
Description of Participants	71
Research Question One	76
Lack of purpose.....	76
Leader of soldiers.....	77
New roles.....	79
Research Question Two.....	80
Strong support network	80
Importance of Preparation.....	82
Research Question Three.....	84
Military identity.....	85
Lack of understanding.....	86
Research Question Four.....	87
Job requirements	87
Ease of transition.....	89
Summary of Findings	89
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY	91
Background and Context.....	91
Understanding Identity	93
Military Culture.....	95
Transition Models Unique to Military.....	97
Method.....	99

Participants	103
Selection criteria.....	103
Sampling procedures	104
Description of participants	106
Data Collection Procedures	107
Data Analysis	109
Trustworthiness	110
Ethical Considerations.....	113
Results	114
Research Question One	115
Lack of purpose.....	115
Leader of soldiers.....	116
New roles	118
Research Question Two	119
Strong support network.....	119
Importance of Preparation.....	121
Research Question Three	123
Military identity	124
Lack of understanding.....	125
Research Question Four	126
Job requirements	126
Ease of transition.....	128
Discussion.....	129

Implications.....	134
Strengths and Limitations.....	137
Conclusions and Future Research	139
References.....	141
Appendix A. Informed Consent Form	158
Appendix B. Informed Consent of Audio Use.....	160
Appendix C. Demographic Survey	161
Appendix D. Permission Letter Email to Contact Potential Participant	163
Appendix E. Prospective Participant Email Invitation	164
Appendix F. Follow Up Email Script	165
Appendix G. Screening Interview Script.....	166
Appendix H. Screening Tool	167
Appendix I. Interview Guide	168
Appendix J. Field Note Form.....	169
Appendix K. Follow Up Email Themes Script.....	170
Appendix L. Follow Up Themes Questions	171
Appendix M. Resource List	172
Appendix N. Transcription Confidentiality Form	173

Abstract

According to the Department of Veteran Affairs (2017), there are roughly 22 million American veterans, which account for approximately 7% of the total U.S. population. Military culture can have a profound impact on the ability for individuals to reintegrate into civilian life. Prior evidence suggests that various programs and resources (i.e. finances, resume writing) can aid military personnel upon their transition to civilian life. However, research focusing on the impact of transition and the experiences of identity reconstruction amongst military members is limited.

The current study was designed to explore identity reconstruction amongst individuals who were transitioning from military to civilian life. Male participants ($N = 10$) were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format that addressed the following research questions: (a) What is the process of identity reconstruction during the transition from military to a civilian life? (b) what factors play a role in a successful transition from military to civilian life? (c) what factors may impede making a successful transition? (d) what is surprising about the transition?

Results included several categories including the lack of purpose, becoming a leader of soldiers, strong support networks, the challenges of military culture, and preparation, as factors that impact an individual identity reconstruction and a successful transition into civilian life. Each category was broken down and discussed in this paper. These findings provide insight towards bringing more awareness of identity reconstruction, as well as information to better inform psychologists and various existing programs to be better suited to working with this unique population.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Who am I now? Unfortunately for many people transitioning out of the military to civilian life, the answer to this question can be complex and difficult. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs (2017), there are roughly 22 million American veterans, who account for approximately 7% of the total U.S. population. Individuals who have served military careers for 10-20 years have known a certain way of life and transitioning out of the military culture can have an impact on an individual's identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). However, little is known about how the transition from military to civilian life impacts an individual's identity and what factors are important in facilitating a successful transition (Ahern et al., 2015). Fortunately, programs are in place (e.g., finance, resume writing) to assist military personnel going through the transition from active duty to retirement. Are these programs enough to fully aid in helping an individual navigate through a successful transition? They are designed to help the individual in various aspects of their life, such as competing for jobs, but to what extent are they preparing military personnel for life outside of the confines of military culture? Only a handful of research studies have focused on transitioning out of the military and they share a common thread throughout their conclusions. Self-identity issues and the continued formation of identity are of concern for many service members throughout their transition into civilian life (Buell, 2010; Drops, 1979; Savion, 2009; Yanos, 2004).

Background and Context

Many attempts have been made to describe the complexities of military culture. Researchers within psychology agree that a common thread of military culture is the

emphasis on the group as a whole as opposed to the individual (Boose, 1993; French, 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Huntington, 1957; Verrips, 2006; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). Deep relationships develop between military personnel throughout their service, and these bonds are difficult to understand for someone not enveloped within the military culture (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Sørensen, 2011; Verrips, 2006). Emphasis on behaviors and values such as loyalty, duty, and even self-sacrifice are prevalent among military personnel (Bragin, 2010; Goldstein, 2001). During the acculturation process, soldiers learn to suppress their individuality in favor of the requirements of the collective group (Ben-Ari, 1998; Hall, 2012). Due to this emphasis on the group as a whole, many researchers suggest that a person begins to change their perception of self. People acculturated into the military begin to form a new sense of group identity rather than individual aspects of themselves prior to entering into service (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Cabrera, Figley, & Yarvis, 2012; Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2012).

The transition and reintegration into civilian life may become a challenge for military personnel due to their strong learned military self-identity (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Edström, Lunde, & Haaland, 2009; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Such events as field exercises and combat training are examples of military cultural phenomena that can shape military identity. These events help build camaraderie among military members and can lead to further deepening of a military identity (Haaland 2011; Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Kümmel, 2011; Mäkinen, 2011).

The intensity of the military identity is congruent with literature in the area of athletic identity in college athletics. The concept of athlete identity investment and how it affects the transition process can have an impact on identity formation (Arvinen-Barrow et al., 2017;

Beamon, 2012; Brewer et al., 2000; Grove et al., 2007; Lally, 2007; Stoltenburg et al., 2011; Warriner & Lavalley, 2008). Athletes who have a strong athletic identity tend to be more vulnerable to having a negative transition experience since they are so invested in sport (Brewer et al., 2000.) By intensely investing in the athletic identity, other roles and identities (e.g., student, family member, relationship) of the individual can suffer. This incongruity of identity balance is similar to individuals who are invested in a military identity. Military personnel have their own “culture” and members who are indoctrinated into the culture have difficulties assuming or holding onto other identities (Bragin, 2010). Conversely, individuals who invest in developing other identities besides that of being an athlete tend to have a smoother transition out of the sport (Grove et al., 1997; Lally, 2007). Along with investing in other identities, having a pre-retirement strategy or a “Plan B” has been identified as helpful in combating the investment of the athletic identity (Stoltenburg et al., 2011). Similar research has identified that military personnel could ease their transition from active duty to being retired by having a pre-retirement strategy (Ainspan, Pink, & Kerney, 2018)

Coping mechanisms and support systems are strategies to aid individuals in making a successful transition. For example, individuals who are able to make a smoother transition out of sport have coping strategies such as acceptance and mental disengagement (Grove et al., 1997). Other helpful strategies include optimism about the future along with grit and resilience (Poczwardowski et al., 2014). Along with coping strategies, social support is also a significant factor in allowing for a successful transition. According to Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017), having an alumni-mentoring program for individuals can aid in a transitional process. Also, having a strong social network has been found to be effective in helping facilitate a successful transition and re-identification for athletes transitioning from their sport (Lally &

Kerr, 2008; Willard & Lavallee, 2016). The research on athletic identity with people transitioning out of their sport could potentially shed light on identity changes for individuals transitioning from the military back to civilian life.

Statement of the Problem

Some researchers have suggested that military identity is learned and performed. The important components of military self-identity are expertise in professional skills and camaraderie with other members (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). However, little is known about how people experience the transition from a military to a civilian identity during the process of identity reconstruction (e.g., the challenges of returning to civilian life, key differences between military and civilian environments, how veterans navigate challenges and approach reconnection, as well as what resources mitigate transition difficulties). Gaining further insight into the transition experience is imperative to understanding the processes of identity reconstruction among individuals who have transitioned to civilian life and to informing the development of interventions that will further support successful transition.

Statement of Purpose

The majority of research in the realm of transitional identity has been dedicated to collegiate athletes and factors that have impacted their identity upon transitioning out of sport. Limited research has been done exploring and describing the process of identity change among average service members undergoing the transition into civilian life. Current research on military members primarily focuses on service members with psychiatric diagnoses, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries (TBI), or related symptoms (Bragin, 2010; Bryan & Morrow, 2011). In sum, a gap in the research for

military members transitioning back to civilian life exists. Psychologists and other health service providers need to better understand the lived experiences of these individuals related to how identity changes by understanding successful or unsuccessful transitions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use a phenomenological method to better understand the process of identity reconstruction in individuals who transition from military to civilian life.

Research Questions

In order to explore the phenomenon of identity formation, the researcher focused on the following central research question: What is the process of identity reconstruction during the transition from military to a civilian life? In addition, the researcher explored the following sub questions: What factors play a role in a successful transition from military to civilian life? What factors may impede making a successful transition? What is surprising about the transition? In order to more fully understand the factors that impact an individual's identity reconstruction during the transition from the military to civilian life, it was important to interview participants who have recently retired from the military (in the past five years), as they would be able to provide insight on their relatively recent transition. Exploring the themes that emerged from this study may assist psychologists and others who assist military personnel in developing alternative programs and interventions that could aid individuals in shaping their identity with a successful transition from military to civilian life.

Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

Previous studies have looked at the transition experiences of individuals leaving the military in other countries (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). However, limited research explores the process of identity reconstruction in military personnel from their perspective, with the aim of understanding their lived experiences and process of identity transition. Therefore, a

phenomenological approach was chosen for this study due to the importance of better understanding the essence of identity among individuals who have transitioned from military to civilian life. This phenomenological approach sought to give voice to individuals who have made this transition and to provide an understanding of their identity reconstruction based on their shared experiences. Lastly, using a phenomenological approach that focuses on the meaning of identity reconstruction will benefit individuals who have struggled with making a successful transition, as findings may allow them to have a better understanding and self-awareness of the various factors that impact the transition. With a greater understanding of the self-identity process, individuals can be better informed of the circumstances that surround identity reconstruction and those who work with military personnel might develop interventions that can be implemented to allow for a more successful transition to civilian life.

Rationale for Role of the Researcher

One of the defining characteristics of qualitative research, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2015), is to describe and clarify experiences as they are lived and constituted in our environment. While quantitative research utilizes inventories, questionnaires, or machines to gather information, the researcher is typically not used as an instrument. Therefore, it was important to allow for the researcher to be an instrument in this phenomenological study because the researcher was able to dig deeper into participants' experiences in order to understand meanings that are not otherwise observable and that cannot be gathered using survey or other data-gathering strategies (Creswell, 2017). In order to fulfill this role, readers of the research need to know about the researcher as a human instrument. The qualitative researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of his/herself, including any biases and

assumptions, expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003).

Assumptions and Biases

Van Manen (1990) and Creswell (2017) state that we bring certain beliefs and assumptions to our research, and it is important to be aware of the impact our preconceptions can have on the research process. Due to the nature of the phenomenological approach, it is important that I am transparent about my own assumptions and biases in regards to this study. I must take ownership of my own experiences in self-identity reconstruction so that I am aware of how my experiences may shape my interpretations within this study.

I did not sign up for “active duty” or go through basic combat training within the military. However, I have had the opportunity to be around individuals who have recently served in active duty and I have had meaningful conversations about the culture of the military. These conversations included discussion about values such as loyalty, respect, and the mentality that emerges as a result of being part of a group instead of an individual mentality. It is important to be aware of these values as they shaped the lens in which I asked questions during the interview process.

It is important to acknowledge my status as a White male due to the privilege that has been bestowed upon me due to my race and gender. I understand that White male privilege has been embedded in our society. As a result, I have not been exposed to some of the experiences of identity reconstruction that other races might have experienced such as not having available resources to aid in stable employment opportunities. Being a White male, it is my assumption that I will be able to connect better with other White males who have transitioned out of the military due to the similarity in race and gender. In order to navigate

the dynamics between the researcher and participants, my approach was to continuously express to the participants of the study that they were the expert on their lives and experiences and not myself. As a civilian in this type of setting, I also needed to assert myself more as a researcher with the participants in an effort to obtain meaningful data. The participants may see me as an outsider and therefore might not open up fully about their experiences. It was important for me to build rapport so that my status as a civilian outsider did not hinder the interview process.

I also needed to take into consideration my educational status as a doctoral level student. Another assumption I had is that knowing that I am pursuing a higher degree would potentially affect the relationship with participants because they may have seen me as an authority figure. As a result, participants may not have been as forthcoming with information about their experiences. My educational background also includes research with coach-athlete relationships and identity; therefore, I had preconceptions regarding identity among athletes in transition that may have influenced this study. For instance, previous research describes how social support has an impact on identity along with mentoring programs on making transitions (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017). These preconceptions had the potential to lead me to shape the questions in a certain way that may have taken away the meaning of the experiences of the participants. Since I have researched the various methods related to how student-athletes navigate athletic identity after transition and the various methods used to cope with that transition, I assumed that military personnel would experience similar instances of difficult transition to civilian life and they would maintain strong ties to military identities. Acknowledging my assumptions of similar transitional factors in identity between collegiate athletes and military assisted me in this study.

My own experience with identity transition needed to be addressed as well in this study. Transitioning from a full-time professional back to being a student had an impact in shaping my own identity and how I perceived the world around me. The transition was difficult in certain aspects due to the financial loss and location change. It is important to remember as the researcher that my experiences were different from each participant, although it was possible for similar themes to arise. Transitioning out of the military is a culture and lifestyle change and can have an impact on one's identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). Having this knowledge, it was important for me as the researcher to build rapport with the participants during the interview process in an effort to capture and describe their lived experiences. I needed to understand that realities are co-constructed between the researcher and participants and the emerging themes were shaped by our individual experiences in regards to identity in transition (Carter & Little, 2007). Military members may have had different experiences transitioning out of their military career into a civilian life than I did in my identity reconstruction process when transitioning from a contractor with the military to a full-time doctoral student. Having this knowledge and understanding the various interpretations of the transition experience, I was able to build a relationship with participants.

In addition to working on building rapport, in an effort to manage my preconceptions and biases, I allowed for transparency in regards to my reactions and interpretations during the interview process with the participants and also at the conclusion of the study. To allow for transparency, I processed my facial expressions as well as sought feedback from the participants regarding whether my interpretation of their response was correct. Additionally, I kept a reflexive journal of my reactions and reflections in an effort to keep my

preconceived notions out of data analysis. This transparency facilitated leaving my biases and preconceptions out of my findings as much as possible as well as allowed the participants to find meaning in their identity reconstruction and transition experiences. By being transparent and building rapport with the participants, the researcher was able to be utilized as an instrument to gather meaningful data and allow participants to further understand their experiences in developing their sense of self.

Definition of Key Terminology

Identity: A system that integrates an individual's inner self and the outer social world into a congruent whole (Erikson, 1968).

Identity Reconstruction: The process of identity reformation and integration from the former self to the present self (Grimmell, 2017).

Successful Transition—The ease at which a service member adjusts to civilian life and their satisfaction with life after discharge from the military (Ainspan, Penk, & Kearney, 2018).

Active Duty — Being in the military full time, with potential of living on a military base, able to be deployed at any time (Krueger, 2000).

Military Acronyms

BCT. Basic Combat Training^[1]

MOS. Military Occupation Specialty

PCS. Permanent Change of Station

DOD. Department of Defense

NCO: Non-Commissioned Officer

Summary

Due to the gap in the literature related to understanding identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning out of the military, it is clear that a qualitative study that explores this phenomenon was needed. This study sought to deepen our understanding of the existing research on identity transitions and military personnel. In addition to further understanding the lived experiences of individuals who have transitioned out of the military to civilian life, the findings of the research may be helpful in informing programs already in place that aid military personnel during the transition process. By gaining a greater awareness of the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transition out of the military, practitioners will be better informed about how best to support these individuals in understanding their identity during and after their transition experiences.

Chapter Two of this dissertation will examine the current literature related to adult identity development and transitional models to gain a better understanding of the process an individual goes through during significant life transitions. Additionally, factors that can either challenge or support the transitional process will be explored. The primary aim of the review of literature will be to provide a depiction of the current literature focusing on identity reconstruction and to provide a critical discussion of the findings. The review will demonstrate the need for additional qualitative research in the area of identity amongst individuals transitioning out of the military in an effort to better support them in their experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the process of identity reconstruction during the transition from military to civilian life. The goal was to recruit 10-15 participants who have recently retired from active duty in the military and have transitioned into civilian life. The following central research question was the focus of this study: What is the process of identity reconstruction during the transition from military to civilian life? Additional research questions that guided this study included: What factors play a role in a successful transition; what factors may impede a successful transition; and what is surprising about the transition? In order to further explore the phenomenon of the process of identity reconstruction, a critical and thorough review of existing literature is necessary related to identity reconstruction among military members transitioning to civilian life.

This literature review explored several areas of research related to identity construction theory and the transition from active duty military and synthesized the information that connects these content areas. Additionally, how these topics are relevant to the current study were also discussed. The major areas of literature that were critically reviewed include: (a) history of identity development (b) models of identity (c) transition models (d) athletic identity and transition (e) military culture (f) challenges and barriers of transitioning to civilian life (g) risk and protective factors in relation to transitioning back to civilian life (h) gender differences. By reviewing the literature on identity and exploring military culture, the research aimed to provide a better understanding of the process of identity reconstruction during the transition from military to civilian life.

In order to gather a more precise and in-depth review of the literature, the researcher used multiple information sources, including peer-reviewed articles, books, and government websites. Throughout the review of literature, the researcher attempted to address important gaps in the current literature, grasp a better understanding of available resources currently attainable by military members who transition to civilian life, and identify areas that help or hinder the process of identity in transition. Additionally, the current study sought to expand on the current literature on identity reconstruction and transition. In the conclusion of this literature review, the researcher provided a summary of how the literature provides a foundation and framework for the current study.

History of Identity Development

The concept of identity is a complex process that has been around for centuries. The term *identity* can be traced back as early as Ancient Rome and Greece to mean sameness, oneness, or being the same (Lemert, 2014). However, it was not until the 19th century that the identity concept would come into the form that is used today (Akhtar & Samuel, 1996). While the term identity has been mentioned throughout centuries, there are conflicting ideologies about the true definition of the term identity. Some definitions claim that the concept of identity is an internalized psychic system that integrates an individual's inner self and the outer social world into a congruent whole (Erikson, 1968; Waterman 1982). Another meaning of identity is a process for individuals to develop a better understanding of their sense of self in the context of cultural and social demands (Triandis, 1989). To better understand what identity means for us today, it is important to understand how the idea of identity formation was first developed decades ago.

Psychological theories of identity construction can be dated back to the early 1900s with Sigmund Freud's psychosexual stages of development (Lemert, 2014). Freud's work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), described the psychosexual stages as underlying motivations and impulses that shaped the sense of self. For a period of time, the lens that identity was seen through was congruent with Freud's work in the area of childhood and adolescence. Specifically, navigating the transition from being dependent in childhood to increasing responsibility for one's own needs, desires, and aspirations, was one of the most important developments of the sense of self (Akhtar & Samuel, 1996; Erikson, 1968). However, in the 1950s, Eric Erikson argued that identity development was as an ongoing process that continues across the life span and through adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Lemert, 2014; Waterman, 1982). Erikson's stages of development helped shape the foundation that identity construction is seen through today and provided a basis for the more recent advancements of models and theories of identity.

It is important to learn about the history of identity development and models used to help better understand the current landscape and theories that psychologists are utilizing in today's world. More recently, one of the criticisms of earlier models of identity development is that they articulate a linear form of development in which an individual navigates between stages until one no longer has internal conflict and has realized their identity (Berzonky, 2004). Newer models of identity construction conceptualize identity as multidimensional, transitional, and more fluid rather than being linear (Lemert, 2014). Additionally, researchers and theorists argue that more traditional theories of identity construction do not fully explain the process of an individual's group or social identity such as gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (Berzonky, 2004; Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989).

Another criticism of traditional linear theories of identity development is that they were constructed based on a traditional European and individualistic culture (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Consequently, more traditional theories may not apply to racial/ethnic groups or collectivistic cultures whose family systems, cultural norms, and developmental milestones may be different from the European model (Berzonky, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Hence, it is integral to explore identity construction theories that are multidimensional and consider cultural aspects of one's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). To aid in better understanding identity, it is important to review both foundational models of identity development as well as more modern identity theories.

Identity Models

Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. While the concept of identity has been around for centuries, it was not until the twentieth century that psychoanalyst Erik Erikson aided in shaping and developing identity as it is now researched today (Kroger, 2000). Erikson has been referred as "identity's architect" and the first person to term the phrase *identity crisis* (Akhtar & Samuel, 1996; Friedman, 1999). His research on identity has been used as a springboard for modern researchers to better understand the intricacies of identity (Friedman, 1999). According to Erikson (1968), identity is psychosocial in nature and formed by the intersection of biological and psychological capacities in an individual. Additionally, this intersection is combined with the opportunities and supports offered by one's social context (Kroger, 2000). Unlike previous researchers, Erikson emphasized that the family and culture that an infant is born into can shape their development (Clark, 2010). This belief in the influence that caregivers and family can have on an infant led to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Friedman, 1999).

Erikson's model emphasizes a process that relies on relationships with caregivers and the impact of the sociocultural environment into which the person is born (Clark, 2010).

Erikson's (1963) stage model of development theorized eight distinct stages, with five stages up to the age of 18 years and three stages further beyond well into adulthood, through which an individual progresses in developing a sense of self: (1) trust versus mistrust, (2) autonomy versus shame, (3) initiative versus guilt, (4) industry versus inferiority, (5) identity versus confusion, (6) intimacy versus isolation, (7) generativity versus stagnation, and (8) integrity versus despair (Clark, 2010; Friedman, 1999; Meeus, 1996). Erikson argued that successful completion of each stage results in a healthy personality and acquisition of basic virtues (Clark, 2010). Additionally, the psychosocial stages are epigenetic in nature, meaning that the resolution of one task sets the foundation for the next stage and all those to follow (Kroger, 2000).

According to Erikson (1963), during each stage the person experiences a psychosocial crisis, which could have a positive or negative outcome for their identity. These crises are psychosocial in nature since they involve the psychological needs of the individual conflicting with the needs of society (Kroger, 2000). The first stage, *trust versus mistrust*, involves an infant being uncertain in the world in which s/he lives and developing a sense of consistent stability from the primary caregiver (Clark, 2010; Erikson, 1963). The second stage, *autonomy versus shame*, refers to a child learning to be more independent and exploring his or her abilities. If the parent is over controlling, then the child may sense that they are inadequate and feel shame (Clark, 2010; Erikson, 1963; Friedman, 1999). During the third stage, *initiative versus guilt*, children begin to assert themselves more frequently and to develop games and

activities. If parents treat the child's actions as trivial, then the child may develop negative self-perception (Erikson, 1968).

During the fourth stage, *industry versus inferiority*, the child's peer group is a major contributor in the child's self-esteem and the child feels the need to demonstrate competencies (e.g., reading, writing) that are valued by society (Clark, 2010). The fifth stage, *identity versus confusion*, is one of adolescence and the individual reviews his or her life and is confronted with choices regarding occupation, relationships, and politics (Clark, 2010; Meeus, 1996). According to Erikson (1968), this stage is when an individual starts to truly explore their identity and who they are as a person. How an individual navigates the fifth stage of psychosocial development can have an impact on the next stage (Josselson, 1994). The sixth phase of the model, *intimacy versus isolation*, involves a major crisis of forming loving relationships with people (Meeus, 1996). The seventh stage, *generativity versus stagnation*, is where individuals experience a need to create or nurture something that will outlast them and to make contributions towards society. Lastly, during the eighth stage, *integrity versus despair*, individuals reflect back on their accomplishments and determine whether they led successful lives or were unproductive and had unfinished business (Clark, 2010; Meeus, 1996).

Erikson (1963) argued that while there is an initial resolution to the identity vs. role confusion stage during adolescence, identity is never really resolved. Essentially, identity is fluid and remains open to modifications and alterations throughout adult life (Erikson, 1968). Some of the strengths of Erikson's approach lie in its consideration of both individual and cultural factors in a person's identity (Kroger, 2000). For individual factors, Erikson emphasized resilience and hope as individual factors that could aid a person going through the various psychosocial stages (Clark, 2010; Horton-Parker & Brown, 2002). In regards to

cultural factors, Erikson's model provides the opportunity for individuals to further explore how their environment can shape who they are by solving the particular psychosocial crises in each stage of the model (Kroger, 2000).

While Erikson's stages of psychosocial development provide a springboard to understanding identity, one of the criticisms of his model is that it is too linear and does not account for cross cultural shifts (Schachter, 2005). Additionally, Schachter (2005) argues that Erikson's model is not as relevant in the postmodern age and in today's society. According to Schachter (2005), self-actualization and adaptability are pitted against one another and therefore a harmonious identity cannot be achieved in the postmodern age. This belief of not being able to achieve both self-actualization and adaptability is contrary to what Erikson constructed as a hierarchical ranking of structures of identity (Schachter, 2005). Additionally, some of the limitations of Erikson's model include his vagueness in describing the steps, which can make it more difficult to conceptualize. While Erikson's model of identity development has wide applicability across cultural contexts and highlights the ongoing nature of identity change, more modern identity development models need to be explored to help serve as a foundation for understanding identity formation (Friedman, 1999).

Berzonsky's social cognitive model of identity. Postmodernity can be defined as an accelerated rate of social, technological, and economic change with instant media and global access (Berzonsky, 2005). In order to better understand identity in postmodernity, nonlinear models such as Berzonsky's social cognitive model need to be explored. Recent research has demonstrated that progress in identity formation is associated with stylistic differences in the social-cognitive processes individuals use to cope with identity conflicts and making commitments (Berzonsky, 2004; Berzonsky & Kinney, 2008). Berzonsky (1989) proposed a

model that explored a process conceptualization of identity. According to Berzonsky and Sullivan (1992), this model emphasizes the manner in which individuals differ when they are solving personal problems and identity conflicts. Additionally, the social cognitive model of identity emphasizes differences in the sociocultural processes used by individuals to construct and accommodate their identities (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Recent research has demonstrated that progress in identity formation is associated with stylistic differences in the social-cognitive processes youth use to cope with identity conflict, make commitments, and process self-relevant information (Alisat & Pratt, 2012).

Alisat and Pratt (2012) conducted a longitudinal mixed methods study examining identity formation in young adulthood by interviewing and surveying 100 Canadian students through four points (e.g., ages 17, 19, 23, 26). Utilizing the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS), which measures identity status across domains of spirituality, politics, and career, Alisat and Pratt found that coherent relationships between identity status and religious beliefs played a prominent role in the development of an ego identity. These findings could help shed light on future protective factors that aid in helping an individual form their own identity during transitions, such as from active duty to civilian life.

The social cognitive model of identity is comprised of three processing identity orientations: (1) information, (2) normative, (3) and diffuse/avoidant (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky & Kinney, 2008; Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Individuals who are information-oriented actively seek out and attempt to process information that is important to solving their problems and identity transition (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). Some key characteristics of individuals who are more information-oriented include problem-focused coping strategies and openness to alternative ideas, values, and behaviors (Berzonsky, 2004). Conversely,

individuals who use a more normative orientation tend to conform to expectations of relevant groups and authority figures (Berzonsky, 1989). Typically, these individuals tend to disregard information that conflicts with their beliefs and values (Berzonsky, 2011).

Additionally, individuals with a normative orientation are associated with firm goals, commitments, and a sense of purpose, needing more structure and less certainty (Berzonsky, 2004). Lastly, individuals who adhere to the diffuse/avoidant orientation are characterized by a reluctance to confront the problems and challenges associated with their identity (Berzonsky & Sullivan, 1992). These individuals assume a present moment, self-serving perspective that emphasizes immediate rewards and social concerns, such as trying to be popular among others (Berzonsky, 2004). While people tend to lean towards one of the orientations more than the other, what forms an individual's identity is the combination of all the processing styles of identity. These orientations take into account a person's social identity (e.g., public self-image), personal identity (e.g., values and goals), and collective identity (e.g., family, community, nation) (Berzonsky, 2011). Berzonsky (2005) argues that an individual's sense of identity is not a separate entity as compared to one's roles, attitudes, motives, values, goals, self-views, regulatory strategies, and the like from which it is composed. Berzonsky's (1989) social cognitive model of identity highlights the importance of cross-cultural experiences and is integral in better conceptualizing the process of identity among individuals who transition out of the military. Berzonsky's (2011) model may be able to shed light on the processing style individuals transitioning from the military may have in differentiating their various identity orientations (e.g., social, personal, collective).

Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory. To further understand identity, it is important to explore how societal groups can play a role in one's identity. People tend to

categorize themselves in regards to their social reference groups, which often serve to maintain shared attitudes, beliefs, and values common to the members (Triandis, 1989). A feeling of “belonging” is an important aspect of every person’s sense of self and social groups can help create a frame of reference that aids in an individual identity (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). For individuals, personal identity addresses the question of “Who am I?” whereas social identity addresses the question “Who am I, relative to others?” (Triandis, 1989). As the military is inherently a collectivistic culture emphasizing being part of the group, it is important to explore the impact social identity can have on the process of identity to the individual.

According to Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, and Flament (1971) social identity can be defined as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (p. 272). Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that one’s identity is not just self-perception, but also how an individual perceives him or herself in relation to being a member of a group. In order to explore social perception, social comparison, and intergroup conflict, Tajfel and Turner developed social identity theory (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This theory suggests that when someone identifies with a group, they develop a bias in favor of this group, called the ingroup, and a bias against other groups, the outgroup, which is seen as in competition with the ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 2001).

One of the fundamental assumptions of social identity theory is that the focus is more on how social groups operate within the minds of individuals rather than how individuals operate within the social group (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Within this context, an individual gathers information about the value of their ingroup by making comparisons with outgroups in an effort to establish a positive status (Martiny & Rubin, 2016; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Identification within a group has been linked with an increased level of self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). When a group member feels their social identity is no longer satisfactory, they will attempt to leave their existing group and join a more positively distinctive group, or take efforts to make their existing group more positively distinct (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

Social identity theory consists of three main components: (1) social-psychological, (2) system, and (3) societal (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). The social-psychological component helps to explain the cognitive and motivational processes that an individual goes through when perceiving themselves within a group. This cognitive process makes social identity salient enough to the point that an individual's self-evaluation is synonymous with their in-group evaluation (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The system component sets out the conditions under which the motivational and cognitive processes will and will not occur (e.g., when group boundaries are impermeable and status system is unstable and illegitimate) (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Lastly, the societal component relates to the specific historical, political, and cultural context that defines the group in which the person is a member (Rubin & Hewstone, 2004). Social identity theory is beneficial in better understanding the various components an individual goes through and how the saliency of the identity of one's group could in turn become how a person identifies him or herself (Hogg, 2006).

McAdams's life story model of identity. One of the criticisms of earlier models of identity such as Erikson's psychosocial stages is that they are conflict-based in nature and argue that individuals must navigate inner conflict to ultimately actualize their identity (Alisat & Pratt, 2012). Newer models of identity assert that identity is more transitional, fluid, and

integrative (Alisat & Pratt, 2012; McAdams & Adler, 2010). While Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory focuses on how an individual perceives him or herself within a group setting, a limitation of this theory is that it does not incorporate all aspects of how individuals construct their identity. One of the ways in which our identity is constructed is through storytelling. Stories are the primary vehicle through which people relate and think in an effort to shape identities from lived experiences in a cohesive way (Demers, 2011). In congruence with the new ideology of fluid identity, McAdams proposed a life story model in which, starting in adolescence, individuals living in modern societies begin to organize their lives and create stories they selectively remember and that are most salient to them (McAdams, 1990; McAdams, 2001; McAdams, 2004). McAdams (2001) argued that one's life story is essentially their narrative identity and thus identity is constructed into a story containing a setting, scenes, characters, plots, and themes.

This narrative approach, steeped in cross-cultural and societal processes, utilizes an integrative view with the individual as the source and context for his or her own identity (Schwartz, 1987). During development and processing, an individual reflects on their life story in social contexts that have been most salient to him or her (McAdams, 2001; McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015). The way in which the individual recounts his or her story can be seen as a way of negotiating how the individual thinks of himself or herself throughout time (McAdams, 1999; McAdams, 2001; Schwartz, 1987).

Life stories are strongly shaped by personal experience and culture (McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015). Each individual will have a subjective interpretation of past experiences based on saliency of events and cultural background (McAdams, 2004). Therefore, according to McAdams (2004) no two life stories will be the same. However, despite the uniqueness in an

individual's story, commonalities exist amongst individuals and two distinct themes arise from life stories: (1) agency versus communion, and (2) redemption versus contamination (McAdams, 2004; McAdams & Adler, 2010). Individuals who come from an individualistic culture (agency) tend to emphasize and develop their stories based on goals and achievement, whereas the stories of individuals from a collectivist culture (communion) emphasize conformity to social norms and group work (McAdams, 2004; McAdams & Adler, 2010).

The second theme, contamination, involves an individual having an affectively positive life story scene followed by an affectively negative outcome (e.g., giving birth to a child, but then losing a spouse). Redemption is the opposite of contamination; a negative outcome is followed by a positive outcome in which overcoming an obstacle is a central aspect of the story (McAdams, 2004). Overcoming difficulties and obstacles is typically associated with American culture and proves to aid in understanding how people perceive their life stories. By understanding how one constructs one's own life story, individuals may develop purpose and find meaning in not only how they interpret the past, but also how they anticipate their future (McAdams, 2001; McAdams, 2004). When asking military personnel about their experiences transitioning back to civilian life, understanding how an individual constructs their own story was important to provide context and meaning to their lived experience.

Transition Models

Bridge's transition model. Change can have a powerful impact on individuals. According to Bridges (1986), "Change happens when something either starts or stops, or when something that used to happen in one way starts to happen in another" (p. 25). Often people use change and transition interchangeably, but there is a difference between them (Deane & Asselin, 2015). Bridges argues that change is situational, external, and focused on new content

such as roles, while transition is internal and related to the psychological process one goes through to come to terms with their new situation (Bridges, 1986; Bridges & Mitchell, 2008; Dima & Skehill, 2011). During this transitional process an individual comes to terms with the details of the new situation the change brings about (Bridges, 2002; Deane & Asselin, 2015). Additionally, change can happen quickly, while transition tends to be processed more slowly (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008).

According to Bridges (1986), one of the reasons transitions take longer for individuals is due to transition being a three-part psychological process that can extend over a long period of time. Bridges proposed that transition can be broken down into three phases: (1) letting go, (2) neutral zone, and (3) new beginnings (Bridges, 1986; Dima & Skehill, 2011). The first phase of the transition, *letting go*, requires an individual to let go of the way things used to be and in part how they themselves used to be (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008). Letting go of the old reality and identity a person had before the change takes place can be difficult (Dima & Skehill, 2011). This stage is marked with emotional upheaval and resistance from a person due to the discomfort connected with leaving a situation in which they identify (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008). Typical emotions associated with the first phase of Bridge's Transition model include fear, denial, uncertainty, and a sense of loss (Bridges, 1986). In order to make a successful transition, individuals have to go through a process of letting go of who they were prior to the change and acknowledge the loss (Deane, & Asselin, 2015).

The second phase of the transition, *the neutral zone*, is an in-between phase in an individual's transition, which is described as a place between one's old sense of identity and the new, with ambiguity being one of the central themes (Bridges, 1986; Dima & Skehill, 2011). The neutral zone is a critical period in which the individual is psychologically

processing the re-alignment and re-patterning of their new identity and environment (Deane & Asselin, 2015). Typical emotions individuals experience in the neutral zone are anxiety about their identity, ambiguity of the future, and confusion (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008). However, as Bridges (1986) notes, the neutral zone is “when the real reorientation that is at the heart of transition is taking place” (p. 25). Despite the negative feelings associated with this phase, the neutral zone is also a place for creativity and renewal (Bridges & Mitchell, 2008).

The last phase of Bridge’s Transition Model, *new beginnings*, is a time of acceptance and a period when people are beginning to embrace change (Bridges, 2002). In this stage, the individual transitions to a new identity and experiences excitement, energy, and a new sense of purpose (Deane & Asselin, 2015). It is important to note that these stages do not have clear boundaries (Bridges, 1986). According to Bridges (2002), people can be in more than one phase at the same time but the “movement through transition is marked by a change in the dominance of one phase as it gives way to the next” (p. 70). Bridge’s transition model can be used to better understand the process of transition in terms of how individuals deal with change and the typical emotions experienced throughout the transition (Deane & Asselin, 2015; Dima & Skehill, 2011). Understanding the process of transition is equally important for individuals in the military who are leaving active duty and going back into the civilian world. Bridges (2002) argues that by locating people along the continuum of the three phases and actively guiding the individual toward the new beginning stage, psychologists may aid in helping the individual transition. Additionally, deliberate strategies to identify who is losing what, defining what is over and what is not, and letting people take a piece of the old with them could potentially help military members who struggle in making the transition (Bridges, 2002; Dima & Skehill, 2011).

Schlossberg's transition model. In further understanding the transition experience for individuals leaving the military, Schlossberg's (1981) Transition Model will be examined. According to Schlossberg (1981) a transition is any event or non-event that leads to a change in routines, relationships, and roles. The term non-event is described as subtle transitions characterized as failure to occur (Elliot, 1982). The process of leaving one set of roles, relationships, routines, and establishing new ones can be difficult and takes time (Schlossberg, 2011). In order to understand the meaning that a transition can have for an individual, the type of transition, the context, and the perceptual impact on the individual need to be considered (Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1982; Schlossberg, 2011).

Schlossberg (1981) developed a model to better understand the different types of factors that impact transitions and how they can affect an individual. Schlossberg's model consists of five components: (1) the transition, (2) the characteristics of the transition, (3) the characteristics of the person, (4) characteristics of the pre- and post-transition environments, (5) and adaptation (Elliott, 1982; Schlossberg 1981). The transition itself can either be anticipated (e.g., retirement) or unanticipated (e.g., sudden death of a loved one) (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 2011). This model theorized that the three characteristics of the transition, (e.g. person, pre, and post) all interact with each other to produce an outcome: adaptation or failure to adapt to change (Schlossberg, 1981).

The characteristics of the transition involve variables such as role change, duration, onset, and the degree of stress (Schlossberg, 1981). These variables outline that the process of transition will involve ebbs and flows for the individual. Therefore, the ebbs and flows can lead to positive or negative feelings about the transition change. The effects of a transition can be permanent, temporary, or of an uncertain time frame (Elliot, 1982).

For the characteristics of the individuals, Schlossberg identified that individuals bring a unique set of abilities and coping skills to cope with transitions. Specifically, the following eight characteristics are important to consider when adapting to transitions: (a) psychosocial competence, (b) sex, (c) age, (d) state of health, (e) race or ethnicity, (f) socioeconomic status, (g) value orientations, and (h) previous experience with similar transitions. Of all of these characteristics, psychosocial competence and previous experience have been found to be the most dynamic in aiding in a transition (Elliot, 1982; Schlossberg, 1981).

The fourth component of Schlossberg's model, characteristics of the pre- and post-transition, emphasizes the need for support systems during the transition: (1) interpersonal support systems, (2) institutional supports and (3) physical setting. Interpersonal support systems, intimate relationships, family, and network of friends have been identified as important in helping adaptation (Elliot, 1982; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). Additionally, institutional supports, such as counselors and outside agencies, can either help or hinder an individual's adaption pre- and post-transition (Elliot, 1982; Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1982).

The interaction between these three components will play a role in how well individuals adapt to the transition. Adaptation can be defined as "a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 7). Schlossberg (1981) argues that successful adaptation rests "in part on the degree of similarity and difference in one's assumptions about self and in one's environment" (p. 8). The previously mentioned components account for the variability in how easy or difficult adaptation can be for individuals (Elliot, 1982). Schlossberg's model provides context and a foundational framework for understanding the types of processes individuals go

through during a transition. Understanding the characteristics of an individual and how the three components play a role in adaptation can point to what factors may help or hinder the transition process.

A limitation of Schlossberg's theory as applied to this study is that while it provides a general model for people transitioning, it does not address the military as a unique population. Additionally, Schlossberg's theory focuses more on the career aspect of an individual's transition rather than the process of their identity reconstruction (Leibowitz & Schlossberg, 1982). Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of how transition affects active duty personnel, and various intricacies of the military environment, theories specializing in the process of identity transition will be reviewed.

Military transition theory. While Schlossberg's model provides a general lens for how an individual adapts to transitions, newer research has focused on military personnel who are transitioning back to civilian life. The experience of transitioning from the military back to being a civilian can have an impact on one's relationships and one's personal and social identity (Castro & Kintzle, 2014; Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper, & Fossey, 2018). In order to better understand and conceptualize the military transition process, Castro and Kintzle (2016) developed the military transition theory. This theory can be used as a theoretical framework to describe and explain important aspects of a military member's transition out of the military and back to civilian life (Castro & Kintzle, 2016).

The military transition theory is comprised of three overlapping phases that describe individual, interpersonal, and military organizational factors that can impact the transition process: (a) approaching the military transition, (b) managing the transition, and (c) assessing the transition (Castro & Kintzle, 2016). The first phase, approaching the military transition,

consists of both personal and cultural factors that can influence how successful the transition will be for the individual. Such factors include the type of military discharge, combat history, expectations of the transition, the nature of the transition (e.g., choice to leave willingly or not), and personal characteristics (Castro & Kintzle, 2014; Castro & Kintzle, 2016). The second phase of the military transition theory, managing the transition, refers to the specific factors that influence the individual progression from service member to civilian. Such factors as adaptive individual adjustment and military transition management play a role in this phase (Castro & Kintzle, 2016). Specifically, the attitudes, coping styles, and ability to navigate military resources (e.g., career planning, benefits packages) of each individual will ultimately affect how well they are able to manage the transition back to civilian life (Kintzle, Wilcox, Hassan, & Ell, 2013). The last phase, assessing the transition, is more retrospective for the individual and refers to the outcomes associated with the transition. These outcomes are assessed in the area of work, family, well-being, and community (Castro & Kintzle, 2016). Specifically, how an individual acclimates to new family roles, engagement in the community, and their physical and psychological well-being, help determine the success of the transition (Kintzle et al., 2013).

All three of the phases play an integral part in a successful transition for a military member returning to civilian life and can overlap with one another (Castro & Kintzle, 2014). While this theory addresses aspects of preparedness prior to the transition, during the transition, and assessment afterward, a plethora of factors can influence the transition. Specifically, military resources available to an individual will ultimately play a role in how they transition (Castro & Kintzle, 2016). While there are similarities between resources available to military personnel amongst the various branches, each branch has specific models

and training programs to aid in transitioning (Ahern et al., 2015). In order to better understand how military personnel from the Army develop identity and transition back to civilian life, a transition model designed specifically by the Army needs to be examined.

Soldier life cycle transition model. Military members who transition from active duty to being a civilian face a multitude of factors that can ultimately affect whether a successful reintegration occurs for an individual. Factors such as physical and psychological injuries, family, social relationships, employment, and educational factors have been found to play a role in helping or hindering an individual from making a successful transition (Ahern et al., 2015; Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2016). When there are hardships or deficits in multiple areas, the cumulative effect could lead to a functional impairment for an individual attempting a successful transition and a delay in successful reemployment (Pease et al., 2016).

Due to a continued disassembling of the large U.S. military presence in various parts of the world, veterans are transitioning back to civilian life at faster rates, requiring the development of supportive programs to support their homecoming transition (Ahern et al., 2015). In the past few years, the Army has recognized the importance of aiding military members with the tools and skills necessary in order to succeed when transitioning back to being a civilian (Koester, 2015). In late 2014, the Army established the Soldier Life Cycle Transition Model to aid military members. This model is comprised of three phases: (1) first year, (2) career, and (3) transition (Walleman, 2014). This three-phase cycle prepares soldiers from the beginning of their military career through the point of their transition to civilian life with resources, including employment skills, counseling, and opportunities to enhance marketability (Koester, 2015).

The first phase of the Soldier Life Cycle Transition Model occurs in a soldier's first

year in the military in which they receive credentialing for their military occupational setting (MOS) and attend a financial readiness class (Koester, 2015; Walleman, 2014). Additionally, soldiers meet individually with financial counselors to establish a one-year budget. The second phase has two parts: one to ten years of service and ten years of service to transition or retirement (Walleman, 2014). During the first part of the second phase, soldiers will annually review their individual development plans as well as update their career goals with their leaders. The second part of this phase requires soldiers to start working on their resumes and begin thinking about the transition process and what they want to do when they get out of the military (Koester, 2015; Walleman, 2014). The last phase of the Soldier Life Cycle model is the transition phase itself, which includes employment training, resume writing, and job-hunting skills (Koester, 2015). As previously mentioned in Schlossberg's model, institutional support can provide a helpful catalyst for individuals who are transitioning (Schlossberg, 1981). Understanding the various aspects of the Soldier Life Cycle model can provide a good basis and context for individuals transitioning out of the military. However, to truly understand how difficult or easy the process of identity can be for these individuals, the culture of the military needs to be explored to provide a context for the impact this transition can have on the saliency of an individual's identity.

Athletic Identity and Transition

When examining the topic of military transitions and identity, a gap is found in the literature, likely due to the subject matter being relatively new in the eyes of researchers in the field. Given this void in the literature, identity changes in individuals from non-military domains (e.g., athletes) will be reviewed. Specifically, athletes form an identity that can be based on the culture and sport in which they compete (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993).

According to Brewer et al. (1993), athletic identity is defined as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" (p. 237).

Research assessing the investment or strength of athlete identity and how this investment affects the transition process has been consistent amongst the literature (Arvinen-Barrow, Hurley, & Ruiz, 2017; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000; Grove, Lavalley, & Gordon, 1997; Lally, 2007; Stoltenburg, Kamphoff, and Bremer, 2011). One major finding of this literature is that athletes who have a strong athletic identity tend to be more vulnerable to a negative transition experience since they are so invested in their sport (Brewer et al., 2000.) By investing solely in the identity of athlete, other roles and identities of the individual can suffer (Lally, 2007). People who invest in developing other identifies in addition to being an athlete tend to have a smoother transition out of the sport (Grove et al., 1997; Lally, 2007).

Understanding how athletic identity can impact an individual's sense of self may assist with conceptualizing the difficulties military personnel with a strong sense of military identity may have when transitioning back to civilian life.

Another major theme that emerged from the athletic identity literature was the usefulness of coping strategies and support in a successful transition. For example, individuals who were able to make the transition out of support more smoothly had coping strategies that included acceptance and mental disengagement from the sport (Grove et al., 1997). Other helpful strategies included optimism about the future along with grit and resilience (Poczwadowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Harberl, 2014). Social support was an additional important factor in a successful transition. A strong social network that included other members in their sport and parents was found to be effective in helping athletes make a successful transition out of sport (Lally, 2007; Willard & Lavalley, 2016). Learning the various

coping strategies and support systems that athletes utilize can provide further insight into how best to aid military personnel who are struggling with transitioning out of the military.

Military Culture

Newer models of identity have emphasized the importance of culture in helping shape how an individual can better develop their sense of self (Martiny & Rubin, 2016; Triandis, 1989). Culture is a product of the social environment in which one surrounds themselves and includes a shared sense of values, norms, ideas, symbols, and meanings (Redmond et al., 2015). The sense of culture helps in distinguishing groups of people from one another and people in the same cultures often share common ways of perceiving the world (Krueger, 2000). Much like college athletics and athletic identity and culture, the military has its own culture. The military is a unique culture in which personnel and family members have experiences and perceptions that are different than civilians (Redmond et al., 2015).

In an effort to better understand the identity of individuals transitioning out of the military, one must have knowledge of the culture surrounding military personnel. The experiences of those who served in “active duty” set them apart from civilians in the U.S. population. If one is not in the military culture, then outsiders are often seen as not knowing “what it is like” (Bragin, 2010). Due to this perspective many service members admittedly are not as open to individuals who have not been immersed into the military culture. Transitioning out of the military is a culture and lifestyle change and can have an impact on one’s identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). Military culture can be defined as “attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of people in uniformed military service to their countries, who, along with their families, participate in cohesive workplace organizational structures fostering a common mindset” (Krueger, 2000, p.252). The process of becoming indoctrinated into the

military culture begins as soon as personnel arrive to reception (Hall, 2013). At the very early stages, people are taught to lose their sense of individuality and adhere to becoming a part of the group (Meyer, 2015). The military acculturates people to certain disciplines, including attitudes, values, and expectations, in order to develop camaraderie and group cohesiveness (DeVries, Hughes, Watson, & Moore, 2012; Hall, Garland, Charlton, & Johnson, 2018; Krueger, 2000).

According to Britt, Adler, and Castro (2006), five core principles can help guide an understanding of military culture: (1) Military organizations require members to possess particular values, (2) adopted values influence the identity as a service member, which in turn affects military performance, (3) as service members incorporate military values (e.g., respect for others) into their identity, the integration of subgroups committed to the goals of the military will be utilized, (4) an effective military organization takes on the responsibility of supporting the health and well-being of the members and their families, and (5) success in the military is a function of how the organization is perceived by society. The essence of military culture can permeate almost every aspect of a person's life. According to Meyer (2015), veterans who served in the military for only a few years continue to report strong identification with the military years after transitioning out. Individuals who have a strong and heightened sense of military identity can have a more difficult transition experience (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This difficult transition was found to be particularly true if the military identity was still salient after the transition back to civilian life (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Meyer, 2015). When beginning to understand the process of identity reconstruction among people who have transitioned out of the military, the military culture can play a distinctive role in how identity is formed.

Challenges of Adjustment and Transition

In addition to better understanding the various models of identity reconstruction and transition, it is important to be aware of the difficulties and challenges military personnel may face when returning to civilian life. To conceptualize the lived experiences of Army veterans in the civilian world, a number of aspects of the process of transition need to be examined. Three aspects of transitioning may particularly influence how successful a transition is for an individual returning to civilian life. These aspects of the transition process include risk factors that need to be overcome for successful transition, protective factors that can aid an individual both during and after the transition, and the gender of the individual making the transition. These three aspects will be discussed in more detail below, as they are particularly salient in learning to help and assist individuals with their identity reconstruction during transition.

Risk factors. While most personnel have successful transitions going from the military back to civilian life, some will struggle to have a smooth transition (Beder, Coe, & Sommer, 2011). According to Adler, Zamorski, and Britt (2011), transitioning involves a psychological shift in one's self-concept and management of the attitude associated with the transition. When service members are making the transition back to civilian life, a number of risk factors can impact an individual's self-concept. In a qualitative study by Brunger, Serrate, and Ogden (2013) involving military personnel transitioning back to civilian life, eleven male participants from the United Kingdom armed forces reported that their transition was characterized by loss. The loss included financial insecurity due to unemployment, loss of community, and loss of a common purpose. Interestingly, the most significant loss reported by participants in the study was self-identity. According to Brunger et al. (2013), participants reported a shift in identities "highlighting the change from developing and owning the identity of a soldier, to losing

everything that embodies this identity; resulting in a fractured sense of self' (p. 93).

Other risk factors present in the literature that could potentially hinder a service member's transition back to civilian life are psychosocial factors (e.g., mental health, inability to regulation emotion) (Adler et al., 2011; Bowes, Ferreira, & Henderson, 2018; Elnitsky, Fisher, & Blevins, 2017; Junger, 2016). Additionally, a stigma associated with seeking help while in the military continues to exist, including possible negative career impact and being treated differently (Bowes et al., 2018). This stigmatic belief about seeking help could be carried over into the transition into civilian life and reinforce an individual's belief about seeking help with the transition (Bowes et al., 2018; Pease et al., 2016). In a study by Bowes et al. (2018) looking at the influence of psychosocial variables on military to civilian transition, results showed that an individual's mental health was strongly and negatively correlated to adjustment difficulty. Hence, as mental health declined, adjustment difficulties increased. Additionally, the inability to regulate emotion can be a risk factor that affects an individual's successful transition (Adler et al., 2011). For military personnel, especially during deployments, suppressing emotional responses may be appropriate and adaptive ways to manage their emotions during a life-threatening situation. However, once an individual transitions back to civilian life, appropriately expressing emotions may be difficult and this difficulty may make adjusting back to being a civilian particularly challenging (Adler et al., 2011). These risk factors, along with the previously mentioned factors of loss of community and sense of purpose, can make it difficult for an individual to have a successful transition. In order to aid in the adjustment back to civilian life, protective factors need to be examined to better understand how individuals can better adapt to their new sense of identity and transition.

Protective factors. Research has shown that a number of protective factors can aid in helping an individual transition back from the military to civilian life more successfully. As previously mentioned, one of the biggest risk factors associated with transitioning back to civilian life is a sense of loss (Brunger et al., 2013). Community integration and environmental factors have been found to enhance an individual's ability to transition more successfully and to grow (Ainspan, Penk, & Kearney, 2018; Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Demers, 2011; Robertson, 2013). According to Ainspan et al. (2018), community integration is a critical component to a successful transition for an individual. Community based support groups can provide individuals who are transitioning with a place to feel welcomed and to maintain a sense of belonging that had been part of their identity while in the military (Ainspan et al., 2018).

Additionally, family support has been found to be integral in aiding an individual's transition back to civilian life (Demers, 2011). In a study by Robertson (2013) that investigated the relationship between life satisfaction and military transition, results showed a small, positive relationship between duration of transition and family support. A portion of the 136 participants in the study reported a greater need and reliance of support from family and friends if they were in transition longer, as compared to individuals who were in shorter transitions (Robertson, 2013). The amount of community integration and family support may be helpful indicators in assessing how well an individual will be able to transition back into civilian life (Ainspan et al., 2018; Robertson, 2013).

Environmental protective factors such as finances and employment opportunities can also aid an individual in transition (Robertson, 2013). According to Robertson (2013), people who are in transition longer may experience lower financial income, whereas individuals who

have a shorter transition may experience a higher income. Ainspan et al. (2018) argues that an important factor in obtaining future employment is for individuals to have educational goals. If individuals have a sense of purpose prior to transitioning and an educational goal is set in place, this focus will aid them in making a smoother transition (Ainspan et al., 2018).

Additionally, the military offers services (e.g., Transition Assistance Program) that focus on the job search and financial planning (Robertson, 2013). According to Robertson (2013), if individuals are able to avoid excessive periods of unemployment, personal and professional growth is likely to occur. While these protective factors are important to take into account for individuals transitioning from the military to civilian life, gender can also affect the experiences of individuals in transition (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015). Hence the next section will examine various aspects of gender differences for individuals transitioning from the military back to civilian life.

Gender differences. An individual goes through various stages of identity transformation both while in the military and when transitioning back to civilian life. It is interesting to note that female personnel go through a variety of different challenges than the male individual transitioning out (Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017). In military culture and training, a masculine gender role is emphasized as a cultural norm in order to prepare soldiers for combat, and to inculcate values of selfless sacrifice for the group (Shields, Kuhl, & Westwood, 2017). These masculine ideologies tend to play as a set standard of acceptable behavior across services types for both men and women. However, the effort to adhere to this masculine environment could have unique and different consequences for men's and women's experiences transitioning out of the military and may present mental health challenges (Shields et al., 2017).

Women are now the fastest growing group within the military and veteran population (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017). Due to the military opening up more positions for women, female veterans are expected to increase at an average rate of 18,000 women per year during the next 10 years (Ainspan et al., 2018). Active duty military women are approximately three times more likely to be single parents than military men. Hence, when female individuals are transitioning back to being a civilian, they continue to have a higher likelihood of being the primary caregiver of the family (Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017). Additionally, due to societal gender role stereotypes, military women returning to civilian life are expected to readjust quicker to family and parenting roles than their male counterparts (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Shields et al., 2017).

Leslie and Koblinsky (2017) examined the challenges experienced by women upon transitioning back to civilian life. After talking with 29 female veterans in focus groups, several themes emerged about the challenges of transitioning to civilian life: (1) incompatibility between military and civilian life, (2) a fear of intimacy, (3) a sense of having missed their children's development, (4) family role changes, (5) problems managing anger, (6) a struggle with sharing versus burdening family members with information, and (7) family members lack of understanding. While coping strategies were discussed (e.g., accessing veteran support, restoring family routines), female military members continued to deal with unique aspects upon transitioning that were different than their male counterparts (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017).

It is interesting to note that a gap in the research exists with regard to transgender individual's experiences in the military. Most studies revolve around men or women's experiences and how their identity is impacted (Belkin, 2015). By studying not only men and

women transitioning out of the military but also transgender individuals, an opportunity exists to provide a better understanding of the saliency of this marginalized identity (Belkin, 2015). When understanding the process of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning back to civilian life, it is important to note both the similarities that men and women share about their identity and also their differences.

Summary of Findings

This study explores the process of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from their military career back to becoming a civilian. A number of identity models have been identified in the literature that contribute to a better understanding of the process an individual goes through when experiencing transition. While most models agree that an individual's identity begins during adolescence, older models see identity as conflict resolution in a linear style (Schachter, 2005). Newer research has argued that identity is more fluid and transitional, with culture, age, ethnicity, and gender playing integral roles into shaping an individual's identity (Alisat & Pratt, 2012). Research has also identified various transitional models in which perceptions of the transition, preparedness, and acceptance have all been found to influence how successful a transition is for the individual. Additionally, the circumstances (e.g., voluntary or involuntary), characteristics of the individual, coping styles, and ability to navigate resources can impact how an individual transitions and the impact on their identity (Ahern et al., 2015; Castro & Kintzle, 2016; Schlossberg, 1981).

Being indoctrinated into a culture such as the military can also have an impact on the way an individual understands their own identity both pre- and post-transition. The military culture is vastly different than the civilian world and can cause military personnel to struggle with shaping their identity after transitioning out (Redmond et al., 2015). The saliency of the

military identity is profound and the literature suggests that many individuals who have transitioned back into being a civilian still strongly identify with the military (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Meyer, 2015). As evidenced with other domains such as athletic identity, this strong identification within the military can lead individuals to have more difficulty during the transition back to civilian life. Some of the challenges identified with transitioning back to being a civilian include a sense of loss, financial insecurities, mental health issues, and inability to cultivate other identities (Adler et al., 2011; Bowes et al., 2018; Pease et al., 2016). In addition to the abovementioned factors, difficulty regulating emotion, lack of community, and ineffective sense of purpose are other challenges that face individuals transitioning back to civilian life. The presence of protective factors such as family support, being more involved within the community, and effective coping strategies are useful in aiding in the transition process, yet there is a lack of literature in understanding how these factors can aid in the identity reconstruction of the individual (Ainspan et al., 2018; Robertson, 2013).

In summary, the literature has been consistent in identifying the challenges and adjustments of individuals transitioning into the military. However, a gap in the research exists exploring the lived experiences of individuals transitioning out of the Army and the impact on their identity reconstruction. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the process of identity reconstruction among Army veterans transitioning back to becoming a civilian. This study sought to add to the existing literature by providing a better understanding of what factors play a role in successful transition and what factors can hinder the transition. The next chapter of this proposal discusses the qualitative methodology that was used to explore the process of identity among individuals transitioning from the military back to civilian life.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transition from the military to civilian life. Most of the research that exists discusses the various identity and transitional models for individuals as they experience changes in their identity as they transition. Additionally, the research is related to some of the challenges and adjustments for individuals transitioning from the military. However, no research to date was found that investigates the process of how identity develops throughout the transition process. The aim of this study was to explore the phenomenon of identity among individuals transitioning from the military. The researcher hoped to gain a better understanding of how salient certain identities become during and after this transition and what factors may help or hinder the transition process. By gaining a deeper understanding of the impact transitioning out of the military has on identity, the findings may assist in developing more awareness, interventions, and programs that can assist individuals in a more successful transition toward reconstructing their identity.

This chapter describes the research design, participants, sampling strategy, and methods of data collection and analysis. Additionally, the researcher describes efforts that were made to ensure trustworthiness of the study as well as ethical considerations. Finally, potential limitations of the design of the study were discussed.

Research Design

Individuals who are transitioning from military to civilian life are a unique population. They not only need to balance the complexity of transitioning from a military environment into a civilian environment, they also undergo a change in their identity. To

better understand the experiences of individuals transitioning from military to a civilian, a phenomenological case study approach was the core design of this study.

Phenomenology is the study of human experience and the ways things present themselves through such experiences (Sokolowski, 2000). A unique aspect of the phenomenological approach is the focus to understand the lived experiences or events of individuals (Van Manen, 2017). According to Van Manen (2017), the “lived experience” is the moment or instant of the “now” and how individuals perceive their experiences. This method of inquiry works specifically from the participants’ statements and experiences, and the research approach is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2017). The goal of this study was to focus on the specific and unique perception of the individual’s experience regarding the process of identity reconstruction related to the transition from a military to a civilian life. Historically, phenomenology deals with questions of meaning and meaningfulness; therefore, semi-structured interviews were utilized in order to further explore the lived experiences of these individuals (Gallagher, 2014).

Participants

Transitioning out of the military and into a civilian lifestyle is something many personnel experience. In order to better understand the process of identity reconstruction and the meaning behind this phenomenon, participants needed to have experienced this transition. Additionally, it was important to interview participants who have some level of insight into how their identity has changed during their transition out of the military.

Participants for this study were recruited from male individuals who have recently retired from active duty in the United States Army. The rationale for targeting male

individuals from the Army is due to the fact that the Army is the biggest branch of the United States Military. Additionally, there is a higher prevalence of male service members in the Army than female. Male individuals tend to have significantly lower usage rates for mental health services when they are struggling with mental health concerns, as opposed to their female counterparts, and a need for better understanding of who they are after transition. (Shield et al., 2017).

The population target were people who have transitioned out of the Army within the past five years. By targeting male individuals who have transitioned out of the military within the last five years, the transition experience was recent enough that the individual would have sufficient level of insight into their transitional experience into being a civilian that would be otherwise mitigated through an extended amount of time since the transition occurred. The researcher mirrored other studies that have looked at this phenomenon, in which the numbers of participants have ranged from 7-20 individuals and are in their adulthood years (Ahern et al., 2015; Binks & Cambridge, 2018). The researcher gathered data from 10 male individuals who were previously in the military. Participants could have been any age but needed to have served at least 10 years in active duty due to retirement benefit compensation of prolonged active duty status. Participants were eligible if they had indicated that they met the following criteria:

- (a) Participants have been retired from active duty military for no more than 5 years.
- (b) Participants have served at least 10 years active duty in the Army.
- (c) Participants have served on at least two deployments.

- (d) Participants currently do not work as a contractor in any capacity with the military.

Sampling Procedures

The researcher recruited 10 male individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the study and met the criteria for the formal interview. In order to recruit participants, the researcher utilized a snowball sampling strategy. The researcher contacted veterans and former colleagues that he had worked with in the past and asked that they identify individuals who would be a good match for this study. The former colleagues provided the names of the individuals as well as their contact information (e.g., email address) to be able to be reached for interest. Once individuals were identified, a study invitation email was sent out to potential participants to gain interest (See Appendix E). Once individuals contacted the researcher to show their interest, he contacted the potential participant to set up phone screenings to determine participant eligibility for the study (see Appendix G). The researcher gave a summary of the purpose of the study and answered any questions the potential participant had about the study. If a participant met the criteria for eligibility and was still interested in participating in the study, a time was decided upon to do the formal interview. The informed consent form for the study (see Appendix A), informed consent of audio use (see Appendix B), and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) were sent out via Qualtrics for the participant to fill out and return to the researcher prior to the formal interview. The formal interview was conducted via phone. Once the researcher identified an eligible participant for the study, the researcher outlined the possible risks and benefits of the study and what was required for participation in the study. A possible risk for the participants included the resurfacing of any unresolved emotional issues or confusion in regards to the

transition from the military to civilian life. In order to mitigate this risk, participants had the option to stop the interview at any time or take a break. Additionally, the researcher offered a resource list (see Appendix M) to participants if they wanted to seek out additional resources. Potential benefits of the study included improved awareness of an individual's sense of self, along with the potential to develop strategies and interventions to better aid individuals when transitioning out of the military.

Due to the design of this study, the participant pool was a homogeneous sample consisting of men who meet the criteria listed above. According to Creswell (2017), a homogenous sample (e.g., similar in age and experience) is beneficial to the researcher in order to better understand the common experiences that are part of the process of identity reconstruction. In the case of a shortage of eligible participants using snowball sampling, the researcher would have reached out to contractors who still work in the military to identify potential candidates they have worked with in the past and who are now retired until the numerical goal of eligible participants was reached. All participants who completed the interview process received \$10 on Venmo or PayPal to compensate them for their time in participating in this study.

Pilot Testing & Case Studies

Steps in preparing for the interviews included deciding on the research questions, identifying the participants, types of interviews, recording procedures, and interview protocols (Creswell, 2017). After the interview protocols were designed and used, it was important for them to be refined through pilot testing. The researcher utilized two participants, individuals who had recently (e.g., last five years) made the transition from military to civilian life, for the pilot tests to ensure interview questions were tailored to

understand the phenomenon of identity change or transition in this study. After completing the pilot study, the target goal for the sample for this case study was between 10-15 male participants. The researcher settled on a total of 10 participants due to the saturation of data.

Theoretical Foundation

This study was designed to look at the process of identity reconstruction in people transitioning from military to civilian life. The researcher attempted to understand these experiences through a social constructivist lens (Creswell, 2017). It was important to rely on the participants' views of the situation in order for there to be a development or essence of meaning in their reality (Creswell, 2017). In order to better understand reality, it was important to uncover through what lens the nature of reality was being viewed (Creswell, 2017). Reality, according to the social constructivist position, is not a singular entity but is rather subjective and influenced by the context of the situation. Essentially, individual experiences and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher all influence what is defined as reality (Creswell, 2017). To unearth each participant's "lived experiences" regarding the process of identity transition back to being a civilian, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews within a specific time frame (within five years of official retirement from active duty). The point of conducting the interviews was to understand the multiple meanings of a phenomenon from the minds of the people who experienced it as well as to develop interpretations of themes. It was important to be aware that participants have a subjective reality and that their reality may evolve as they processed their experiences through the interview (Creswell, 2017).

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), reality is constructed by the research participant with an emphasis of understanding the "lived experiences" from the point of view

of those who live it day to day. The research on identity transition highlights that many factors can influence an individual's transition, such as perceptions of self and the nature of the transition (Beder, 2012). The same could be said of people who are transitioning out of the military back to being a civilian. This study focused on the process of identity reconstruction after transitioning out of the military back into the civilian sector.

In sum, the phenomenological approach utilized for this study sought to explore the process of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from the military to being a civilian. Although participants had unique experiences based on this phenomenon, a shared meaning was uncovered as a result of this exploration. In order to capture the essence of this experience, it was important to recruit participants who have these unique experiences of transitioning from active duty Army to being a civilian in recent years. This next section will detail the data collection procedures, including the recruitment of participants, eligibility requirements, primary interview, and follow-up.

Data Collection Procedures

The aim of this research study was to describe identity reconstruction of individuals who are transitioning from military to civilian life. Finding participants who were currently experiencing the phenomenon allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions, perspectives, and understandings during the process of their identity reconstruction after transitioning out of the military. Due to the type of information gathered during the interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized with 10 male participants. Additionally, all of the interviews were audio-recorded. Once the participants, male individuals who have retired from active duty military within five years, were selected, establishing a relationship and building trust were the next steps in the data collection

process. Building trust involved researcher and participants talking informally before interviews began, and throughout the semi structured process. As mentioned previously, each case study participant was interviewed and given questions for reflection. Interviews took place via phone in order to allow for further exploration during the interview process. Two pilot interviews were conducted prior to the other interviews via Skype in order to standardize the questions in an effort to better understand the lived experiences of individuals who have transitioned out of the military.

Possible complications with data collection were the ability to obtain access to participants and the limited time individuals had to sit down for an interview. Due to this concern, participant recruitment remained relatively small; consent forms outlining the details of the study were provided to each participant. When conducting interviews, a secure recording device was used to ensure confidentiality (Creswell, 2017). The timing and length of the study was important to consider as many participants had full time jobs and other responsibilities. The length of the semi-structured interviews was around 45-60 minutes in length in order to explore the lived experiences of these individuals while also being mindful of other time commitments the participants may have had.

Consensual Qualitative Research

Consensual Qualitative Research, also known as CQR, is an inductive method that is characterized by open-ended or semi-structured interview questions and focuses on the importance of context and words rather than numbers (Hill, 1997). Since this study was exploring the identity reconstruction of individuals transitioning out of the military, CQR methods were beneficial. CQR is especially well suited to research that requires rich descriptions of experiences, attitudes, and perceptions (Hill, 1997).

Data Sources

Interviews. Due to the phenomenological approach to this study, the primary source of data collection was individual interviews with 10 participants (Creswell, 2017). The rationale behind using interviews was to be able to speak with participants about their experiences with transitioning from military to civilian life and the process of their identity reconstruction. Semi-structured interviews allowed for deeper exploration into the participants' experiences in a free and open manner (Patton, 2002).

The interview between the researcher and each participant took place at an agreed upon time between the researcher and the participant over phone. The researcher began with informed consent, including a review of the purpose of the study, rights of the participants, confidentiality procedures, and an opportunity for participants to ask any questions they had about the study. Following the informed consent process, a semi-structured interview format was utilized, extending between 45-60 minutes. A pre-designed interview guide was used as a flexible framework and was based on key concepts and questions that were most pertinent to the study (see Appendix I).

The format of the interview allowed for questioning within the natural flow of the conversation, providing the opportunity for participants to speak on related issues they felt were important. The interviews were divided into three sections. The first interview section included information about the study's aims and procedures, reiterated confidentiality, and oriented the participants to the interview process. The second section of the interview served as a rapport building section that helped make participants feel more comfortable with the disclosing of information. The third section of interview questions focused on gaining a better understanding of the process of identity reconstruction within individuals transitioning

from the military to civilian life. Questions explored how salient military identity was within the individuals (e.g., “How would you describe who you were while being active duty in the military?” Additional follow up questions included: a) What factors do you believe are important for an individual to have to best provide a successful transition? b) How, if any, has who you are changed since you transitioned out? Additional follow up questions were asked in order to clarify and obtain as much information as possible.

Field notes. During the interview, the researcher utilized a fieldwork form (see Appendix J) that listed the questions, with space to write any reflections and thoughts that he experienced during the interview. These field notes consisted of his reactions, thoughts, and initial interpretations of the participant’s responses to the interview questions. The researcher used these field notes to help bracket his own assumptions and biases towards the phenomena of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from the military to being a civilian.

Reflexive journal. After each interview, the researcher recorded his personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions in a journal that was kept with all the data collected. This reflective process aided in separating observational field notes from personal feelings during the data analysis. After saturation of data had been achieved after the 10 participants and results were analyzed and reported, the researcher shredded the raw materials within 6 months after the final report write-up.

Equipment. All of the interviews were audio-recorded with two separate recording devices and saved onto a flash drive that were transcribed verbatim. Using two recording devices aided in ensuring that the interviews would be captured in their entirety in case of technical difficulties with one of the devices.

Data storage. All electronic data collection materials were kept locked in a safe place where the researcher was the only person who had access. Interviews were recorded on an audio device and backed up to an encrypted thumb drive. All field notes were typed up the day of the interviews and were also kept locked in a safe place.

Field issues. The researcher limited the sample to a number that is recommended by experts in the field of phenomenological research to achieve saturation of data (Creswell, 2017). While 10 participants were enough to achieve saturation of data, the researcher had planned to reach out to contractors who still worked in the military to identify potential candidates they have worked with in the past and are now retired until the numerical goal of eligible participants was needed in order to reach saturation

There was potential for some issues to arise during the interviews. The researcher needed to be aware of how he chose to phrase follow-up questions so that he did not lead the participants through his own researcher lens. In order to practice asking follow up questions that were not guided or persuasive, the researcher conducted pilot interviews with two colleagues who had been through the transition of military to civilian life. Using the interview protocol guide and feedback from the pilot interviews participants aided the researcher with pace, phrasing, and choice of interview questions.

Another potential issue was the equipment used to conduct the interviews. The researcher planned to use Skype or phone on his computer to conduct the interviews and it was possible that the computer would lose connectivity in the middle of the interview process. In order to mitigate this potential issue, the researcher conducted interviews in a place that had multiple outlets for internet connectivity that includes Wi-Fi as well as an internet cord connection to ensure the Skype or phone interview remained untethered.

Trustworthiness

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the process of identity among individuals who transitioned from military to civilian life. A phenomenological approach was utilized in order to better understand the lived experiences of identity of these individuals who had made the transition back to civilian life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The results of this study may be used to develop more strategies and interventions for military personnel in transition and who may struggle with their change in identity. This study may also inform psychological practitioners about how best to serve this population in preparing to transition back to civilian life. In order to achieve these results, the researcher needed to ensure that this study was representative of the participants who engaged in the interviews and that the findings may be transferable to other individuals who are transitioning from the military to being a civilian. In order to ensure the authenticity of this study, the researcher took several steps throughout this process to achieve accuracy. The following section will explore procedures that ensured trustworthiness or validity of the study, which refers to the authenticity and consistency of interpretations grounded in data (Morrow, 2005).

The number of participants for this phenomenological approach was 10. By interviewing this number of participants in this study, data analysis allowed for a more rich, thick description of their experiences (Creswell, 2017). It was important to build trust and rapport with the participants in order to gather a true, representative sample. By interacting with participants using rapport-building questions at the beginning of the interview, a positive relationship was fostered between participants and the researcher, facilitating meaningful responses from the participants. Additionally, through the use of member checking, the researcher shared initial findings and interpretations of the results with the

participants and asked them if they were a true representation of their experiences. It is important that the participants had the opportunity to clarify their experiences and add information to the initial results.

Another strategy the researcher used to ensure trustworthiness of the data was through triangulation of data sources and investigators. Along with individual interviews, another source of data the researcher used was a reflective journal that detailed his thought processes and interpretations throughout the study. Additionally, the researcher took field notes during and following the interviews. Pulling from Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), he also had external auditors who ensured that the codes and themes found were representative of the data (Hill, 1997). The external auditors were individuals removed from the study but well versed in qualitative research. By not being directly involved with the research, the auditors were able to provide valuable insights. Using multiple sources of data and co-investigators (auditor, member checking) ensured the validation of the results, as using these strategies confirmed the authenticity of the findings.

In staying true to the phenomenological approach, it was important that the researcher bracketed his biases and assumptions (Husserl, 1970). To ensure validity, the researcher sought to be self-aware and address any past experiences with this phenomenon that shaped his interpretations. A related challenge with regard to subjectivity and the researcher being an insider to the culture was making sure that the data accurately represents the reality of the participant rather than that of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). Therefore, after the researcher had initially analyzed the data and developed emerging themes, it was critical that the researcher followed up and invited participant feedback to make sure he was giving an accurate voice to the process of identity in regards to transitioning from the military to

civilian life. The researcher presented initial themes via email to the participants in an effort to gain valuable feedback to ensure the data captured represented the reality of the participants (see Appendix K). Participants had the opportunity to add additional information that would clarify their experience by typing their feedback into the space provided by each theme and emailing this feedback back to the researcher (see Appendix L).

Data Analysis

The data collected over the course of this research study included interviews and field notes that consisted of the researcher's own interpretations and reactions to the interviews. The researcher transcribed interviews verbatim and transcripts were analyzed. By comparing each individual account, the aim was to identify patterns of commonalities and differences in the lived experiences of identity in individuals transitioning from military to civilian life.

To begin the data analysis, the researcher read through all the transcripts to get a basic sense of the participants' experiences making the transition to being a civilian. When reading through the interview transcripts, the researcher jotted down notes and ideas that aided in the organization of the data as well as pertinent key concepts that emerge. After the researcher had read through the data and gathered a general sense of information, the Quirkos (Version 1.5; Turner, 2014) software program was utilized for analysis. Quirkos (Turner, 2014) was chosen because it groups codes into sub and sub-sub categories to show connections between themes in a clear, intuitive way. With Quirkos as a mechanism to code data, the researcher utilized a combination of inductive and deductive qualitative analysis methods to discover emerging patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Patton, 2002). In the first phase of analysis, inductive analysis was used and the raw data from the interviews with the participants was coded with detailed descriptions and experiences from the participant

interviews. After all of the transcripts were coded with Quirkos, the researcher listed all of the code words that appeared based on similar patterns (Turner, 2014).

After all the codes had been listed, the goal was to collapse the list of codes to a manageable number of around 20 codes. The researcher began to reduce any overlap of codes and if there were code words that were often repeated from the participants, they were kept, while code words that only appeared two times or less were not included in the next phase of analysis (Hill, 1997). It was important to take notice of codes that consistently repeat themselves as they lead to the pertinent themes of the participants' experience. After the codes had been listed and grouped together based on similarity, the next step was to collapse the list of codes to a manageable number, which was between 10-15 codes.

After codes had been organized and reduced, the next phase of analysis was to look for patterns, themes, and categories within the codes. Using the software program, the researcher identified eight general themes based on the interconnectedness of the codes. After those themes have been identified, they were compared with the original data along with the field notes that were taken during the interviews.

After coding, the researcher shared findings with participants to make sure the interpretation of themes was accurately represented by their experiences. To ensure that the researcher's interpretations and reactions did not demonstrate bias towards the participants and their experience, the researcher additionally met with committee members to review the initial themes and interpretations and reactions of those themes. Participants were encouraged to read through these themes and were given the opportunity to add to the themes to ensure that their experiences are represented. In addition, participants also had the opportunity to address themes that did not represent their experience. After the initial themes were developed, the researcher

emailed the themes to the participants asking them to review them. Each theme had space for participant to add their feedback to the findings. After the participants read through these themes and made adjustments that they found necessary, they emailed their feedback to the researcher. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of participants' shared experience (Creswell, 2017), and the aim was to make sure that the research portrayed what those experiences meant to the individuals who lived them. After all feedback was received and themes had been adjusted, the researcher began the final write-up of the results of the study. After the final write-up was completed, the researcher sent a copy of the results to the participants in addition to their \$10 for having participated in the study.

Ethical Considerations

While conducting this study, a major focus was the protection of participants from harm. This research adhered to APA ethical standards *Section 4.01* and *Section 8.02* of the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*, in order to protect the identities of participants as well as to make sure participants were well informed about the nature of the research (APA, 2017). During the informed consent process at the beginning of the interview, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research study and that participation in the study was completely voluntary. The consent form consisted of the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and a description of the methods of the study (i.e., nature of interviews, member checks). The researcher gave an explanation of the potential risks and benefits of participation and he informed participants that should they wish to withdraw, they were able to do so at any point during the study without penalty. Potential benefits for participants in the study included an increased awareness for the participants of their own identity process and possible strategies to help future veterans with

the transition. Military programs involved with the transition process of individuals moving on from the military could utilize the findings to promote and provide strategies and social support for their personnel in preparing for the emotional and psychological stress that may come with the transition back to civilian life.

In addition to sharing a description and purpose of the study, the informed consent process included providing resources to participants (see Appendix J), including counseling resources, the researcher's contact information, and a supervisor's contact information should participants have further questions or concerns. The researcher also provided an explanation of who would have access to the data and information that was audiotaped, namely the researcher, dissertation chair, and an outside transcription agency. Building rapport with this specific population was a little difficult because the only prior interaction between researcher and participants were emails beforehand to establish the time of the interview; therefore, establishing good rapport from the interview was crucial to obtain the most accurate and truthful data. Providing participants with information in regards to how the data collected was used and made public helped with building rapport since they knew that their identities and privacy were protected. In the event that participants become distressed during the interview, the researcher stopped the interview and offered to process their feelings, along with providing a resource list of referrals to local mental health agencies close. This effort addressed and reduced any harm to the participants of the study. Additionally, to protect the participant's identities, the researcher utilized a pseudonym for participants on raw data and in the write up of findings.

In writing up initial interpretations, the researcher was deliberate in leaving out revealing unique characteristics of individuals that may inadvertently identify participants.

For added protection, all interview data and tape recordings were kept in a secure location known only to the researcher. Raw data was destroyed upon completion of the study.

Pseudonyms were used when writing up the data and results to increase the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

Limitations

There were several limitations that existed in this study. The first limitation was that since these were phenomenological semi-structured interviews with 10 male participants, the results cannot be generalized to female individuals who are experiencing transition. Also, a unique component of the participants is the length of service (i.e., 20 years) each one had as they all served in various leadership roles. Therefore, a limitation is this study is not generalizable to all soldiers transitioning from the military, in particular individuals with shorter terms of service (i.e., 2-4 years). Additionally, this study focused on individuals who were Army veterans. Although this study sought to explore the process of identity among individuals who transitioned from the military to civilian life, it should not be assumed that the themes that arose would be consistent with the other armed forces since they have different challenges and programs than the Army. Therefore, these results cannot be generalized to individuals who have transitioned from the other armed forces (e.g., Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Air Force).

Another limitation was the bias of the researcher. The researcher's familiarity of working with the Army, where he obtained study participants, increased rapport among research participants and also presented opportunity for bias. Due to the nature of a phenomenological approach, it was important that the participant's true experiences were shown in the study and not represented by the researcher's interpretations. One way the researcher reduced bias in the study was to engage in a self-reflective journal recording his thoughts throughout the process.

Another limitation of the study was that the primary research method is focused on interviews. Due to the nature of the study, data does not include observations within assistance-program settings of how individuals' identity shaped during the actual transition. Linking interviews along with observational data could have provided a more holistic perspective on the process of identity with individuals transitioning out of the military to civilian life.

Summary

While a number of research studies exist related to identity following transition out of sport, limited studies focus on individuals who are transitioning out of the military to being a civilian (Ahern et al., 2015). This study sought to explore and understand the process of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from the military to civilian life. Focusing on these personnel, as well as their experiences with this phenomenon, may inform counseling psychologists as to how to work with people who are transitioning back to being a civilian. Findings may provide guidance regarding implementing coping strategies and developing a well-rounded identity that can be beneficial when making the transition to being a civilian after leaving the military. By understanding the process of identity reconstruction someone goes through when transitioning from the military to civilian life, future research could continue to aid in helping answer the question: Who am I now?

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from this study of exploring identity among individuals who have recently transitioned from active duty to civilian life. Responses to the four primary research questions were used to determine common themes across the participants. This section is organized by the four primary research questions, and further delineated into eight major themes: (a) lack of purpose; (b) leader of soldiers; (c) new normal; (d) strong support network; (e) importance of preparation; (f) military identity; (g) lack of understanding; and (h) job requirements. In correspondence to each of the primary research questions, each of these major themes is described, including quotations from the participants to illustrate each theme.

Description of Participants

This critical phenomenological study was developed from individual interviews with 10 veterans who previously served in active duty Army (Table 1). All 10 veterans completed the demographic questionnaire and provided informed consent for this study. Two interested participants did not respond to an email about scheduling an interview or did not fit the interview schedule.

The participants ranged in number of years serving in active duty from 16 to 24 years ($M = 20.8$). Among the participants, all 10 identified as male and seven identified as White (70%), two identified as Hispanic (20%), and one identified as Black (10%). Additionally, the number of overseas deployments among participants' experiences ranged from two to seven deployments ($M = 3.9$). The participants were recruited from the following regions of the United States: Southeast ($n = 3$), Northeast ($n = 2$), West ($n = 2$), and Midwest ($n = 3$).

Detailed demographic information and their experiences will be discussed in the participant narratives.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Age	Years of Service	Number of Deployments	Years of Retirement	Relationship Status	Current Occupation
Pseudonym*						
DP 1	42	21	3	2	Married	Photographer
DM 2	45	24	7	1	Married	Business
JG 3	41	20	4	3	Married	Retired
JP 4	43	20	3	1.5	Married	Truck Driver
AH 5	44	22	4	1	Single	Sales Consultant
GL 6	39	21	3	1	Married	Government
JL 7	42	24	7	1	Married	Packaging
TJ 8	38	20	2	1	Divorced	Government
TR 9	35	16	3	1	Married	Student
PM 10	42	20	3	2	Single	Sales Profession

*Actual participant names not used to protect confidentiality

Domestic Participant Narratives

This critical phenomenological study captured the lived experiences of 10 veterans returning to civilian life. The following is a detailed description of each participant in order

to provide the reader with a better understanding of their individual experience and to aid in understanding the research results. All names are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of participants.

DP 1. DP1 is a 42-year-old male, who first entered the military after a semester in college in which he discovered he needed more discipline in order to be more successful post high school studies. While in service, DP1 was an 11B, which is an infantryman, and he was deployed three times over his military career. After serving for 21 years, he retired due to the birth of his first child. DP1 has been retired from active duty military for two years and currently lives in the Midwest region of the United States. His current occupation includes being a full-time photographer.

DM 2. DM2 is a 45-year-old male, who first entered the military after realizing there were no career jobs he could invest in from his hometown. While in service, DM2 was a 25U, which is signal systems support specialist, and he was deployed seven times over his military career. After serving for 24 years, he retired as he reported being ready for the next phase of his life. DM2 has been retired from active duty military for one year and currently lives in the Southeast region of the United States. He and his wife currently manage an acupuncture business.

JG 3. JG 3 is a 41-year-old male, who first entered the military after wanting to leave his small hometown and explore the rest of the world. While in service, JG 3 was a 19K, which is an armor crewman, and he was deployed four times over his military career. After serving for 20 years, he retired in order to receive the benefits package the military offers after 20 years of service. JG 3 has been retired from active duty military for three years and

he currently lives in the Southeast region of the United States. He is retired and travels the country with his wife.

JP 4. JP 4 is a 43-year-old male, who first entered the military seeking full-time employment. While in service, JP 4 was an 11B, which is an infantryman, and he was deployed three times over his military career. After serving for 20 years, he retired in order to receive the benefits package the military offers after 20 years of service. JP 4 has been retired from active duty military for one and half years and currently lives in the Southeast region of the United States. His current occupation is a full-time truck driver.

AH 5. AH 5 is a 44-year-old male, who first entered the military in order to serve his country along with acquire new skills he can use in life. While in service, AH 5 was a 19D, which is a cavalry scout, and he was deployed four times over his military career. After serving for 22 years, he retired in order to receive the benefits package the military offers after 20 years of service. AH 5 has been retired from active duty military for one year and currently lives in the Southeast region of the United States. His current occupation is a sales consultant for a firearms manufacturing company.

GL 6. GL 6 first entered the military wanting to find purpose and direction. While in service, GL 6 was an 11Z, which is a command sergeant major, and he was deployed three times over his military career. After serving for 21 years, he received medical retirement related to injuries he sustained while in service. GL 6 has been retired from active duty military for six months and currently lives in the Midwest region of the United States. His current occupation is as a federal employee.

JL 7. JL 7 first entered the military after wanting to leave his small hometown and have a change of pace. While in service, JL 7 was a 11B4P, which is an infantryman and he

was deployed seven times over his military career. After serving for 24 years, he retired due to the maximum time allowed for rank and years in service without being promoted (i.e. 26 years). JL 7 has been retired from active duty military for one year and currently lives in the Southeast region of the United States. His current occupation is working for a COO/CFO of a packaging company.

TJ 8. TJ 8 first entered the military due to wanting to travel more in his life. While in service, TJ 8 was a 25B, which is an information technology specialist, and deployed two times over his military career. After serving for 20 years, he retired due to the benefits package the military offers of 20 years of service. TJ 8 has been retired from active duty military for one year and currently lives in the Southeast region of the United States. His current occupation includes working for the government.

TR 9. TR 9 first entered the military due to the events of 9/11. While in service, TR 9 was a 13M/13Z, which is a senior sergeant for rocket launch systems, and he was deployed three times over his military career. After serving for 16 years, he separated from the Army with an honorable discharge. TR 9 has been retired from active duty military for one year and currently lives in the Northeast region of the United States. He is currently a full-time student at a local university.

PM 10. PM 10 first entered the military after not being successful in college and looking more for a purpose and for a way to separate himself from his peers. While in service, PM 10 was an 11B, which is an infantryman, and he was deployed three times over his military career. After serving for 20 years, he retired due to the benefits package the military offers of 20 years of service. PM 10 has been retired from active duty military for

two years and he currently lives in the Western region of the United States. His current occupation is a solution sales professional for a high-end company.

Research Question One

As aforementioned, the first research question of this study was: What is the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transitioned from active duty to civilian life. Several themes emerged from the data that provide insight into how individuals viewed their identity before they entered the service, while they were active duty, and how they viewed their identity upon entering the civilian world again. These themes provide a better understanding of this reconstruction process and the unique experiences of these individuals, including an experience of uncertainty or lack of purpose prior to entering the military, being a leader of soldiers during their military experience, and identifying new roles in their lives following military service.

Lack of purpose. In accordance with the interpretation and analysis of the participants' responses along with field notes, multiple people spoke about uncertainty of who they were prior to joining the military. When describing what their identity was prior to joining the military, many participants explained they had a shallow view of the world and a lack of purpose. Additionally, participants were uncertain as to who they wanted to be as many of them were wanting to get out of the towns where they grew up. For instance, DP 1 described himself prior to joining the military as "I, ah, I was kind of a punk kid who thought that he knew a lot about the world, and didn't really know a ton." DM 2 also described himself in the same manner:

So, prior to me joining the military, I, how do I describe myself? I was a punk! Um, I... in high school, I was, I was the only person in my high school to ever get a scholarship. I came from a really small school.

Some participants also had trouble with a lack of direction or purpose in what they wanted to pursue. They reported they had uncertainty of their sense of self and were unsure of what they to do in life. For instance, JP 4 noted:

I just was. Um, prior, prior to making the decision one day on a whim to join the military, I had non- I had neither. No purpose, no direction. I was a high school dropout. I was content to party all the time and, live off of whoever would allow me to crash on their couch. I- I was... I really didn't have a direction or a purpose. I just was.

Leader of soldiers. When describing themselves during their time in the military, many participants mentioned being a leader as part of their identity. Participants reported that as part of the culture, the military helped cultivate and enhance the trait of leading others. Also, depending on the rank they were at the time, the identity of being a leader was more ingrained for some of the participants. For instance, DM 2 spoke about his experiences during training in the military shifted how he viewed himself:

It kind of really, really, really hit home on me. And, um, that's when I became a good leader, is when I started realizing that learning how to actually communicate with people and being about teamwork and all that stuff.

JG 3 also echoed the sentiment of identifying himself as a leader. He noted:

Um, I mean, I was an NCO, so I considered myself a leader, you know. Again, uh, took care of my guys. My guys took care of me. Again, there, there was a sense of duty. I had pride in what I, what I did. I had pride in wearing the uniform.

The identity of being a leader is engrained in soldiers from their time in the military. It is interesting to note that depending on how one answers the question of who they are, they may not be ready for transitioning out of the military as echoed by DP 1:

Uh, I would even probably challenge and say if your immediate response is I'm a leader you're probably not ready to get out because you're still, unless you're like, an active leader in some organization other than the army, you're still trying to hold onto something that's going to disappear very, very quickly.

Many of the participants discussed the importance of being a leader of soldiers both while on and off deployments. Specifically, time on deployment shaped a few of the participants into a different version of themselves than who they were prior to their deployment, as noted by GL 6:

Oh, I mean, every, I changed when I came back, specifically due to the PTSD, um, so physically my reactions to things changed. How I looked at life and how I approach situations, um, it made me more, um, uh, held back about doing certain things, as before I was more happy go lucky, I didn't care what, what happened. Um, so yeah, I mean, it did change me, as far as, like, self-efficacy goes, um, I think it changed me to the fact that, uh, I didn't take things for granted as much as I used to, and I viewed the world differently, and what I mean by differently, is I think I was more along the lines of, um, I guess, for lack of better terms, more sociopathic before, not giving a crap about anybody but myself. Now after deployment I was a little more, um, empathetic, um, about everything and everyone around me. Because a lot of people think that Sergeant Majors, Majors, and above, don't want to be perceived as broke, hurt, um, weak, Um, a lot of them thought it as, thought it was, saw it as a weakness, or somebody being broke, but in the long run I was able to keep more of my soldiers because they were able to get the

help they needed, um, I don't know, I think I just approached things differently because of my own personal perspective on self-worth and identity.

Other participants spoke about how being on deployment changed how they identified themselves and echoed how they became more empathetic and developed a stronger leadership style. For example, JL 7 noted, "I think for me individually, my leadership became stronger uh, through the deployments."

New roles. In accordance with the interpretation and analysis of the participants' responses, multiple people spoke about a shift in their identity upon their transition out of the military and an attempt to reconstruct who they were as people. When describing the cognitive shift of their identity after transitioning from active duty, some participants spoke about coming to an understanding that they were no longer the person they were while active duty as JL 7 noted:

You're used to being on the top of your game. And when you come back into the civilian world, well you know, it's kind of hard to understand that you're not in charge of anything anymore. It's kind of hard for you to understand that um, you know, you're not, you're not the, the guy that people were gonna come to when they need something because you're not in the leadership role in a company.

A component that aided DP 1 in figuring out his new normal was asking himself how he responded to his own personal identity as well as those who were asking him. For instance, he mentioned:

I think when people started asking me what I did, I think before I got out, that answer depended on who was asking me the question. Started to switch from I am a soldier to I am a photographer or I am a teacher.

Other members spoke about how other identities were able to become more salient within them as they no longer had to associate as being a soldier. TR 9 spoke about his identity as a father by stating, “I almost- you know I get to be dad again? Or, you know, I get to be dad for once.” Additionally, TR noted his surprise as to his overall happiness about the ability to identify himself differently:

Uh, guess how happy I was gonna be, like I thought, I mean, you know for 16 years that the- the fear was put into you, All right, you don't want to be on the outside world, you- life in the army's so much easier. This. That. And you're like- so you're like, you fear- you're apprehensive to step out the door, to take that uniform off.

DP 1 also spoke to the importance of family and how he identified himself:

Um, being a father to two little kids, especially being home primarily with them. Um, and I think that's been a huge part of my identity too now. I'm now responsible for making sure I don't raise, you know, two human beings that I wouldn't be proud of, wouldn't want to have a beer with, uh, you know and I'm already thinking of them as who they are as adults. I'm thinking a lot about the values and the character strength.

Research Question Two

The second research question of this study is: What factors play a role in a successful transition from military to civilian life? Several themes emerged from the data that provide insight into this question, including (a) the importance of having a strong support network surrounding the individual transitioning, which includes both family and fellow veterans, (b) an emphasis on preparation for the transition.

Strong support network. Participants reported that various types of social support can impact the ease of the transition. The type of social support participants identified as important

ranged from having family by their side to support groups and resources. Many participants spoke about the importance of having a supportive family to help aid in the transition and the relationships that were being established. For example, PM 10 mentioned, “Relationships are definitely the pulling of the realm.” Both AH 5 and GL 6 spoke to the importance of having a support group and AH 5 explained:

Uh, so you can find those little groups, and find out what you really need. Uh, to get into that community. And what you need, the skills to get hired in that. Plus it gives you the networking, and you know people there.

GL 6 spoke about the importance of learning from those who have previously transitioned out. “Um, friends that are already out, that are, that have already experienced what you're going to experience. Um, uh, VA support, um, for medical.”

Additionally, participants reported utilizing some of the resources the military provides in order to aid in a successful transition and networking opportunities, as noted by GL 6:

Um, yeah, from my perspective getting out, I noticed that not only from the positive side, that people helped you with certain processes that were, um, for lack of better terms, um, uh, anxious creating, creating, create, create anxiousness, like people were getting out, they're like, "Oh my god, I don't know what's going to happen." Um, "I don't know how I'm going to get taken care of." They have these executive level meetings for Captains, and Sergeant Major, and above. Actually, Major, and Sergeant Major and above, that help you with transitioning, even to the point where you're assisted with resumes and assisted with finding jobs, and linking you with people. That's the positive side.

Importance of Preparation. Multiple participants spoke to the importance of planning out their future well in advance and prior to the transition. They spoke about how many individuals who are transitioning out have the idea that their service will allow them to walk into the civilian workforce and have a high-level job. They reported that this portion of their training is where the military can fail people and that there should be much more emphasis on understanding how the transition process works and preparation. These participants spoke about beginning to plan their transition almost two to three years before they were actually transitioning into the civilian world. For example, JG 3 indicated before the transition out, “So, just being able to plan, prepare, and then take responsibility. Say, 'Okay, hey, I need to ... This is what my end goal is going to be. How do I get to that end goal?'. Additionally, JG 3 noted the timeline of when to start preparing to transition, “Yeah. 12, 12 months you start your plan and then six months you start, should start putting your plan into place. Between the, I say the 4, 6 month mark.” GL 6 echoed the sentiment of preparation by “having a plan to get to that. I think what has helped a lot of the people that I've mentored through this, is having a vision board.” It was further emphasized by multiple participants to not only plan for yourself upon transitioning but taking care of your family by utilizing all the resources the military could provide, as noted by GL 6:

Start taking care of yourself and your family at least a year before getting out, and what I mean by that is, any type of medical things that you need or your family needs, um, setting up your spouse or yourself up in the future for where you're going to live and what job you're going to find, um, and take advantage of SFL-TAP employment opportunities.

TJ 8 further emphasized the importance of preparation in order to have a more successful transition:

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Do your research, take advantage of the different classes, and the different trainings that they offer, 'cause, the, the bulk of it isn't mandatory, it's only a few mandatory things like, making sure your records are in order.

Similarly, DM 2 also echoed the importance of planning prior to the transition out:

Well, so, I got yes and no. So, I was a, I'm a lucky one because my wife and I opened our business a year before I got out. So it was already, but we planned it right? We planned it because we're planners but we planned, we opened the business because, you know, as a, you know, a means to an end, you know, what we were gonna do when we got out. So, I didn't have to worry about that. But, yeah like, I have a lot of friends that got out of the military, didn't have a plan, and now, and I think it's a big reason, like, the military does not set people up for outside the military.

Many participants also noted the importance of taking advantage of existing programs the military provides to assist in the transition process, even before the actual transition. Participants reported that these programs helped them prepare for making the transition as noted by PM 10:

Um, you know, definitely take advantage of all of the, uh, transition programs 'cause there are a p- you know, a plethora of them now. I took advantage of, you know, one of them.

However, participants reported that often times it is difficult for people to attend the courses, as JL 7 recounted, "90% of the problem is people don't attend these classes." Participants reported that most of the transition classes were optional and not a requirement and that often times the classes would be after work hours. To aid in preparing for a more successful transition,

participants mentioned the importance of taking advantage of the process the military has for changing a civilian into a soldier and reorienting them back to being a civilian as proposed by AH 5:

I would, uh... The big thing that I would do is... We take... It takes us 22 weeks on the average to turn a civilian into a soldier. So, I would do a, you know, we'll just call it 15 weeks. Your last 15 weeks in the Army, you would basically go to a civilian battalion, and you still have a wear a uniform, you still... Couldn't grow your hair out and all that sort of stuff. But things like that battalion you would be using normal people work. You would be showing up at 9 a.m. instead of 0900. And there would be classes. It would be, you know, classes on vocabulary. There would be class, you know, three weeks long class on translating your military experience into civilian experience rather than a three hour class. Uh, and basically you would just take that, you know, over that 15 weeks you'd be able to go and you'd be able to have time to do appointments. Because we have the Warrior Transition Battalion now. You would hand over all your responsibilities, you would hand over all that stuff, and you would be working on your transition, going to your appointments, making sure that, you know... And then there would still be Army things where you get graded on your resume, and you get, you know, graded on that sort of stuff? And you get reprimanded if you use, like hoo-ah, and, you know, that sort of stuff. It would be Army, but it would be focused on that transition.

Research Question Three

The third question this study investigated was: What factors could impede and hinder individuals from making a successful transition from active duty to civilian life. Two themes emerged related to the third research question. The first theme was the saliency of the military identity

among individuals as they were transitioning out. Age, time served in service, and rank were found to have an impact on the salience of the military identity. Another theme was an insufficient understanding and lack of awareness by civilians of the intricacies of the military culture to aid individuals in the transition. Further, civilians transition out of the military expressed a lack of awareness about how civilians would treat them.

Military identity. When describing difficulties in the ability to be able to have a successful transition, the theme of military identity and culture were prevalent throughout the interviews. Most participants spoke about how the military is a different lifestyle and that even the thought process is different from that of civilian life. They reported many veterans find it extremely hard to make a life shift after so many years of having the same identity and being ingrained in the military culture. Factors such as age, time served in service, and rank were found to have an impact on how salient the military identity was for participants. According to participants, the higher the rank, the more difficult it was to let go of the military identity. For example, DM 2 spoke about the difficulties of letting go of the culture and rank upon transition:

And that's something, like, like, I know a lot of people that get out, they're higher ranking people, they have a hard time letting go. And letting go of the military, letting go of their rank, because that's all they've known for years.

The military identity is also prevalent for those participants who had difficulties from their fellow soldiers, as AH 5 noted:

As soon as you put in your retirement packet, or you don't sign up to reenlist, everybody thinks you're a quitter. The impact of the military identity can be seen from both personal identity standpoint along with feeling like one is betraying their fellow soldiers. I was so ready to be a civilian that I wanted to be able to leave that Army

identity behind. Of course, I wanted their money for retirement. But I wanted to be as far away from that culture as I could.

On a similar note, there is a sense of having to change one's sense of self in order to conform to the military identity and culture that made it difficult while being active duty as well as during transitioning as noted by both PM 10 and GL 6:

Yeah so it made, it made for a very interesting experience for yourself is almost this idea of having to hide a little bit of who you were to kinda conform to, you know, what the culture presented and like what people were doing (PM 10)

And when you're out, you're just a number. Ain't nobody, there's nobody going to go back in the system and be like, "Oh, this guy really did break his back." (GL 6)

Other participants also echoed the difficulties of letting go of the military identity and of the ability to lead others, as noted by JL 7:

You're used to being on the top of your game. And when you come back into the civilian world, well you know, it's kind of hard to understand that you're not in charge of anything anymore. It's kind of hard for you to understand that um, you know, you're not, you're not the, the guy that people were gonna come to when they need something because you're not in the leadership role in a company.

Lack of understanding. Another impeding factor that emerged as a theme of this study and that was described by multiple participants was a lack of understanding from civilians as to what job titles or roles the participants had while being in active duty. For example, DM 2 spoke about the lack of care from civilians "And then when you step in the civilian world, people don't care, they thank you for your service, but they don't really care all the great things you did in the military." TR 9 also echoed the lack of understanding from the civilian side by stating:

Like it- nobody cares if you were a- a Sergeant Major in the army. Or if you were a four star general. You know, especially if you get away from, you know, military installations, there's a lot of military around, the ... you know, the- the thought process of a civilian that has no real connection to the military.

From the military side, some participants also spoke about how some soldiers feel like there is a sense of entitlement for them upon reentering the civilian world and a concurrent lack of planning for the transition, as noted by JG 3:

Sense of entitlement. So, you know, there's a lot of, lot of soldiers who get out and think that, um, they are owed something because they've served their, their country. Well, I'm going to get a job because I, I've served our country.' Yeah, so did 1.7 million other individuals across America that are applying probably for that same type of job. This is in all ranks, not just young, young guys but even seen some Full-Bird Colonels, um, a General, and they had that false sense of, false sense of entitlement and then they weren't honest with themselves.

Research Question Four

The final question this study investigated was: Was there anything surprising about the transition for the participants? A major theme of the responses to this question included the job requirements and qualifications one might need to have in order to find employment after the transition from active duty.

Job requirement. Based on participants' responses, one of the most surprising factors for four (JG 3, GL 6, JL 7, PM 10) of the ten participants was that the ability to acquire a job was easier than they realized. Many participants reported that it was important to be able to speak about the experiences they had acquired over their time in the military in a way that would

translate into the civilian workforce. For example, JG 3 expressed that due to his experiences, he was able to acquire a job for which he did not have the correct credentials. He noted “Probably one of the most surprising part ... For the job I got required to have basically, I was supposed to have a PhD.” Additionally, he explained that “So, I think one of the surprises for me was sometimes that job listing is not truly what you have to have. There's ways around it.” The idea of being hired based on experiences was echoed by PM 10:

I'm actually really surprised that, um, you know, there's companies that will hire you, uh, you know, based off of your experience. And that they will, you know, invest in you and, and pay you just as much as somebody that has an MBA. You know, my credentials on paper do not look as good as most of my peers. Um, yet I get selected over my, you know, many of my peers for positions which, you know, I was shocked at that and I am still a little bit, um, you know, kinda uneasy about. Um, you, you know, folks who have been in this business for, um, you know, their whole life or whatever, you know, for, for, you know, 15, 20 years or something like that.

In addition to being surprised by job requirements, a few participants did note the importance of having some sort of education as part of the ability to find a job. Specifically, participants emphasizes that providing an education was not something the military did, but participants found that an education to be highly valued upon transitioning, as noted by DM 2:

As an enlisted soldier in the military, I didn't have to have college. I didn't have to, like, I didn't even get, I didn't get my degree until I was almost out of the military. And, like, in the civilian world, like, you have to have a degree. I don't know, like, I just think that, like, so they don't push education. And I think, in today's world, you have to have an education.

Ease of transition. Another major theme that was surprising to participants was the ease with which they were able to make the transition from military to civilian life. A handful of participants spoke about how there was an initial fear of transitioning placed on them by the military. For example TR 9 mentioned:

Uh, guess how happy I was gonna be, like I thought, I mean, you know for 16 years that the fear was put into you. All right, you don't want to be on the outside world, you- life in the army's so much easier. This. That. And you're like- so you're like, you fear- you're apprehensive to step out the door, to take that uniform off.

Other participants spoke about the ease with which they were able to transition after moving forward from the initial fear of the transitioning itself. For example, AH 5 mentioned:

Uh, just at how easy it was for me. There was a lot of fear there, and there was a lot of things, but that effort that I put into it, um, like I stopped saying, you know, roger, and I started changing my vocabulary two to three years out.

Additionally, GL 6 explained that due to his identity changing prior to transitioning out, there was more ease for him to move forward by stating “ Um, it was easier than everybody told me it was going to be, but I think that's because of my own, um, changing identity prior to getting out.”

Summary of Findings

In sum, findings of this study included several major themes such as the new roles of identity after transition, successful factors that aid in transition, including a strong support network, impeding factors such as a strong military identity, and surprising factors related to job requirements and ease of the transition. Most participants recognized that their identity changed upon entering the military from the point of active duty to now, and their experiences shaped

who they are today. Additionally, many participants noted that there needs to be more emphasis placed upon providing individuals with resources and the time to be able to prepare for transition into civilian life in order to aid in improving overall well-being and success rate.

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Research Question 4
Lack of Purpose: Pre-enlistment	Strong Support Network	Military Identity	Job Requirement
Leader of Soldiers: While Active Duty	Importance of Preparation	Lack Of Understanding	Ease of Transition
New Normal: Post Transition			

Figure 1. A visual representation of the themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Who am I now? Unfortunately for many people transitioning out of the military to civilian life, the answer to this question can be complex and difficult. According to the Department of Veteran Affairs (2017), there are roughly 22 million American veterans, which accounts for approximately 7% of the total U.S. population. Individuals who have served military careers for 10-20 years have known a certain way of life and transitioning out of the military culture can have an impact on an individual's identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). However, little is known about how the transition from military to civilian life impacts an individual's identity and what factors are important in facilitating a successful transition (Ahern et al., 2015). Fortunately, programs are in place (e.g., finance, resume writing) to assist military personnel go through the transition from being active duty to retiring. But are these programs enough to fully aid in helping an individual navigate through a successful transition? They are designed to help the individual in various aspects of their life, such as competing for jobs, but to what extent are they preparing military personnel for life outside of the confines of military culture? Only a handful of research studies have focused on transitioning out of the military and they share a common thread throughout their conclusions. Self-identity issues and the continued formation of identity are of concern for many service members throughout their transition into civilian life (Buell, 2010; Drops, 1979; Savion, 2009).

Background and Context

Many attempts have been made to describe the complexities of military culture. Researchers within psychology agree that a common thread of military culture is the

emphasis on the group as a whole as opposed to the individual (Boose, 1993; French, 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Huntington, 1957; Verrips, 2006; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). Deep relationships develop between military personnel throughout their service, and these bonds are difficult to understand for someone not enveloped within the military culture (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Sørensen, 2011; Verrips, 2006). Emphasis on behaviors and values such as loyalty, duty, and even self-sacrifice are prevalent among military personnel (Bragin, 2010; Goldstein, 2001). During the acculturation process, soldiers learn to suppress their individuality in favor of the requirements of the collective group (Ben-Ari, 1998; Hall, 2012). Due to this emphasis on the group as a whole, many researchers suggest that a person begins to change their perception of self. People acculturated into the military begin to form a new sense of group identity rather than individual aspects of themselves prior to entering into service (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Cabrera, Figley, & Yarvis, 2012; Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2012).

The transition and reintegration into civilian life may become a challenge for military personnel due to their strong learned military self-identity (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Edström, Lunde, & Haaland, 2009; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Events such as field exercises and combat training are examples of military cultural phenomena that can shape military identity. These events help build camaraderie among military members and can lead to further deepening of a military identity (Haaland 2011; Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Kümmel, 2011; Mäkinen, 2011). Some researchers have suggested that military identity is learned and performed. The important components of military self-identity are expertise in professional skills and camaraderie with other members (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). However, little is known

about how people experience the transition from a military to a civilian identity during the process of identity reconstruction (e.g., the challenges of returning to civilian life, key differences between military and civilian environments, how veterans navigate challenges and approach reconnection, as well as what resources mitigate transition difficulties).

The following section provides more detail on existing literature related to identity and transition from a military perspective. Existing literature will be synthesized and the chapter will provide some critique as to where the location of major gaps exists. This discussion will set the stage for the current study and provide a rationale for further contributions to this area of research. In addition, the potential implications of this research moving forward will be explored. These implications include the potential for greater awareness for practitioners in addition to programs and resources allocated to aiding in the understanding identity for military members. Most notably, future research in this area has the potential to be a driving force for a more holistic approach when working with military members as they continue to aid them in exploring their identity during and after transition into civilian life.

Understanding Identity

The present study explores the process of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from their military career back to a civilian. A number of identity models have been identified in the literature that contribute to a better understanding of the process an individual goes through when experiencing transition. While most models agree that an individual's identity begins during adolescence, older models see identity as conflict resolution in a linear style (Schachter, 2005). Newer research has argued that identity is more fluid and transitional, with culture, age, ethnicity, and gender playing integral roles into shaping an individual's identity (Alisat & Pratt, 2012).

It is important to learn about the history of identity development and models used to help better understand the current landscape and theories that psychologists are utilizing in today's world. More recently, one of the criticisms of earlier models of identity development is that they articulate a linear form of development in which an individual navigates between stages until one no longer has internal conflict and has realized their identity (Berzonky, 2004). Newer models of identity construction conceptualize identity as multidimensional, transitional, and more fluid rather than being linear (Lemert, 2014). Additionally, researchers and theorists argue that more traditional theories of identity construction do not fully explain the process of an individual's group or social identity such as gender, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation (Berzonky, 2004; Blustein, Devenis, & Kidney, 1989).

Another criticism of traditional linear theories of identity development is that they were constructed based on a traditional European and individualistic culture (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Consequently, more traditional theories may not apply to racial/ethnic groups or collectivistic cultures whose family systems, cultural norms, and developmental milestones may be different from the European model (Berzonky, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 2001). Hence, it is integral to explore identity construction theories that are multidimensional and consider cultural aspects of one's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). For example, Berzonky's social cognitive identity model (2005) argues that an individual's sense of identity is not a separate entity as compared to one's roles, attitudes, motives, values, goals, self-views, regulatory strategies, and the like from which it is composed. Berzonky's (1989) model highlights the importance of cross-cultural experiences and is integral in better conceptualizing the process of identity among individuals who transition out of the military. Berzonky's (2011) model may

be able to shed light on the processing style individuals transitioning from the military may have in differentiating their various identity orientations (e.g., social, personal, collective).

Military Culture

Newer models of identity have emphasized the importance of culture in helping shape how an individual can better develop their sense of self (Martiny & Rubin, 2016; Triandis, 1989). Culture is a product of the social environment in which one surrounds themselves and includes a shared sense of values, norms, ideas, symbols, and meanings (Redmond et al., 2015). The sense of culture helps in distinguishing groups of people from one another and people in the same cultures often share common ways of perceiving the world (Krueger, 2000). Much like college athletics and athletic identity and culture, the military has its own culture. The military is a unique culture in which personnel and family members have experiences and perceptions that are different than civilians (Redmond et al., 2015).

In an effort to better understand the identity of individuals transitioning out of the military, one must have knowledge of the culture surrounding military personnel. The experiences of those who served in “active duty” set them apart from civilians in the U.S. population. If one is not in the military culture, then outsiders are often seen as not knowing “what it is like” (Bragin, 2010). Due to this perspective many service members admittedly are not as open to individuals who have not been immersed into the military culture. Transitioning out of the military is a culture and lifestyle change and can have an impact on one’s identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). Military culture can be defined as “attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of people in uniformed military service to their countries, who, along with their families, participate in cohesive workplace organizational structures fostering a common mindset” (Krueger, 2000, p.252). The process of becoming indoctrinated into the

military culture begins as soon as personnel arrive to reception (Hall, 2013). At the very early stages, people are taught to lose their sense of individuality and adhere to becoming a part of the group (Meyer, 2015). The military acculturates people to certain disciplines, including attitudes, values, and expectations, in order to develop camaraderie and group cohesiveness (DeVries, Hughes, Watson, & Moore, 2012; Hall, Garland, Charlton, & Johnson, 2018; Krueger, 2000).

According to Britt, Adler, and Castro (2006), five core principles can help guide an understanding of military culture: (1) Military organizations require members to possess particular values. (2) Adopted values influence the identity as a service member, which in turn affects military performance. (3) As service members incorporate military values (e.g., respect for others) into their identity, the integration of subgroups committed to the goals of the military will be utilized. (4) An effective military organization takes on the responsibility of supporting the health and well-being of the members and their families. (5) Success in the military is a function of how the organization is perceived by society. The essence of military culture can permeate almost every aspect of a person's life. According to Meyer (2015), veterans who served in the military for only a few years continue to report strong identification with the military years after transitioning out. Individuals who have a strong and heightened sense of military identity can have a more difficult transition experience (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This difficult transition was found to be particularly true if the military identity was still salient after the transition back to civilian life (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Meyer, 2015). Being indoctrinated into a culture such as the military can also have an impact on the way an individual understands their own identity both pre- and post-transition. The military culture is vastly different from the civilian world and can cause military personnel to struggle with

shaping their identity after transitioning out (Redmond et al., 2015). The saliency of the military identity is profound and the literature suggests that many individuals who have transitioned back into being a civilian still strongly identify with the military (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Meyer, 2015). As evidenced with other domains, such as athletic identity, this strong identification within the military can lead to individuals having more difficulty during the transition back to civilian life.

Transition Models Unique to Military

Research has also identified various transitional models in which perceptions of the transition, preparedness, and acceptance have all been found to influence how successful a transition is for the individual. Additionally, the circumstances (e.g., voluntary or involuntary), characteristics of the individual, coping styles, and ability to navigate resources can impact how an individual transitions and the impact on their identity (Ahern et al., 2015; Castro & Kintzle, 2016; Schlossberg, 1981).

Military members who transition from active duty to being a civilian face a multitude of factors that can ultimately affect whether a successful reintegration occurs for an individual. Factors such as physical and psychological injuries, family, social relationships, employment, and educational factors have been found to play a role in helping or hindering an individual from making a successful transition (Ahern et al., 2015; Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2016). When there are hardships or deficits in multiple areas, the cumulative effect could lead to a functional impairment for an individual attempting a successful transition and a delay in successful reemployment (Pease et al., 2016).

Due to a continued disassembling of the large U.S. military presence in various parts of the world, veterans are transitioning back to civilian life at faster rates, requiring the

development of supportive programs to support their homecoming transition (Ahern et al., 2015). In the past few years, the Army has recognized the importance of aiding military members with the tools and skills necessary in order to succeed when transitioning back to being a civilian (Koester, 2015). In late 2014, the Army established the Soldier Life Cycle Transition Model to aid military members. This model is comprised of three phases: (1) first year, (2) career, and (3) transition (Walleman, 2014). This three phase cycle prepares soldiers from the beginning of their military career through the point of their transition to civilian life with resources, including employment skills, counseling, and opportunities to enhance marketability (Koester, 2015). Understanding the various aspects of the Soldier Life Cycle model can provide a good basis and context for individuals transitioning out of the military. However, to truly understand how difficult or easy the process of identity can be for these individuals, the culture of the military needs to be explored to provide a context for the impact this transition can have on the saliency of an individual's identity.

Some of the challenges identified with transitioning back to being a civilian include a sense of loss, financial insecurities, mental health issues, and inability to cultivate other identities (Adler et al., 2011; Bowes et al., 2018; Pease et al., 2016). In addition to the abovementioned factors, difficulty regulating emotion, lack of community, and ineffective sense of purpose are other challenges that face individuals transitioning back to civilian life. The presence of protective factors such as family support, being more involved within the community, and effective coping strategies are useful in aiding in the transition process, yet there is a lack of literature in understanding how these factors can aid in the identity reconstruction of the individual (Ainspan et al., 2018; Robertson, 2013).

In summary, a gap in the research for military members transitioning back to civilian life exists. Previous studies have focused on transitioning out of the military and they have shared a common thread throughout their conclusions. Self-identity issues and the continued formation of identity are of concern for many service members throughout their transition into civilian life (Buell, 2010; Drops, 1979; Savion, 2009). Psychologists and other health service providers need to better understand the lived experiences of these individuals related to how identity changes by understanding successful or unsuccessful transitions. This study sought to deepen an understanding of the existing research on identity transitions and military personnel. In addition to further understanding the lived experiences of individuals who have transitioned out of the military to civilian life, the findings of the research may be helpful in informing programs already in place that aid military personnel during the transition process. The findings of this study offer fruitful information and insight into gaining a greater awareness of the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transition out of the military, and practitioners may become better informed about how best to support these individuals in understanding their identity during and after their transition experiences.

Method

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transition from the military to civilian life. Most of the research that exists discusses the various identity and transitional models for individuals as they experience changes in their identity and as they transition. Additionally, the research is related to some of the challenges and adjustments for individuals transitioning from the military. However, no research to date was found that investigates the process of how identity develops throughout the transition process. The findings of this study offer fruitful information and insight into

gaining a greater awareness of the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transition out of the military, and practitioners will be better informed about how best to support these individuals in understanding their identity during and after their transition experiences. This phenomenological study was completed over two phases. The first phase included a pilot interview with one individual to refine question protocols. The second phase included a demographic questionnaire and interviews with individuals who have experienced a recent transition from military to civilian life.

Research Questions

In order to explore the phenomenon of identity formation, the researcher focused on the following central research question: What is the process of identity reconstruction during the transition from military to a civilian life? In addition, the researcher explored the following sub questions: What factors play a role in a successful transition from military to civilian life? What factors may impede making a successful transition? What is surprising about the transition? In order to more fully understand the factors that impact an individual's identity reconstruction during the transition from the military to civilian life, it was important to interview participants who have recently retired from the military (in the past five years), as they will be able to provide insight on their relatively recent transition. Exploring the themes that emerge from this study may assist psychologists and others who assist military personnel in developing alternative programs and interventions that could aid individuals in shaping their identity with a successful transition from the military to civilian life.

Definition of Key Terminology

Identity: A system that integrates an individual's inner self and the outer social world into a congruent whole (Erikson, 1968).

Identity Reconstruction: The process of identity reformation and integration from the former self to the present self (Grimmell, 2017).

Successful Transition—The ease with which a service member adjusts to civilian life and their satisfaction with life after discharge from the military (Ainspan, Penk, & Kearney, 2018).

Active Duty — Being in the military full time, with potential of living on a military base, and can be deployed at any time (Krueger, 2000).

Military Acronyms

BCT. Basic Combat Training

MOS. Military Occupation Specialty

PCS. Permanent Change of Station

DOD. Department of Defense

NCO: Non-Commissioned Officer

Assumptions and Biases

Van Manen (1990) and Creswell (2017) state that people bring certain beliefs and assumptions to their research, and it is important to be aware of the impact one's preconceptions can have on the research process. Due to the nature of the phenomenological approach, it is important that the researcher was transparent about his own assumptions and biases in regards to this study.

The researcher's own experience with identity transition needs to be addressed in this study. Transitioning from a full time professional back to being a student had an impact in shaping his own identity and how he perceived the world around me. The transition was difficult in certain aspects due to the financial loss and location change. It is important to remember as the researcher that my experiences will be different from each participant,

although similar themes may arise. Transitioning out of the military is a culture and lifestyle change and can have an impact on one's identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017). Having this knowledge, it was important for the researcher to build rapport with the participants during the interview process in an effort to capture and describe their lived experiences. The researcher needed to understand that realities are co-constructed between the researcher and participants and the emerging themes will be shaped by our individual experiences in regards to identity in transition (Carter & Little, 2007). Military members will have different experiences transitioning out of their military career into a civilian life than the researcher did in his identity reconstruction process when transitioning from a contractor with the military to a full-time doctoral student. By having this knowledge and by understanding the various interpretations of the transition experience, I was able to build on the relationship with participants.

Additionally, the researcher kept a reflexive journal of his reactions and reflections in an effort to keep his preconceived notions out of data analysis. This transparency facilitated leaving his biases and preconceptions out of the findings as much as possible as well as allowed the participants to find meaning in their identity reconstruction and transition experiences. By being transparent and building rapport with the participants, the researcher was able to be utilized as an instrument to gather meaningful data and allow participants to further understand their experiences in developing their sense of self.

Research Design

Individuals who are transitioning from military to civilian life are a unique population. They not only need to balance the complexity of transitioning from a military environment into a civilian environment, but additionally they undergo a change in their

identity. To better understand the experiences of individuals transitioning from military to a civilian, a phenomenological case study approach was the core design of this study.

Phenomenology is the study of human experience and the ways things present themselves through such experiences (Sokolowski, 2000). What is unique about the phenomenological approach is that the focus is to understand the lived experiences or events of individuals (Van Manen, 2017). According to Van Manen (2017), the “lived experience” is the moment or instant of the “now” and how individuals perceive their experiences. This method of inquiry works specifically from the participants’ statements and experiences, but the research approach is also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2017). The goal of this study was to focus on the specific and unique perception of the individual’s experience regarding the process of identity reconstruction related to the transition from a military to a civilian life. Historically, phenomenology deals with questions of meaning and meaningfulness; therefore, semi-structured interviews were utilized in order to further explore the lived experiences of these individuals (Gallagher, 2014).

Participants

Selection criteria. Participants for this study were recruited from male individuals who have recently retired from active duty in the United States Army. The rationale for targeting male individuals from the Army is due to the fact that the Army is the biggest branch of the United States Military. Additionally, there is more prevalence of male service members in the Army than female. Male individuals tend to have significantly lower usage rates for mental health services when they are struggling with mental health concerns, as opposed to their female counterparts and a need for better understanding of understanding

who they are after transition. (Shield et al., 2017). The sample of participants in this study allowed for more generalizability and understanding among individuals who experienced this phenomenon.

The researcher gathered data from 10 male individuals whom were previously in the military. Participants could have been any age but need to have served at least 10 years in active duty due to retirement benefit compensation of prolonged active duty status.

Participants were eligible if they had indicated that they met the following criteria:

- (a) Participants have been retired from active duty military no more than 5 years.
- (b) Participants have served at least 10 years active duty in the Army.
- (c) Participants have served at least on two deployments.
- (e) Participants currently do not work as a contractor in any capacity with the military.

Sampling procedures. The researcher recruited 10 male individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the study and met the criteria for the formal interview. In order to recruit participants, the researcher utilized a snowball sampling strategy. The researcher contacted veterans and former colleagues that he had worked with in the past and asked that they identify individuals who would be a good match for this study. The former colleagues provided the names of the individuals as well as their contact information (e.g., email address) to be able to reach out for interest. Once individuals were identified, a study invitation email was sent out to potential participants to gain interest (See Appendix E). Once individuals contacted the researcher to show their interest, he contacted the potential participant to set up phone screenings to determine participant eligibility for the study (see Appendix G). The researcher gave a summary of the purpose of the study and answered any questions the potential participant had about the study. If participant met the criteria for

eligibility and was still interested in participating in the study, a time was decided upon to do the formal interview. The informed consent form for the study (see Appendix A), informed consent of audio use (see Appendix B), and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) were sent out via Qualtrics for the participant to fill out and return to the researcher prior to the formal interview. The formal interview was conducted via phone. Once the researcher identified an eligible participant for the study, the researcher outlined the possible risks and benefits of the study and what was required for participation in the study. A possible risk for the participants included the resurfacing of any unresolved emotional issues or confusion in regards to the transition from the military to civilian life. In order to mitigate this risk, participants had the option to stop the interview at any time or take a break. Additionally, the researcher offered a resource list (see Appendix M) to participants if they wanted to seek out additional resources. Potential benefits of the study included improved awareness of an individual's sense of self, along with the potential to develop strategies and interventions to better aid individuals when transitioning out of the military.

Due to the design of this study, the participant pool was a homogeneous sample consisting of men who meet the criteria listed above. According to Creswell (2017), a homogenous sample (e.g., similar in age and experience) is beneficial to the researcher in order to better understand the common experiences that are part of the process of identity reconstruction. If there was a shortage of eligible participants using snowball sampling, the researcher would reach out to contractors who still work in the military to identify potential candidates they have worked with in the past and who are now retired until the numerical goal of eligible participants was reached. Additionally, all participants who completed the

interview process received \$10 on Venmo or PayPal to compensate them for their time in participating in this study.

Description of participants. This critical phenomenological study developed through data collected from 10 interviews with veterans who had served in active duty Army. All ten veterans completed the demographic questionnaire and provided informed consent for this study. Two interested participants did not respond to an email about scheduling an interview or did not fit the interview schedule.

Ten veterans participated in this study (Table 1). The participants who were recruited ranged in serving active duty from 16 to 24 years ($M = 20.8$). Among the participants, all 10 identified as male and seven identified as White (70%), two identified as Hispanic (20%), and one identified as Black (10%). Additionally, participants' experiences being deployed overseas ranged from two-seven deployments ($M = 3.9$). The participants were recruited from the following regions of the United States: Southeast ($n = 3$), Northeast ($n = 2$), West ($n = 2$), and Midwest ($n = 3$). Detailed demographic information and their experiences will be discussed in the participant narratives.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

	Age	Years of Service	Number of Deployments	Years of Retirement	Relationship Status	Current Occupation
Pseudonym*						
DP 1	42	21	3	2	Married	Photographer
DM 2	45	24	7	1	Married	Business
JG 3	41	20	4	3	Married	Retired
JP 4	43	20	3	1.5	Married	Truck Driver
AH 5	44	22	4	1	Single	Sales Consultant
GL 6	39	21	3	1	Married	Government
JL 7	42	24	7	1	Married	Packaging
TJ 8	38	20	2	1	Divorced	Government
TR 9	35	16	3	1	Married	Student
PM 10	42	20	3	2	Single	Sales Profession

*Actual participant names not used to protect confidentiality

Data Collection Procedures

Phase 1: Pilot testing. The researcher utilized two participants, individuals who had recently (e.g., last five years) made the transition from military to civilian life, for the pilot tests to ensure interview questions were tailored to understand the phenomenon of identity change or transition in this study. After reaching out to these participants, snowball sampling

was utilized in order to identify participants who were a good match to the study. It was important to obtain consent from each participant that was to be interviewed

Phase 2: Individual interviews. Due to the phenomenological approach to this study, the primary source of data collection was individual interviews with a group of 10 participants (Creswell, 2017). The rationale behind using interviews was to be able to speak with participants about their experiences with transitioning from military to civilian life and the process of their identity reconstruction. Semi-structured interviews allowed for deeper exploration into the participants' experiences in a free and open manner (Patton, 2002). Following the informed consent process, a semi-structured interview format was utilized, extending between 45-60 minutes. A pre-designed interview guide was used as a flexible framework and was based on key concepts and questions that were most pertinent to the study (see Appendix I).

Field notes. During the interview, the researcher utilized a fieldwork form (see Appendix J) that had the questions listed and space to write any reflections and thoughts that he experienced during the interview. These field notes consisted of his reactions, thoughts, and initial interpretations of the participant's responses to the interview questions. Also, the researcher used these field notes to help bracket his own assumptions and biases towards the phenomena of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from the military to being a civilian.

Reflexive journal. After each interview, the researcher recorded his personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions in a journal that was kept with all the data collected. This reflective process aided in separating observational field notes from personal feelings during the data analysis. After saturation of data had been achieved and results were analyzed and

reported, the researcher shredded the raw materials within 6 months after the final report write-up.

Data storage and transcription. All electronic data collection materials were kept locked in a safe place where the researcher was the only person who had access. Interviews were recorded on an audio device and backed up to an encrypted thumb drive. All field notes were typed up the day of the interviews and were also kept locked in a safe place. The audio recordings of individual interviews were transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document by a professional transcriber following the data collection. All data will be deleted 10 years after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

To begin the data analysis, the researcher read through all the transcripts to get a basic sense of the participants' experiences making the transition to being a civilian. When reading through the interview transcripts, the researcher jotted down notes and ideas that aided in the organization of the data as well as pertinent key concepts that emerge. After the researcher had read through the data and gathered a general sense of information, the Quirkos (Version 1.5; Turner, 2014) software program was utilized for analysis. Quirkos (Turner, 2014) was chosen because it groups codes into sub and sub-sub categories to show connections between themes in a clear, intuitive way. With Quirkos as a mechanism to code data, the researcher utilized a combination of inductive and deductive qualitative analysis methods to discover emerging patterns, themes, and categories within the data (Patton, 2002). In the first phase of analysis, inductive analysis was used and the raw data from the interviews with the participants was coded with detailed descriptions and experiences from the participant

interviews. After all of the transcripts were coded with Quirkos, the researcher listed all of the code words that appeared based on similar patterns (Turner, 2014).

After all the codes had been listed, the goal was to collapse the list of codes to a manageable number of around 20 codes. The researcher began to reduce any overlap of codes and if there are code words that were often repeated from the participants, they were kept while code words that only appeared two times or less were not included in the next phase of analysis (Hill, 1997). It was important to take notice of codes that consistently repeat themselves as they may lead to the pertinent themes of the participants' experience. After the codes had been listed and grouped together based on similarity, the next step was to collapse the list of codes to a manageable number, which was between 10-15 codes.

After codes had been organized and reduced, the next phase of analysis was to look for patterns, themes, and categories within the codes. Using the software program, the researcher identified eight general themes based on the interconnectedness of the codes. After those themes have been identified, they were compared with the original data along with the field notes that were taken during the interviews.

After coding, the researcher shared findings with participants to make sure the interpretation of themes was accurately represented by their experiences. To ensure that the researcher's interpretations and reactions did not demonstrate bias towards the participants and their experience, the researcher additionally met with committee members to review the initial themes and interpretations and reactions of those themes. Participants were encouraged to read through these themes and were given the opportunity to add to the themes to ensure that their experiences are represented. In addition, participants also had the opportunity to address themes that did not represent their experience. After the initial themes were developed, the researcher

emailed the themes to the participants asking them to review them. Each theme had space for participant to add their feedback to the findings. After the participants read through these themes and made adjustments that they found necessary, they emailed their feedback to the researcher. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of participants' shared experience (Creswell, 2017), and the aim was to make sure that the research portrayed what those experiences meant to the individuals who lived them.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the authenticity of this study, the researcher took several steps throughout this process to achieve accuracy. The following section will explore procedures that ensured trustworthiness or validity of the study, which refers to the authenticity and consistency of interpretations grounded in data (Morrow, 2005).

The number of participants for this phenomenological approach was 10. By interacting with participants using rapport-building questions at the beginning of the interview, a positive relationship was fostered between participants and the researcher, facilitating meaningful responses from the participants. Additionally through the use of member checking, the researcher shared initial findings and interpretations of the results with the participants and ask them if they were a true representation of their experiences. It is important that the participants had the opportunity to clarify their experiences and add information to the initial results.

Another strategy the researcher used to ensure trustworthiness of the data was through triangulation of data sources and investigators. Along with individual interviews, another source of data the researcher used was a reflective journal that detailed his thought processes and interpretations throughout the study. Additionally, the researcher took field notes during

and following the interviews. Pulling from Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), he also had external auditors who ensured that the codes and themes found were representative of the data (Hill, 1997). The external auditors were individuals removed from the study but well versed in qualitative research. By not being directly involved with the research, the auditors were able to provide valuable insights. Using multiple sources of data and co-investigators (auditor, member checking) ensured the validation of the results, as using these strategies confirmed the authenticity of the findings.

Biases and managing bias. In staying true to the phenomenological approach, it was important that the researcher bracketed his biases and assumptions (Husserl, 1970). To ensure validity, the researcher sought to be self-aware and address any past experiences with this phenomenon that shaped his interpretations. A related challenge with regard to subjectivity and the researcher being an insider to the culture was making sure that the data accurately represents the reality of the participant rather than that of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). Therefore, after the researcher had initially analyzed the data and developed emerging themes, it was critical that the researcher followed up and invited participant feedback to make sure he was giving an accurate voice to the process of identity in regards to transitioning from the military to civilian life. The researcher presented initial themes via email to the participants in an effort to gain valuable feedback to ensure the data captured represented the reality of the participants (see Appendix K) Participants had the opportunity to add additional information that would clarify their experience by typing their feedback into the space provided by each theme and emailing this feedback back to the researcher (see Appendix L).

Ethical Considerations

In order to engage in the data collection, the institutional review board at Springfield College approved the study and ensured that procedures in place posed minimal harm to participants and that the benefits of the study outweighed the risks to participants.

Informed consent. While conducting this study, a major focus was the protection of participants from harm. This research adhered to APA ethical standards *Section 4.01* and *Section 8.02* of the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*, in order to protect the identities of participants as well as making sure participants were well informed about the nature of the research (APA, 2017). During the informed consent process at the beginning of the interview, participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research study and that participation in the study was completely voluntary. The consent form consisted of the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and a description of the methods of the study (i.e., nature of interviews, member checks). The researcher gave an explanation of the potential risks and benefits of participation and he informed participants that should they wish to withdraw, they were able to do so at any point during the study without penalty. Potential benefits for participants in the study included an increased awareness for the participants of their own identity process and possible strategies to help future veterans with the transition. Military programs involved with the transition process of individuals moving on from the military could utilize the findings to promote and provide strategies and social support for their personnel in preparing for the emotional and psychological stress that may come with the transition back to civilian life.

Protecting participants. Providing participants with information in regards to how the data collected was used and made public helped with building rapport since they knew

that their identities and privacy were protected. In the event that participants become distressed during the interview, the researcher stopped the interview and offered to process their feelings, along with providing a resource list of referrals to local mental health agencies close. This effort addressed and reduced any harm to the participants of the study. Additionally, to protect the participant's identities, the researcher utilized a pseudonym for participants on raw data and in the write up of findings.

In writing up initial interpretations, the researcher was deliberate in leaving out revealing unique characteristics of individuals that may inadvertently identify participants. Once the preliminary analysis was completed, participants were asked to review the overall themes found across participants to ensure accuracy in representing their experiences, and any further feedback via encrypted email. Six of the ten participants completed member checking via encrypted email. Those participants did not request any changes and felt the findings fit with their experiences as a whole. For added protection, all interview data and tape recordings were kept in a secure location known only to the researcher. Raw data was destroyed upon completion of the study. Pseudonyms were used when writing up the data and results to increase the confidentiality and privacy of participants.

Results

Responses to the four research questions were used to determine common themes across the participants. This section is organized by the research questions, and further delineated into nine major themes, including lack of purpose, leader of soldiers, new roles, strong support network, importance of preparation, military identity, lack of understanding, job requirements, and ease of transition. In correspondence to each of the research questions, each of these major themes is described below with quotations from the participants to

illustrate each theme and subtheme. Additionally, the themes are represented visually in Figure 1.

Research Question One

As aforementioned, the first research question of this study was: What is the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who transitioned from active duty to civilian life. Several themes emerged from the data that provide insight into how individuals viewed their identity before they entered the service, while they were active duty, and how they viewed their identity upon entering the civilian world again. These themes provide a better understanding of this reconstruction process and the unique experiences of these individuals, including an experience of uncertainty or lack of purpose prior to entering the military, being a leader of soldiers during their military experience, and identifying new roles in their lives following military service.

Lack of purpose. In accordance with the interpretation and analysis of the participants' responses along with field notes, multiple people spoke about uncertainty of who they were prior to joining the military. When describing what their identity was prior to joining the military, many participants explained they had a shallow view of the world and a lack of purpose. Additionally, participants were uncertain as to who they wanted to be as many of them were wanting to get out of the towns where they grew. For instance, DP 1 described himself prior to joining the military as "I, ah, I was kind of a punk kid who thought that he knew a lot about the world, and didn't really know a ton." DM 2 also described himself in the same manner:

So, prior to me joining the military, I, how do I describe myself? I was a punk! Um, I... in high school, I was, I was the only person in my high school to ever get a scholarship. I came from a really small school.

Some participants also had trouble with a lack of direction or purpose in what they wanted to pursue. They reported they had uncertainty of their sense of self and were unsure of what they to do in life. For instance JP 4 noted:

I just was. Um, prior, prior to making the decision one day on a whim to join the military, I had non- I had neither. No purpose, no direction. I was a high school dropout. I was content to party all the time and, live off of whoever would allow me to crash on their couch. I- I was... I really didn't have a direction or a purpose. I just was.

Leader of soldiers. When describing themselves during their time in the military, many participants mentioned being a leader as part of their identity. Participants reported that as part of the culture, the military helped cultivate and enhance the trait of leading others. Also, depending on the rank they were at the time, the identity of being a leader was more ingrained for some of the participants. For instance, DM 2 spoke about his experiences during training in the military shifted how he viewed himself:

It kind of really, really, really hit home on me. And, um, that's when I became a good leader, is when I started realizing that learning how to actually communicate with people and being about teamwork and all that stuff.

JG 3 also echoed the sentiment of identifying himself as a leader. He noted:

Um, I mean, I was an NCO, so I considered myself a leader, you know. Again, uh, took care of my guys. My guys took care of me. Again, there, there was a sense of duty. I had pride in what I, what I did. I had pride in wearing the uniform.

The identity of being a leader is engrained in soldiers from their time in the military. It is interesting to note that depending on how one answers the question of who they are, they may not be ready for transitioning out of the military as echoed by DP 1:

Uh, I would even probably challenge and say if your immediate response is I'm a leader you're probably not ready to get out because you're still, unless you're like, an active leader in some organization other than the army, you're still trying to hold onto something that's going to disappear very, very quickly.

Many of the participants discussed the importance of being a leader of soldiers both while on and off deployments. Specifically, time on deployment shaped a few of the participants into a different version of themselves than who they were prior to their deployment, as noted by GL 6:

Oh, I mean, every, I changed when I came back, specifically due to the PTSD, um, so physically my reactions to things changed. How I looked at life and how I approach situations, um, it made me more, um, uh, held back about doing certain things, as before I was more happy go lucky, I didn't care what, what happened. Um, so yeah, I mean, it did change me, as far as, like, self efficacy goes, um, I think it changed me to the fact that, uh, I didn't take things for granted as much as I used to, and I viewed the world differently, and what I mean by differently, is I think I was more along the lines of, um, I guess, for lack of better terms, more sociopathic before, not giving a crap about anybody but myself. Now after deployment I was a little more, um, empathetic, um, about everything and everyone around me. Because a lot of people think that Sergeant Majors, Majors, and above, don't want to be perceived as broke, hurt, um, weak, Um, a lot of them thought it as, thought it was, saw it as a weakness, or somebody being broke, but in the long run I was able to keep more of my soldiers because they were able to get the

help they needed, um, I don't know, I think I just approached things differently because of my own personal perspective on self worth and identity.

Other participants spoke about how being on deployment changed how they identified themselves and echoed how they became more empathetic and developed a stronger leadership style. For example, JL 7 noted, "I think for me individually, my leadership became stronger uh, through the deployments."

New roles. In accordance with the interpretation and analysis of the participants' responses, multiple people spoke about a shift in their identity upon their transition out of the military and an attempt to reconstruct who they were as people. When describing the cognitive shift of their identity after transitioning from active duty, some participants spoke about coming to an understanding that they were no longer the person they were while active duty as JL 7 noted:

You're used to being on the top of your game. And when you come back into the civilian world, well you know, it's kind of hard to understand that you're not in charge of anything anymore. It's kind of hard for you to understand that um, you know, you're not, you're not the, the guy that people were gonna come to when they need something because you're not in the leadership role in a company.

A component that aided DP 1 in figuring out his new normal was asking himself how he responded to his own personal identity as well as those who were asking him. For instance he mentioned:

I think when people started asking me what I did, I think before I got out, that answer depended on who was asking me the question. Started to switch from I am a soldier to I am a photographer or I am a teacher.

Other members spoke about how other identities were able to become more salient within them as they no longer had to associate as being a soldier. TR 9 spoke about his identity as a father by stating, “I almost- you know I get to be dad again? Or, you know, I get to be dad for once.” Additionally, TR noted his surprise as to his overall happiness about the ability to identify himself differently:

Uh, guess how happy I was gonna be, like I thought, I mean, you know for 16 years that the- the fear was put into you, All right, you don't want to be on the outside world, you- life in the army's so much easier. This. That. And you're like- so you're like, you fear- you're apprehensive to step out the door, to take that uniform off.

DP 1 also spoke to the importance of family and how he identified himself:

Um, being a father to two little kids, especially being home primarily with them. Um, and I think that's been a huge part of my identity too now. I'm now responsible for making sure I don't raise, you know, two human beings that I wouldn't be proud of, wouldn't want to have a beer with, uh, you know and I'm already thinking of them as who they are as adults. I'm thinking a lot about the values and the character strength.

Research Question Two

The second research question of this study is: What factors play a role in a successful transition from military to civilian life? Several themes emerged from the data that provide insight into this question, including (a) the importance of having a strong support network surrounding the individual transitioning, which includes both family and fellow veterans, (b) and an emphasis on preparation for the transition.

Strong support network. Participants reported that various types of social support can impact the ease of the transition. The type of social support participants identified as important

ranged from having family by their side as well as support groups and resources. Many participants spoke about the importance of having a supportive family to help aid in the transition and the relationships that were being established. For example, PM 10 mentioned, "Relationships are definitely the pulling of the realm." Both AH 5 and GL 6 spoke to the importance of having a support group and AH 5 explained:

Uh, so you can find those little groups, and find out what you really need. Uh, to get into that community. And what you need, the skills to get hired in that. Plus it gives you the networking, and you know people there.

GL 6 spoke about the importance of learning from those who have previously transitioned out. "Um, friends that are already out, that are, that have already experienced what you're going to experience. Um, uh, VA support, um, for medical."

Additionally, participants reported utilizing some of the resources the military provides in order to aid in a successful transition and networking opportunities, as noted by GL 6:

Um, yeah, from my perspective getting out, I noticed that not only from the positive side, that people helped you with certain processes that were, um, for lack of better terms, um, uh, anxious creating, creating, create, create anxiousness, like people were getting out, they're like, "Oh my god, I don't know what's going to happen." Um, "I don't know how I'm going to get taken care of." They have these executive level meetings for Captains, and Sergeant Major, and above. Actually, Major, and Sergeant Major and above, that help you with transitioning, even to the point where you're assisted with resumes and assisted with finding jobs, and linking you with people. That's the positive side.

Importance of Preparation. Multiple participants spoke to the importance of planning out their future well in advance and prior to the transition. They spoke about how many individuals who are transitioning out have the idea that their service will allow them to walk into the civilian workforce and have a high-level job. They reported that this portion of their training is where the military can fail people and that there should be much more emphasis on understanding how the transition process works and preparation. These participants spoke about beginning to plan their transition almost two to three years before they were actually transitioning into the civilian world. For example, JG 3 indicated before the transition out, “So, just being able to plan, prepare, and then take responsibility. Say, 'Okay, hey, I need to ... This is what my end goal is going to be. How do I get to that end goal?'” Additionally, JG 3 noted the timeline of when to start preparing to transition, “Yeah. 12, 12 months you start your plan and then six months you start, should start putting your plan into place. Between the, I say the 4, 6 month mark.” GL 6 echoed the sentiment of preparation by “having a plan to get to that. I think what has helped a lot of the people that I've mentored through this, is having a vision board.” It was further emphasized by multiple participants to not only plan for yourself upon transitioning but taking care of your family by utilizing all the resources the military could provide, as noted by GL 6:

Start taking care of yourself and your family at least a year before getting out, and what I mean by that is, any type of medical things that you need or your family needs, um, setting up your spouse or yourself up in the future for where you're going to live and what job you're going to find, um, and take advantage of SFL-TAP employment opportunities.

TJ 8 further emphasized the importance of preparation in order to have a more successful transition:

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Do your research, take advantage of the different classes, and the different trainings that they offer, 'cause, the, the bulk of it isn't mandatory, it's only a few mandatory things like, making sure your records are in order.

Similarly, DM 2 also echoed the importance of planning prior to the transition out:

Well, so, I got yes and no. So, I was a, I'm a lucky one because my wife and I opened our business a year before I got out. So it was already, but we planned it right? We planned it because we're planners but we planned, we opened the business because, you know, as a, you know, a means to an end, you know, what we were gonna do when we got out. So, I didn't have to worry about that. But, yeah like, I have a lot of friends that got out of the military, didn't have a plan, and now, and I think it's a big reason, like, the military does not set people up for outside the military.

Many participants also noted the importance of taking advantage of existing programs the military provides to assist in the transition process, even before the actual transition. Participants reported that these programs helped them prepare for making the transition as noted by PM 10:

Um, you know, definitely take advantage of all of the, uh, transition programs 'cause t here are a p- you know, a plethora of them now. I took advantage of, you know, one of t them.

However, participants reported that often times it is difficult for people to attend the courses, as JL 7 recounted, "90% of the problem is people don't attend these classes." Participants reported that most of the transition classes were optional and not a requirement and that often times the classes would be after work hours. To aid in preparing for a more successful transition,

participants mentioned the importance of taking advantage of the process the military has for changing a civilian into a soldier and reorienting them back to being a civilian as proposed by

AH 5:

I would, uh... The big thing that I would do is... We take... It takes us 22 weeks on the average to turn a civilian into a soldier. So, I would do a, you know, we'll just call it 15 weeks. Your last 15 weeks in the Army, you would basically go to a civilian battalion, and you still have a wear a uniform, you still... Couldn't grow your hair out and all that sort of stuff. But things like that battalion you would be using normal people work. You would be showing up at 9 a.m. instead of 0900. And there would be classes. It would be, you know, classes on vocabulary. There would be class, you know, three weeks long class on translating your military experience into civilian experience rather than a three hour class. Uh, and basically you would just take that, you know, over that 15 weeks you'd be able to go and you'd be able to have time to do appointments. Because we have the Warrior Transition Battalion now. You would hand over all your responsibilities, you would hand over all that stuff, and you would be working on your transition, going to your appointments, making sure that, you know... And then there would still be Army things where you get graded on your resume, and you get, you know, graded on that sort of stuff? And you get reprimanded if you use, like hoo-ah, and, you know, that sort of stuff. It would be Army, but it would be focused on that transition.

Research Question Three

The third question this study investigated was: What factors could impede and hinder individuals from making a successful transition from active duty to civilian life. Two themes emerged related to the third research question. The first theme was the saliency of the military

identity among individuals as they were transitioning out. Age, time served in service, and rank were found to have an impact on the salience of the military identity. Another theme was an insufficient understanding and awareness by civilians of the military culture to aid individuals in the transition. Further, civilians transition out of the military expressed a lack of awareness about how civilians would treat them.

Military identity. When describing difficulties in the ability to be able to have a successful transition, the theme of military identity and culture were prevalent throughout the interviews. Most participants spoke about how the military is a different lifestyle and even the thought process is different from that of civilian life. They reported many veterans find it extremely hard to make a life shift after so many years of having the same identity and being ingrained in the military culture. Factors such as age, time served in service, and rank were found to have an impact on how salient the military identity was for participants. According to participants, the higher the rank, the more difficult it was in letting go of the military identity. For example, DM 2 spoke about the difficulties of letting go of the culture and rank upon transition:

And that's something, like, like, I know a lot of people that get out, they're higher ranking people, they have a hard time letting go. And letting go of the military, letting go of their rank, because that's all they've known for years.

The military identity is also prevalent for those participants who had difficulties from their fellow soldiers, as AH 5 noted:

As soon as you put in your retirement packet, or you don't sign up to reenlist, everybody thinks you're a quitter. The impact of the military identity can be seen from both personal identity standpoint along with feeling like one is betraying their fellow

soldiers. I was so ready to be a civilian that I wanted to be able to leave that Army identity behind. Of course, I wanted their money for retirement. But I wanted to be as far away from that culture as I could.

In a similar note, there is a sense of having to change one's sense of self in order to conform to the military identity and culture that made it difficult while being active duty as well as during transitioning as noted, by both PM 10 and GL 6:

Yeah so it made, it made for a very interesting experience for yourself is almost this idea of having to hide a little bit of who you were to kinda conform to, you know, what the culture presented and like what people were doing (PM 10)

And when you're out, you're just a number. Ain't nobody, there's nobody going to go back in the system and be like, "Oh, this guy really did break his back. (GL 6)

Other participants also echoed the difficulties of letting go of the military identity and of the ability to lead others, as noted by JL 7:

You're used to being on the top of your game. And when you come back into the civilian world, well you know, it's kind of hard to understand that you're not in charge of anything anymore. It's kind of hard for you to understand that um, you know, you're not, you're not the, the guy that people were gonna come to when they need something because you're not in the leadership role in a company.

Lack of understanding. Another impeding factor that emerged as a theme of this study and that was described by multiple participants was a lack of understanding from civilians as to what job titles or roles the participants had while being in active duty. For example, DM 2 spoke about the lack of care from civilians "And then when you step in the civilian world, people don't

care, they thank you for your service, but they don't really care all the great things you did in the military.” TR 9 also echoed the lack of understanding from the civilian side by stating:

Like it- nobody cares if you were a- a Sergeant Major in the army. Or if you were a four star general. You know, especially if you get away from, you know, military installations, there's a lot of military around, the ... you know, the- the thought process of a civilian that has no real connection to the military.

From the military side, some participants also spoke about how some soldiers feel like there is a sense of entitlement for them upon reentering the civilian world and a concurrent lack of planning for the transition, as noted by JG 3:

Sense of entitlement. So, you know, there's a lot of, lot of soldiers who get out and think that, um, they are owed something because they've served their, their country. Well, I'm going to get a job because I, I've served our country.' Yeah, so did 1.7 million other individuals across America that are applying probably for that same type of job. This is in all ranks, not just young, young guys but even seen some Full-Bird Colonels, um, a General, and they had that false sense of, false sense of entitlement and then they weren't honest with themselves.

Research Question Four

The final question this study investigated was: Was there anything surprising about the transition for the participants? A major theme of the responses to this question included the job requirements and qualifications one might need to have in order to find employment after the transition from active duty.

Job requirement. Based on participants' responses, one of the most surprising factors for four (JG 3, GL 6, JL 7, PM 10) of the ten participants was that the ability to acquire a job was

easier than they realized. Many participants reported that it was important to be able to speak about the experiences they had acquired over their time in the military in a way that would translate into the civilian workforce. For example, JG 3 spoke about that due to his experiences, he was able to acquire a job in which he did not have the correct credentials. He noted “Probably one of the most surprising part ... For the job I got required to have basically, I was supposed to have a PhD.” Additionally, he explained that “So, I think one of the surprises for me was sometimes that job listing is not truly what you have to have. There's ways around it.” The idea of being hired based on experiences was echoed by PM 10:

I'm actually really surprised that, um, you know, there's companies that will hire you, uh, you know, based off of your experience. And that they will, you know, invest in you and, and pay you just as much as somebody that has an MBA. you know, my credentials on paper do not look as good as most of my peers. Um, yet I get selected over my, you know, many of my peers for positions which, you know, I was shocked at that and I am still a little bit, um, you know, kinda uneasy about. Um, you, you know, folks who have been in this business for, um, you know, their whole life or whatever, you know, for, for, you know, 15, 20 years or something like that.

In addition to being surprised by job requirements, a few participants did note the importance of having some sort of education as part of the ability to find a job. Specifically, participants emphasize that providing an education was not something the military did, but participants found that an education to be highly valued upon transitioning, as noted by DM 2:

As an enlisted soldier in the military, I didn't have to have college. I didn't have to, like, I didn't even get, I didn't get my degree until I was almost out of the military. And, like, in the civilian world, like, you have to have a degree. I don't know, like, I just think that,

like, so they don't push education. And I think, in today's world, you have to have an education.

Ease of transition. Another major theme that was surprising to participants was the ease with which they were able to make the transition from military to civilian life. A handful of participants spoke about how there was an initial fear of transitioning placed on them by the military. For example TR 9 mentioned:

Uh, guess how happy I was gonna be, like I thought, I mean, you know for 16 years that the fear was put into you. All right, you don't want to be on the outside world, you- life in the army's so much easier. This. That. And you're like- so you're like, you fear- you're apprehensive to step out the door, to take that uniform off.

Concurrently, other participants spoke about the ease in which they were able to transition after moving forward from the initial fear of the transitioning itself. For example, AH 5 mentioned:

Uh, just at how easy it was for me. There was a lot of fear there, and there was a lot of things, but that effort that I put into it, um, like I stopped saying, you know, roger, and I started changing my vocabulary two to three years out.

Additionally, GL 6 explained that due to his identity changing prior to transitioning out, there was more ease for him to move forward by stating “ Um, it was easier than everybody told me it was going to be, but I think that's because of my own, um, changing identity prior to getting out.”

Summary of Findings

In sum, findings of this study included several major themes such as the new roles of identity after transition, successful factors that aid in transition, including a strong support network, impeding factors such as a strong military identity, and surprising factors related to job

requirements and ease of the transition. Most participants recognized that their identity changed upon entering the military from the point of active duty to now, and their experiences shaped who they are today. Additionally, many participants noted that there needs to be more emphasis placed upon providing individuals with resources and the time to be able to prepare for transition into civilian life in order to aid in improving overall well-being and success rate.

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Research Question 4
Lack of Purpose: Pre-enlistment	Strong Support Network	Military Identity	Job Requirement
Leader of Soldiers: While Active Duty	Importance of Preparation	Lack Of Understanding	Ease of Transition
New Normal: Post Transition			

Figure 1. A visual representation of the themes.

Discussion

Generally, the data exemplifies that each participant had his own individual experiences in regards to identity reconstruction and transition. However, several themes arose across the various experiences of the participants. A majority of the participants endorsed for entering the military for reasons related to a lack of purpose and a need for more structure. This theme is consistent with the existing literature on Berzonsky’s social cognitive model (2004). Specifically, the component of the model that associates individuals with normative orientation, which is defined as needing a sense of purpose, more structure and less certainty may have an impact on their identity (Berzonsky, 2004). Additionally, participants discussed the desire to be part of something bigger than themselves and this yearning was a motivating factor in their reason to join the military. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), one’s identity

is not just self-perception, but also how an individual perceives themselves in relation to being a member of a group. Many of the participants spoke about their feeling a lack of purpose and that joining the military was related to the desire to find meaning within a more social context. According to social identity theory, when a group member feels their social identity is no longer satisfactory, they will attempt to leave their existing group and join a more positively distinctive group, or take efforts to make their existing group more positively distinct (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The findings of this study support social identity theory in that many participants reported that they were not satisfied with who they were prior to joining the military and as a result, they took the effort to join a more positively distinctive group, that is, the military.

Life stories are strongly shaped by personal experience and culture (McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015). Each individual tends to have a subjective interpretation of past experiences based on saliency of events and cultural background (McAdams, 2004). Interestingly, the data was congruent with literature in regards to McAdams's life story model and narrative identity in which an individual reflects on their life story in social contexts that have been most salient to him or her (McAdams & Zapata-Gietl, 2015). Specifically, how the theme of leader of soldiers provides context into how participants thought of their identity during active duty can be seen as how individuals thought of themselves during this time (McAdams, 2004). Participants spoke about their identity while in the military as evolving around leadership. The saliency of the military culture was prevalent throughout the data in regards to participants' subjective interpretations. The military culture emphasizes group cohesiveness and being a leader. At the very early stages, people are taught to lose their sense of individuality and adhere to becoming a part of the group (Meyer, 2015). The military acculturates people to certain standards, including attitudes, values, and expectations, in order to

develop camaraderie and group cohesiveness (Hall, Garland, Charlton, & Johnson, 2018; Krueger, 2000). This study provided further evidence of the impact of the military culture on an individual's identity both during active duty and during the transitional period.

The essence of military culture can permeate almost every aspect of a person's life. According to Meyer (2015), veterans who served in the military for only a few years continue to report strong identification with the military years after transitioning out. Individuals who have a strong and heightened sense of military identity can have a more difficult transition experience (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This finding was particularly true if the military identity is still salient after the transition back to civilian life (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Meyer, 2015). Individuals in this study were able to acknowledge the saliency of the military identity for them, but a majority of participants were able to shift their understanding of who they were after transitioning and allow for other identities to surface. For example, a handful of participants spoke about how their family identity became more prevalent and a focus on being a husband and father. An important finding in this study was the number of individuals who stated they were more self-aware of their identity after transitioning from the military, knowing that they were not a "soldier" anymore. For example, a handful of participants noted that their identity as "dad" could now become more salient in their lives since the "soldier" identity was not as prevalent anymore. Noteworthy, while a few participants discussed how their family identity became more prevalent upon transition, a majority discussed identity in regards to career focus. Most participants did not discuss their current social life or how often they reconnect with other individuals who have transitioned out. This finding may be due to the demographics of participants having longevity in their service as well as being male. Conversely, results might have been different had there been a more diverse demographic in

regards to socioeconomic status, gender, and race. The saliency of one's social identity might have become more prevalent than what the current results have shown. However, the focus of this study was not on social identity and therefore participants may not have been inclined to discuss their social identity in a more elaborate manner.

Additionally, some of the transition literature focuses on the transition of athletes when leaving their sport and the factors that best support a successful transition. As previously defined by Ainspan et al (2018), a successful transition is defined as the ease with which a service member adjusts to civilian life and their satisfaction with life after discharge from the military. Conversely, an unsuccessful transition can reveal difficulties in adjustment to civilian life and dissatisfaction with life after leaving the service. Factors such as acceptance, optimism about the future, and social support are important components that have been found to contribute to a successful transition (Grove et al., 1997; Poczwardowski, Diehl, O'Neil, Cote, & Harberl, 2014). This study revealed similar protective factors for individuals transitioning out of the military, indicating that having a strong support network and giving attention to preparation are important factors for a successful transition. Several participants said community based support groups as well as family were factors that aided them in their transition, which is congruent with the literature (Demers, 2011). Nearly all participants mentioned preparation was integral in making a successful transition and how the amount of preparation one conducts can impact identity reconstruction. Specifically, planning their futures from a financial and career standpoint a year or two prior to the transition was of utmost importance. These results are similar to the existing literature noting that community based support groups can provide individuals who are transitioning with a place to feel

welcomed and to maintain a sense of belonging that had been part of their identity while in the military (Ainspan et al., 2018).

Related to factors affecting a smooth transition into civilian life, one of the biggest challenges associated with transitioning back to civilian life is a sense of loss (Brunger et al., 2013). Specifically, loss can include financial insecurity due to unemployment, or loss of community and a common purpose. According to the findings of this study, the biggest challenges that can impede a successful transition are the military culture and the lack of understanding about this culture from civilians. A handful of participants noted the difficulties with letting go of their rank and the culture as a whole upon their transition. Specifically, participants noted struggles with letting go of who they were and a movement toward acceptance that their rank does not define them as an individual. Additionally, the lack of understanding by civilians about what their specific jobs entailed as well as a sense of entitlement from the military standpoints were noted as impeding a successful transition. The findings of this study further strengthen the literature highlighting the challenges of transition. Specifically, the difficulties of moving away from the military culture can in essence instigate a sense of loss and a fractured sense of self by those losing the soldier identity (Brunger et al., 2013).

A noticeable gap in the literature revolves around surprising factors in transitioning from the military and the impact of this transition on identity reconstruction. In terms of surprising factors that were uncovered during this study, participants noted the ease of getting a job after transitioning as well as the ease of the transition itself as being important components that were brought to the surface during the transition. Specifically, many participants noted that their abilities to land a job after transitioning into civilian life was

predicated on how they translated the work they did while active duty to potential job employers. Interestingly, a majority of the participants had longevity in their service that allowed for certain retirement and benefits packages that allowed them the opportunity to look for jobs that were tailored to their skillset. Additionally, due to their longevity of service, participants acquired certain skillsets in their training that may have made it easier to translate into jobs. A handful of participants also noted how education is not as emphasized as it should be in the military. Specifically, gaining education for jobs outside of the military was one of the surprising factors participants claimed they wish they knew more about while being in active duty.

Interestingly, a handful of participants spoke about the initial fear they had of the transition out of the military and how the military places some of the fears on them. For example, a handful of participants spoke about how the military emphasizes the bond between soldiers and the culture that is established, which the participants will no longer have after they transition into civilian life. However, many participants mentioned that once they overcame the initial fear of transition, they had an easier transition. Potential implications of this research will be discussed in regards to how this study adds to our understanding of identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from military to civilian life.

Implications

This study was one of the first studies to explore identity reconstruction of individuals who are transitioning from active duty to civilian life. The findings of this study inform best practices when working with individuals who are preparing to make a transition from the military. Foremost, military personnel, including psychologists, can use these findings to work toward understanding the process of identity reconstruction and the various components that

impact one's transition to life outside of the military. The cultural and social background of participants is noteworthy as the majority was White and came from lower to middle class backgrounds. While participants' educational background varied, it is important for psychologists to consider other components of military personnel's identities as these factors can have an impact on the formation of their identity. Specifically, if a psychologist were to work with a veteran, further understanding of cultural background components (e.g., sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, .) would provide key insights into how their identity has been shaped by their experiences.

Furthermore, these findings can aid existing military programs whose aim is to assist in the transition process, such as the Army Soldier For Life (SFL) and the Transition Assistance Programs (TAP). Specifically, psychologists employed with these programs could implement identity-processing groups that focus individuals towards a reconstruction of other identities that may be more salient after the transition. While these programs provide a strong foundation and resources geared towards education opportunities and finding jobs in the public or private sector, this study provides more information about how an individual reconstructs their identity in order to make for an easier transition and understanding of sense of self.

In a more global sense, this study provides grounds for continued advocacy for proper supports for individuals who are transitioning back to civilian life. As previously mentioned, institutional support can provide a helpful catalyst for individuals who are transitioning (Schlossberg, 1981). For example, at an Army macro level and the unit level individuals may benefit from transition classes as their place of duty, rather than leadership still giving them responsibilities and objectives they must complete that would prevent soldiers from attending classes. Participants mentioned that the Army spends several weeks molding individuals to fit the

military culture, beliefs, and values, but when they are transitioning, they are not offered the same time away to begin the process of reconstructing their individual identity. A suggestion noted from one of the participants was to create a separate battalion designated for reintegration into civilian life (i.e., addressing people by first names, terminology of 8:00 instead of 0800) that individuals could go to help strengthen their ability to transition more smoothly

Another recommendation is to focus on creating and changing transitional programs to emphasize positive experiences of serving while mitigating the negative experiences. Programs that expand educational opportunities and provide psycho-education to both soldiers and civilians about various military jobs could potentially ease the confusion and lack of understanding from the civilian side. Previous research by Koen, Klehe, and Vianen (2012) evaluating a career adaptability resources training to aid career transitions of recently graduated university students showed promise with a single day training session. By creating similar programs for service members transitioning out of the military back into civilian life, military members may be provided with additional resources to aid military members who are in the preparation stage of transitioning and in understanding their sense of self.

Furthermore, this study's findings apply well to the field of psychology in terms of identity and transition research. First, this study proposes the importance of cultivating other identities for active duty members, rather than placing exclusive emphasis on military identity. For military psychologists, focusing on the reconstruction of other identities that can become more prevalent during and post transition may allow for a more successful experience for individuals.

In regards to counseling and non-military psychologists working with veterans, taking a strengths-based approach and focusing on the positive aspects of transition may aid other

identities to become more salient. Specifically, interventions involving reframing the transition as a positive experience could be beneficial. Other interventions that include acceptance commitment therapy focusing on acceptance of new roles and identity may allow non-military psychologists insight into working with this unique population (Shiner, 2011). Additionally, this study suggests that individuals who are struggling with their sense of self take preventative action (i.e., create a support network, seek educational opportunities, engage in financial readiness) to prepare for their transition. By taking these proactive measures, individuals who are in the middle of transitioning back to civilian life may have a better sense of self and an easier process during their identity reconstruction.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study has several strengths and limitations. A strength of the study is the data collection method. First, through subjective, direct responses, the researcher was able to gain first-hand knowledge about what participants experienced through broad and open-ended inquiry (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews allowed all participants to be asked the same questions within a flexible framework and revisions were made along the way as new experiences emerge giving the researcher the ability to construct themes and patterns that were reviewed by participants (Choy, 2014; Creswell, 2017). Another strength of the phenomenological semi structured interview design is that it seeks to find the universal nature of an experience and can provide a deeper understanding through in-depth interviewing and reflection (Choy, 2014). Therefore, the themes and meanings of the participants' experience emerged from the data and allowed the researcher to notice trends and look at the big picture (Creswell, 2017). The data did not fit into a statistical test that confined or restricted the interpretation and therefore provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the

participants (Patton, 2002). Having in-depth information and a homogenous sample allowed for common themes to emerge that were representative of the majority of participants. Many of the participants described their satisfaction with the interview process, as it provided them the opportunity to potentially help others in the future, and gave them a space to reflect on a difficult time in their lives for the greater good.

Though phenomenological semi-structured qualitative studies provide compelling research data, there are limitations to this methodology. For instance, the subjective nature of the research could influence the conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2017; Janesick, 2011; Patton, 2002). The researcher's role must include the integration of his own beliefs and values in the study in order to help mitigate subjectivity (Janesick, 2011). Furthermore, the individual circumstances that data was collected from cannot be generalized due to a smaller sample size (N=10) (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). It is the participant's own "lived experiences" and their own perceptions and subjective reality that cannot be generalized outside the specific population (Morrow, 2005). For example, since this study had all male participants, the results cannot be generalized to female individuals who are experiencing identity reconstruction and transition. Also, a unique component of the participants is the length of service (i.e., 20 years) each one had as they all served in various leadership roles. Therefore, a limitation is this study is not generalizable to all soldiers transitioning from the military, in particular individuals with shorter terms of service (i.e., 2-4 years).

Additionally, this study focused on individuals who were Army veterans. Although this study sought to explore the process of identity among individuals who transitioned from the military to civilian life, it should not be assumed that the themes that arose would be consistent with the other armed forces since they have different challenges and programs than the Army.

Therefore, these results cannot be generalized to individuals who have transitioned from the other armed forces (e.g., Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Air Force). Lastly, another limitation of the study was that the primary research method was individual interviews. Due to the nature of the study, data does not include observations within assistance-program settings of how individuals' identity evolved during the actual transition. Linking interviews along with observational data could have provided a more holistic perspective on the process of identity with individuals transitioning out of the military to civilian life.

Conclusions and Future Research

The purpose of this study was to better understand the process of identity reconstruction among individuals who were transitioning from military to civilian life. Secondly, this study identified what factors played a role in either aiding or impeding a successful transition for individuals in the army. Lastly, this study attempted to interview individuals of different ages, ethnicities, and jobs who had recently transitioned to better understand how aspects of their identity were impacted. The findings of this study offer both evidence supporting existing literature as well as new and fruitful information in the area of identity reconstruction for military members.

In conclusion, the results indicate that men who do not have a strong sense of self and or who lack a sense of purpose may be more inclined to join the military, and the military culture can have a lasting impact on one's identity. By utilizing factors such as a strong support network and preparation for a transition back to civilian life, other identities appear to become more salient and serve to mitigate the strength of the military identity that many individuals will hold onto even after their transition. Ongoing reflection on one's sense of self may aid in the process of identity reconstruction upon entering civilian life.

Focusing on identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning, as well as their experiences with this phenomenon, may inform counseling psychologists as to how to work with people who are transitioning back to being a civilian. It is interesting to note that a gap in the research exists with regard to transgender individuals' experiences in the military. Most studies revolve around men or women's experiences and how their identity is impacted by experiences in the military (Belkin, 2015). Future research could study not only men and women transitioning out of the military but also transgender individuals, which would provide a better understanding of this marginalized identity (Belkin, 2015). When understanding the process of identity development among individuals transitioning back to civilian life, it is important to note the similarities that men and women share about their development, and also the differences. Findings may provide guidance regarding implementing coping strategies and developing a well-rounded identity that can be beneficial when making the transition to being a civilian after leaving the military. By becoming more aware of the process of identity reconstruction someone goes through when transitioning from the military to civilian life, future research could continue to aid in answering the question of who am I now?

References

- Adler, A. B., Zamorski, M., & Britt, T. W. (2011). The psychology of transition: Adapting to home after deployment. In A. B. Adler, P. D. Bliese, C. A. Castro, A. B. Adler, P. D. Bliese, & C. A. Castro (Eds.), *Deployment psychology: Evidence-based strategies to promote mental health in the military* (pp. 153-174). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/12300-006>
- Ahern, J., Worthen, M., Masters, J., Lippman, S. A., Ozer, E. J., & Moos, R. (2015). The challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans' transition from military to civilian life and approaches to reconnection. *Plos ONE*, *10*, 1-13.
- Ainspan, N. D., Penk, W., & Kearney, L. K. (2018). Psychosocial approaches to improving the military-to-civilian transition process. *Psychological Services*, *15*, 129-134. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/ser0000259>
- Akhtar, S., & Samuel, S. (1996). The concept of identity: Developmental origins, phenomenology, clinical relevance, and measurement. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, *3*, 254-267. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.3109/10673229609017193>
- Alisat, S., & Pratt, M. W. (2012). Characteristics of young adults' personal religious narratives and their relation with the identity status model: A longitudinal, mixed methods study. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory And Research*, *12*, 29-52. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15283488.2012.632392>
- American Psychological Association. (2017). *American Psychological Association ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. Retrieved from

<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>

- Arvinen-Barrow, M., Hurley, D., & Ruiz, M. C. (2017). Transitioning out of professional sport: The psychosocial impact of career-ending injuries among elite Irish rugby football union players. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 11*, 67-84. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1123/jcsp.2016-0012>.
- Baechtold, M., & De Sawal, D. (2009). Meeting the needs of women veterans. *New Direction for Student Services, 126*, 35-43. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.314>.
- Beamon, K. (2012). "I'm a baller." Athletic identity foreclosure among African-American former student athletes. *Journal of African American studies, 16*, 195-208.
[doi:10.1007/s12111-012-9211-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-012-9211-8)
- Beder, J. (2012). Those who have served in Afghanistan/Iraq: Coming home. In J. Beder, & J. Beder (Eds.), *Advances in social work practice with the military* (pp. 137-147). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Beder, J., Coe, R., & Sommer, D. (2011). Women and men who have served in Afghanistan/Iraq: Coming home. *Social Work In Health Care, 50*, 515-526. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00981389.2011.554279>
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1989). Identity style: Conceptualization and measurement. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 4*, 268-282.
<http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/074355488943002>
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2004). Identity processing style, self-construction, and personal epistemic assumptions: A social-cognitive perspective. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 1*, 303-315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405620444000120>

- Berzonsky, M. D. (2005). Ego identity: A personal standpoint in a postmodern world. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory And Research*, 5, 125-136. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0502_3
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2011). A social-cognitive perspective on identity construction. In S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, V. L. Vignoles, S. J. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. L. Vignoles (Eds.), *Handbook of identity theory and research* (pp. 55-76). New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media. http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/978-1-4419-7988-9_3
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Kinney, A. (2008). Identity processing style and defense mechanisms. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 39, 111-117. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.2478/v10059-008-0022-7>
- Berzonsky, M. D., & Sullivan, C. (1992). Social-cognitive aspects of identity style: Need for cognition, experiential openness, and introspection. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 7, 140-155. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F074355489272002>
- Binks, E., & Cambridge, S. (2018). The transition experiences of British military veterans. *Political Psychology*, 39, 125-142. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/pops.12399>
- Bjornsen, A. L., & Dinkel, D. M. (2017). Transition experiences of Division-1 college student-athletes: Coach perspectives. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 40, 245-268.
- Blustein, D. L., Devenis, L. E., & Kidney, B. A. (1989). Relationship between the identity formation process and career development. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 36, 196-202. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/0022-0167.36.2.196>

- Boose, L. E. (1993). Techno-muscularity and the “boy eternal”: From the Quagmire to the Gulf. In M. G. Cooke & A. Woollacott (Eds.), *Gendering war talk* (pp. 67- 106). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bowes, M. A., Ferreira, N., & Henderson, M. (2018). The influence of psychosocial factors in veteran adjustment to civilian life. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 25, 583-600. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.2182>
- Bragin, M. (2010). Can anyone here know who I am? Co-constructing meaningful narratives with combat veterans. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 38, 316-326. <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s10615-010-0267-4>
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Linder, D. E. (1993). Athletic identity: Hercules' muscles or Achilles heel?. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 24, 237-254.
- Brewer, B. W., Van Raalte, J. L., & Petitpas, A. J. (2000). Self-identity issues in sport career transitions. In D. Lavallee, & P. Wylleman (Eds.), *Career transitions in sport: International perspectives* (pp. 29-43). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Bridges, W. (1986). Managing organizational transitions. *Organizational Dynamics*, 15, 24-33. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(86\)90023-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(86)90023-9)
- Bridges, W. (2002). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change*. London, England: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Bridges, W., & Mitchell, S. (2008). Leading transition: A new model for change. In F. Hesselbein, A. Shrader, F. Hesselbein, & A. Shrader (Eds.), *Leader to leader 2: Enduring insights on leadership from the Leader to Leader Institute's award-winning journal* (pp. 246-255). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Britt, T. W., Adler, A. B., & Castro, C. A. (2006). Military culture: Common themes and future directions. In T. W. Britt, A. B. Adler, C. A. Castro, T. W. Britt, A. B. Adler, C. A. Castro (Eds.), *Military life: The psychology of serving in peace and combat: Military culture* (pp. 231-234). Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.
- Brunger, H., Serrato, J., & Ogden, J. (2013). 'No man's land': The transition to civilian life. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict And Peace Research*, 5, 86-100. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1108/17596591311313681>
- Bryan, C. J., & Morrow, C. E. (2011). Circumventing mental health stigma by embracing the warrior culture: Lessons learned from the Defender's Edge Program. *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice*, 42, 16-23. <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0022290>
- Buell, S. D. (2010). *Life is a cruise: What does it mean to be a retired naval officer transitioning into civilian world?* St. Paul, MN: University of St. Thomas.
- Burkhart, L., & Hogan, N. (2015). Being a female veteran: A grounded theory of coping with transitions. *Social Work In Mental Health*, 13, 108-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332985.2013.870102>
- Cabrera, D., Figley, C. R., & Yarvis, J. S. (2012). Helping the combat medic and corpsman. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Advances in social work practice with the military* (pp. 106-118). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carter, S. M., & Little, M. (2007). Justifying knowledge, justifying method, taking action: Epistemologies, methodologies, and methods in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17, 1316-1328. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1049732307306927>

Castro, C. A., & Kintzle, S. (2014). Suicides in the military: The post-modern combat veteran and the Hemingway effect. *Current Psychiatry Reports, 16*, 1-9.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-014-0460-1>

Castro, C. A., & Kintzle, S. (2016). Military matters: The military transition theory: Rejoining civilian life. Retrieved from <http://www.istss.org/education-research/traumatic-stresspoints/2016-june/military-matters-the-military-transition-theory-re.aspx>

Clark, J. J. (2010). Life as a source of theory: Erik Erikson's contributions, boundaries, and marginalities. In T. W. Miller, & T. W. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of stressful transitions across the lifespan* (pp. 59-83). New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media.

Coll, J. E., Weiss, E. L., & Yarvis, J. S. (2012). No one leaves unchanged - Insights for civilian mental health care: Professionals into the military experience and culture. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Advances in social work practice with the military* (pp. 18-33). New York, NY: Routledge

Cooper, L., Caddick, N., Godier, L., Cooper, A., & Fossey, M. (2018). Transition from the military into civilian life. *Armed Forces & Society (0095327X)*, *44*, 156-177.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X16675965>

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

Deane, W. H. & Asselin, M. (2015). Transitioning to concept-based teaching: A discussion of strategies and the use of the Bridge's change model. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice, 5*, 52-59. <https://doi.org/10.5430/jnep.v5n10p52>

- Demers, A. (2011). When veterans return: The role of community in reintegration. *Journal of Loss And Trauma, 16*, 160-179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2010.519281>
- Department of Veteran Affairs. (2017). National center for veterans analysis and statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp
- DeVries, M. R., Hughes, H. K., Watson, H., & Moore, B. A. (2012). Understanding the military culture. In B. A. Moore, & B. A. Moore (Eds.), *Handbook of counseling military couples* (pp. 7-18). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Dima, G., & Skehill, C. (2011). Making sense of leaving care: The contribution of Bridges model of transition to understanding the psycho-social process. *Children And Youth Services Review, 33*, 2532-2539. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2011.08.016>
- Drops, G. J. (1979). *Change in self-concept and identity during a time of mid-life transition* (Doctoral dissertation, Union Institute and University). Dissertation Abstracts International: The Sciences and Engineering. Document No. DP10574. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms.
- Edström, E., Lunde, N. T., & Haaland Matlary, J. (Eds.). (2009). *Krigerkultur i en fredsnasjon*. Oslo, Norge: Abstrakt Förlag.
- Elliott, T. R. (1985). Counseling adults from Schlossberg's adaptation model. *American Mental Health Counselors Association Journal, 7*, 133-141.
- Elnitsky, C. A., Fisher, M. P., & Blevins, C. L. (2017). Military service member and veteran reintegration: A conceptual analysis, unified definition, and key domains. *Frontiers In Psychology, 8*, 1-14. <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/ort0000244>
- Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. Oxford, England: Norton & Co.
- French, S. E. (2005). *The code of the warrior: Exploring warrior values past and present*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Freud, S. (1961 [1900]). *The interpretation of dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books.
- Friedman, L. J. (1999). *Identity's architect: A biography of Erik H. Erikson*. New York, NY: Scribner/Simon & Schuster.
- Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., & Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.
- Goldstein, J. S. (2001). *War and gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Greenbank, P. (2003). The role of values in educational research: The case for reflexivity. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29, 791-801.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192032000137303>
- Grimell, J. (2017). A service member's self in transition: A longitudinal case study analysis. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 30, 255–269. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10720537.2016.1187580>
- Grove, J., Lavalley, D., & Gordon, S. (1997). Coping with retirement from sport: The influence of athletic identity. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 9, 191-203.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10413209708406481>
- Haaland, T. L. (2011). A Norwegian expeditionary mindset? In H. Fürst & G. Kümmel (Eds.), *Core values and the expeditionary mindset: Armed forces in metamorphosis* (pp. 165-177). Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

- Hall, K. G., Garland, A., Charlton, G. P., & Johnson, C. M. (2018). Military culture and the civilian therapist: Using relational-cultural theory to promote the therapeutic alliance. *Journal of Creativity In Mental Health, 13*, 489-500. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15401383.2018.1470951>
- Hall, L. K. (2013). Military culture. In B. A. Moore, J. E. Barnett, B. A. Moore, & J. E. Barnett (Eds.), *Military psychologists' desk reference* (pp. 22-26). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Haynie, J. M., & Shepherd, D. (2011). Toward a theory of discontinuous career transition; Investigating career transitions necessitated by traumatic life events. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*, 501-524. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0021450>
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*, 517-572. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0011000097254001>
- Horton-Parker, R., & Brown, N. (2002). *The Unfolding Life: Counseling across the lifespan*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Hogg, M. A. (2006). Social identity theory. In P. J. Burke, & P. J. Burke (Eds.), *Contemporary social psychological theories* (pp. 111-136). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Huntington, S. P. (1957). *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of European science and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy* (D. Carr, Trans.). Evanston, IL:

- Northwestern University Press.
- Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2015) *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52, 250-260. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250>
- Janowitz, M. (1960). *The professional soldier: A social and political portrait*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Josselson, R. (1994). The theory of identity development and the question of intervention: An introduction. In S. L. Archer, S. L. Archer (Eds.), *Interventions for adolescent identity development* (pp. 12-25). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Junger, S. (2016). *Tribe: On homecoming and belonging*. New York, NY: Twelve.
- Kintzle, S., Wilcox, S., Hassan, A., Ell, K. (2013). *Reintegration partnership project: Summary of findings and key recommendations*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families.
- Koester, M. (2015). Soldier for life sets transitioning NCOs on path to success. *NCO Journal*. Retrieved from <http://ncojournal.dodlive.mil/tag/soldier-life-cycle/>
- Kroger, J. (2000). *Identity development: Adolescence through adulthood*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Krueger, G. P. (2000). Military culture. In A. E. Kazdin, & A. E. Kazdin (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of psychology, Vol. 5* (pp. 252-259). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kümmel, G. (2011). Identity, identity shifts and identity politics: The German soldier facing a

- pre/post-Westphalian world risk society, ambitious national politics, an ambivalent home society and a military under stress. In H. Fürst & G. Kümmel (Eds.), *Core values and the expeditionary mindset: Armed forces in metamorphosis* (pp. 51-67). Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.
- Lally, P. (2007). Identity and athletic retirement: A prospective study. *Psychology of Sport And Exercise*, 8, 85-99. <https://doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2006.03.003>
- Lally, P., & Kerr, G. (2008). The effects of athlete retirement on parents. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 20, 42-56. <https://doi:10.1080/10413200701788172>
- Leibowitz, Z. B., & Schlossberg, N. K. (1982). Critical career transitions: A model for designing career services. *Training & Development Journal*, 36, 12-19.
- Lemert, C. (2014). A history of identity: The riddle at the heart of the mystery of life. In A. Elliott, & A. Elliott (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of identity studies* (pp. 3-29). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Leslie, L. & Koblinksy, S. (2017). Returning to civilian life: Family reintegration challenges and resilience of women veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 20, 106-123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2017.1279577>
- Martiny, S. E., & Rubin, M. (2016). Towards a clearer understanding of social identity theory's self-esteem hypothesis. In S. McKeown, R. Haji, N. Ferguson, S. McKeown, R. Haji, & N. Ferguson (Eds.), *Understanding peace and conflict through social identity theory: Contemporary global perspectives* (pp. 19-32). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

- McAdams, D. P. (1990). Unity and purpose in human lives: The emergence of identity as a life story. In A. I. Rabin, R. A. Zucker, R. A. Emmons, S. Frank (Eds.) , *Studying persons and lives* (pp. 148-200). New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co.
- McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5, 100-122. <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100>
- McAdams, D. P. (2004). The redemptive self: Narrative identity in America today. In D. R. Beike, J. M. Lampinen, D. A. Behrend, D. R. Beike, J. M. Lampinen, & D. A. Behrend (Eds.), *The self and memory* (pp. 95-115). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- McAdams, D. P., & Adler, J. M. (2010). Autobiographical memory and the construction of a narrative identity: Theory, research, and clinical implications. In J. E. Maddux, J. P. Tangney, J. E. Maddux, & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Social psychological foundations of clinical psychology* (pp. 36-50). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- McAdams, D. P., & Zapata-Gietl, C. (2015). Three strands of identity development across the human life course: Reading Erik Erikson in full. In K. C. McLean, M. Syed, K. C. McLean, & M. Syed (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of identity development* (pp. 81-94). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Meeus, W. (1996). Toward a psychosocial analysis of adolescent identity: An evaluation of the epigenetic theory (Erikson) and the identity status model (Marcia). In K. Hurrelmann, S. F. Hamilton, K. Hurrelmann, & S. F. Hamilton (Eds.), *Social problems and social contexts in adolescence: Perspectives across boundaries* (pp. 83-104). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Meyer, E. G. (2015). The importance of understanding military culture. *Academic Psychiatry, 39*, 416-418. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s40596-015-0285-1>
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 250-260.
- Patton, M. Q., (1990). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. In *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed., pp. 460-495). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Patton, M. Q., (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed., pp. 431-458). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.
- Pease, J. L., Billera, M., & Gerard, G. (2016). Military culture and the transition to civilian life: Suicide risk and other considerations. *Social Work, 61*, 83-86. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/sw/swv050>
- Poczwardowski, A., Diehl, B., O'Neil A., Cote, T., & Haberl, P. (2014) Successful transitions to the Olympic Training Center, Colorado Springs: A mixed-method exploration with six resident-athletes, *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 26*, 33-51. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10413200.2013.773950>
- Redmond, S. A., Wilcox, S. L., Campbell, S., Kim, A., Finney, K., Barr, K., & Hassan, A. M. (2015). A brief introduction to the military workplace culture. *Work: Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation, 50*, 9-20. <http://doi:10.3233/WOR-141987>.
- Robertson, H. C. (2013). Income and support during transition from a military to civilian career. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 50*, 26-33. <https://doi->

- org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2013.00022.x
- Rubin, M., & Hewstone, M. (2004). Social identity, system justification, and social dominance: Commentary on Reicher, Jost et al., and Sidanius et al. *Political Psychology, 25*, 823-844. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00400.x>
- Savion, S. (2009). *How do retired military officers start anew in civilian society? A phenomenological study of life transition* (Doctoral dissertation, George Washington University). Retrieved from <http://etd.gelman.gwu.edu/10116.pdf>
- Schachter, E. P. (2005). Erikson meets the postmodern: Can classic identity theory rise to the challenge? *Identity: An International Journal of Theory And Research, 5*, 137-160. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1207/s1532706xid0502pass:>
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist, 9*, 2-18.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 48*, 159-162. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/j.2161-1920.2011.tb01102.x>
- Schwartz, J. C. (1987). A life-story approach to identity. *Contemporary Psychology, 32*, 788-789. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/027450>
- Shields, D. M., Kuhl, D., & Westwood, M. J. (2017). Abject masculinity and the military: Articulating a fulcrum of struggle and change. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 18*, 215-225. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/men0000114>
- Shiner, B. (2011). Health Services use in the Department of Veteran Affairs among returning Iraq and Afghan War veterans with PTSD. *PTSD Quarterly, 22*, 1-3.

- Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Sørensen, H. (2011). Core values of Danish expeditionary soldiers. In H. Fürst & G. Kümmel (Eds.), *Core values and the expeditionary mindset: Armed forces in metamorphosis* (pp. 179-189). Baden-Baden, Germany. Publisher?
- Stoltenburg, A. L., Kamphoff, C. S., & Bremer, K. L. (2011). Transitioning out of sport: The psychosocial effects of collegiate athletes' career-ending injuries. *Athletic Insight: The Online Journal of Sport Psychology*, 3, 115-133. Retrieved from <http://www.athleticinsight.com/Vol13Iss2/Feature.htm>
- Tajfel, H., Billig, M. G., Bundy, R. P., & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1, 149-178. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420010202>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2001). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In M. A. Hogg & D. Abrams (Eds.), *Intergroup relations: Essential readings* (pp. 94-109). New York: Psychology Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (2004). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In J. T. Jost, J. Sidanius, J. T. Jost, & J. Sidanius (Eds.), *Political psychology: Key readings* (pp. 276-293). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Thornborrow, T., & Brown, A. D. (2009). Being regimented: Aspiration, discipline and identity work in the British Parachute Regiment. *Organization Studies*, 30, 355-376. <https://doi->

org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0170840608101140

Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, *96*, 506-520. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-295X.96.3.506>

Turner, D. (2014). Quirkos Software [Computer Software]. Edinburgh, UK. Retrieved from <https://www.quirkos.com/index.html>.

Van Manen, M. (2017). Phenomenology in its original sense. *Qualitative Health Research*, *27*, 810-825. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/1049732317699381>

Verrips, J. (2006). Dehumanization as a double-edged sword. In G. Baumann & A. Gingrich (Eds.), *Grammars of identity/alterity: A structural approach* (pp. 142- 154). New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Walleman, J. (2014). Soldier life cycle changes way Army preps troops for eventual transition. Retrieved from https://www.army.mil/article/129757/soldier_life_cycle_changes_way_army_preps_troops_for_eventual_transition.

Warriner, K., & Lavalle, D. (2008). The retirement experiences of elite female gymnasts: Self identity and the physical self. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, *20*, 301-317. doi:10.1080/10413200801998564

Waterman, A. S. (1982). Identity development from adolescence to adulthood: An extension of theory and a review of research. *Developmental Psychology*, *18*, 341-358. <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0012-1649.18.3.341>

- Willard, V. C., & Lavallee, D. (2016). Retirement experiences of elite ballet dancers: Impact of self-identity and social support. *Sport, Exercise, And Performance Psychology, 5*, 266-279. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/spy0000057>
- Woodward, R., & Jenkins, N. K. (2011). Military identities in the situated accounts of British military personnel. *Sociology, 45*, 252-268. <https://doi-org.springfieldcollege.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0038038510394016>
- Yanos, R. C. (2004). *Perceptions of transition to civilian life among recently retired Air Force officers* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland). Retrieved from <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/2321/umi-umd-2126.pdf>

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Consent to Voluntarily Participate in a Research investigation

Department of Psychology

Springfield College

Springfield, MA 01109

Dr. Sally M. Hage
Chair of Dissertation Committee

Shawn Saylor, MA.
Investigator's Name

 Participant's Name

 Date

Dissertation Title: Exploring Identity From Military to Civilian Life: A Phenomenological Study

You are being asked to provide consent in a research study exploring identity reconstruction among individuals transitioning from the military back to civilian life. Participation is voluntary. You can say yes or no. If you say yes now you can still change your mind later.

Your participation includes filling out a brief demographic survey (10 minutes) and an individual interview lasting approximately 60 minutes by Skype or phone. The interview questions will ask about your identity during and after your time in active duty service and your transition process. I encourage you to ask questions now and at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and this form will be a record of your agreement to participate.

Throughout the entire research process, all information about you and other participants (name, age, place of institution, other identifying information) will be kept confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will represent your experience in the study.

It is important to note that participation in this study has potential risks and benefits. There is a risk that discussing your experiences in the Army around your identity transition may trigger

distressing emotions for you. If this occurs, you may stop the interview or take a break at no consequence to you. You may choose to discontinue the interview or reschedule. If the interview is discontinued, it will not be used in the analysis. I will provide you with a list of resources should you wish to process the interview with a professional helper.

Participation in this study also has potential benefits. It is possible that discussing the process of identity during your transition out of the military may create an awareness and better understanding about this experience as well as help others who struggle with identity changes. At the end of this study, you will be eligible to receive \$10. However, you must have completed the interview in order to receive the gift card or cash.

All such investigational projects carried out within this department are governed by the regulations of both the Federal Government and Springfield College. These regulations require that the investigator obtain from you a signed consent to participate in this study. Any further information or questions about the research and explanations of participant rights can be attained from Shawn Saylor at ssaylor@springfieldcollege.edu, Dr. Sally Hage at shage@springfieldcollege.edu, or the Springfield College Institutional Review Board (413) 748-3959.

I certify that I have read and fully understand the above research. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction by the researcher. I willingly give consent to participate.

Signature of Participant

Date

I grant permission for the researcher to contact me, either through phone, text, or email, with a reminder of the interview date/time if needed. I can be contacted at the following phone number or email address:

YES NO

Phone number _____ Email _____

Appendix B

Informed Consent of Audio Use

Researcher will be recording using audio recording to assist with the accuracy of your responses.

You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please read and select one of the following options.

- YES, I give the researcher, Shawn Saylor, permission to audio during my interview.
- NO, I do not give permission.

Signature

Date

Appendix C

Demographic Survey for Participants

I grant permission for the researcher to use all data collected for research purposes only.

YES NO

1. Preferred Method of contact (*please circle all that apply*)
 - a. Phone
 - b. Email
 - c. Text
2. May I leave a voice message in the event you are not able to answer your phone?
YES NO
3. Best time of day to contact you? (*Please circle all that apply*)
 - a. Morning c. Evening
 - b. Afternoon d. Any time
4. Gender (*please circle one*)
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
5. Country of Birth/Citizenship _____ / _____
6. If country of birth/citizenship is other than United States, how long have you lived in United States? _____
7. Race/Ethnicity (*please circle all that apply*)
 - a. Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American
 - b. Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African American
 - c. Latino or Hispanic American
 - d. East Asian or Asian American

- e. South Asian or Indian American
 - f. Native American or Alaskan Native
 - g. African
 - h. Hispanic
 - i. European
 - j. Asian
 - k. Indian
 - l. Any other mixed background _____
 - m. Other _____
8. Reason for joining military? _____
9. MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) while active duty? _____
10. How many years did you serve active duty? _____
11. How many times did you deploy overseas? _____
12. How many years have you been retired from active duty? _____
13. Reason for transitioning out of active duty? _____
14. What is your current occupation? _____

Appendix D

Permission Letter Email to Contact Potential Participants

From: Shawn Saylor

To: [Former Colleague]

Subject of the Email: Contact information for potential participants in a research study about military members identity returning to civilian life.

Dear [Name of Former Colleague]

I am reaching out to you to help me identify potential participants for a research study involving the process of identity reconstruction among military members who are transitioning from military to civilian life. In order to ensure potential participants qualify for the study, I would need their contact information (e.g. name and email address) to send them an email of interest. In order to obtain the contact information, I need your permission to grant me access to this contact information. You have the right to refuse granting access to this information. Please read and select one of the following options.

YES, I give the researcher, Shawn Saylor, permission to obtain contact information.

NO, I do not give permission.

Signature

Date

Appendix E

Prospective Participant Email Invitation

From: Shawn Saylor

To: [Prospective Participant]

Subject of the Email: Invitation for your participation in a research study about military members identity among individuals returning to civilian life.

Dear [Name/Organization of prospective participants]

You are invited to participate in a research investigation to explore and understand the process of identity reconstruction and various factors that impact transition. The purpose of this study is to better understand the process of changing identity among individuals who transition back from the military to civilian life. You were contacted as a potential participant because you have transitioned recently from the Army and have been identified by peers to be a good fit for this study based on meeting the following criteria:

- a. Participants have been retired from active duty military no more than five years.
- b. Participants served at least 10 years active duty in the Army.
- c. Participants served at least on two deployments.
- d. Participants currently do not work as a contractor in any capacity with the military.

All such investigational projects carried out within this department are governed by the regulations of both the Federal Government and Springfield College. These regulations require that the investigator obtain from you a signed consent to participate in this study.

If you agree to participate, you will be one of the participants who will be participating in this research. You are invited to complete a demographic survey (10 minutes) and a 60 minutes phone/Skype interview. There will be a \$10 gift card/cash for participation in this study. The data collected will be confidential, and any identifying information will be stored with your interview information. Information gained from this study will provide an understanding of how retired military members process their identity transition.

If you are interested in participating, please respond via email or telephone to Shawn Saylor at ssaylor@springfieldcollege.edu or 864-616-1833. I would be grateful to answer any questions. In addition, I would appreciate it if participants would forward this e-mail to other potential participants for this study. I greatly appreciate your assistance and support.

Sincerely,
Shawn Saylor, M.A

Appendix F

Follow-Up Email Script

From: Shawn Saylor
To: [Prospective Participant]

Subject of the Email: Follow up invitation for your participation in a research study about military members identity among returning to civilian life.

Hello {Insert Participant's Name},

I am reaching back out to you in regards to participation in a study exploring and understanding the process of identity transformation and various factors that impact the transition from military to civilian life. I am emailing you to follow up on a previous email that was sent to you about participation in this study.

If you agree to participate, you will be one of the participants who will be participating in this research. You are invited to complete a demographic survey (10 minutes) and a 60 minutes phone/Skype interview. You will receive a \$10 gift card/Venmo for participation in this study. The data collected will be confidential, and no identifying information will be connected to your interview data. Information gained from this study will provide an understanding of how retired military members process their identity.

If you are interested in participating, please respond via email or telephone to Shawn Saylor at ssaylor@springfieldcollege.edu or 864-616-1833. This will be the last follow-up email in regards to this study. Thank you for your time in this manner and I greatly appreciate your assistance and support.

Sincerely,
Shawn Saylor,

Appendix G

Screening Interview Script

Hello {Insert Participant's Name},

I am reaching out to you because you expressed interest in participating in this study that focuses on the process of identity among individuals who transition from military to civilian life. I was wondering if you have 10-15 minutes to briefly discuss the study and do a quick screening interview. If now is not a good time to do the phone screening for the study, is there a more convenient time I may call you back?

{Not able to do phone-screening interview at that moment: I appreciate you rescheduling. I will give you a call back at (date and time). Feel free to call or email me if you have any questions before we begin the phone-screening interview.}

{If able to do phone-screening interview: Thank you for taking some time to participate in this phone-screening interview. The purpose of this study is to explore and further understand the process of identity transformation and transition experiences of individuals moving from the military to civilian life. This screening will help determine if you are eligible to participate in this study. I will ask you 4 questions. All of your responses will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Screening Questionnaire

1. Have you been retired from the military less than five years? YES NO
2. Have you served in active duty Army for at least 10 years? YES NO
3. Have you served on at least two deployments during your time in the military? YES NO
4. Do you currently work as a contractor in any capacity within the military? YES NO

Thank you for answering the questions. This study will consist of an interview over Skype or on the phone, lasting around 60 minutes. You are able to choose to not respond to any questions, stop the interview or withdraw from the study without any consequences. Should you decide to complete the study, you will receive a \$10 in gift card or cash.

During the formal interview, I will review the study in more detail and give you a chance to ask questions. The interview will be audio recorded and data will be collected through transcribing the data and analyzing for themes. All of your personal and identifying information will be kept confidential. If you wish, you may receive a copy of the final results at the end of the study as well.

Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to speaking with you again.

Appendix H

Screening Tool

5. Have you been retired from the military less than five years? YES NO

**** If no, not eligible.****

6. Have you served in active duty Army for at least 10 years? YES NO

**** If no, not eligible.****

7. Have you served on at least two deployments during your time in the military? YES NO

**** If no, not eligible.****

8. Do you currently work as a contractor in any capacity within the military? YES NO

**** If yes, not eligible.****

Appendix I

Interview Guide

Hello, thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. Your answers will help us understand better the process of identity and factors that impact transition from military to civilian life. There are no right or wrong answers, and all of your answers will be confidential; there will be no identification of you in any reports coming from this research. If you have any questions at any time please stop me and we'll discuss them, and you are able to stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Okay, let's get started with some basic questions.

Part 1: Informal/friendly/warm-up question:

1) Could you tell me what one of your favorite parts about your time in the service?

Part 2: Questions yielding information on research problem

2) How would you describe your who you were prior to joining the military?

2a) What was your life like prior to joining?

3) How would you describe who you were while being active duty in the military?

4) What was life like during your deployments and did that change who you were after coming back from deployment?

5) How, if any, has who you are changed since you transitioned out of being active duty?

5a) How has your life been since transitioning?

6) What factors do you believe are important for an individual to have to best provide a successful transition?

7) What do you think are the biggest problems that individuals face when they return to civilian life? [SEP]

8) What, if anything, have you found surprising about the transition back to civilian life

9) What advice would you provide someone who is transitioning from military to civilian life? [SEP]

10) How have you changed as a result of your time in the military?

Part 3: Finishing on a positive note

11) When thinking back on about your military career, what was one of your fondest memories?

Appendix J

Field Note Form

Participant:

Date:

Details:

Observations:

Description of activity:

Reflections:

Emerging questions/analyses:

Future action:

Appendix K

Follow-Up Email Themes Script

Hello {Insert Participant's Name},

I would like to thank you again taking time and being a part of this study. Your participation and feedback has been invaluable throughout this process.

I am emailing you because I have finished the data collection and initial analysis part of this study. I have put together the initial themes that arose from this study, and would like to invite you to read through these themes. It is important that your experience is reflected in these findings, so I would invite you to feel free to add any thoughts or feedback that you have regarding these initial findings.

I have attached the themes to this email and have provided space below each theme for you to reflect any thoughts, feelings, or additional experiences if you wish. When you finish reading through and/or commenting on these themes, please email the modified document back to me.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Shawn

Appendix L

Follow-Up Theme Questions

I. THEME 1

- a. Is this theme representative of your experience(s)?
Yes No Somewhat

Please Explain:

- b. Please add any thoughts, feelings, or other experiences that you feel relate to this theme

II. THEME 2

- a. Is this theme representative of your experience(s)?
Yes No Somewhat

Please Explain:

- b. Please add any thoughts, feelings, or other experiences that you feel relate to this theme

III. THEME 3

- a. Is this theme representative of your experience(s)?
Yes No Somewhat

Please Explain:

- b. Please add any thoughts, feelings, or other experiences that you feel relate to this theme

IV. THEME 4

- a. Is this theme representative of your experience(s)?
Yes No Somewhat

Please Explain:

- b. Please add any thoughts, feelings, or other experiences that you feel relate to this theme

Appendix M

Resource List

- Veteran's Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255
 - The Veterans Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource that's available to anyone, even if you're not registered with VA or enrolled in VA health care. The caring, qualified responders at the Veterans Crisis Line are specially trained and experienced in helping Veterans of all ages and circumstances.

- State-Specific Veteran Affairs Office: <https://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>
 - The mission of the Department of Veterans' Services is to advocate on behalf of all veterans and provide them with quality support services and to direct an emergency financial assistance program for those veterans and their dependents who are in need.

- National Organization of Veteran Advocates : 1-202-587-5708
<https://www.vetadvocates.org/cpages/home>
 - The National Organization of Veterans' Advocates, Inc. (NOVA) is a not-for-profit educational membership organization incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1993. NOVA is a national organization of attorneys and other qualified members who act as advocates for disabled veterans.

- Veteran's Center Counseling: 1-877-927-8387/
https://www.vetcenter.va.gov/Vet_Center_Services.asp
 - The VA's readjustment counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located in easily accessible neighborhoods near Veterans, Service members, and their families, yet separate from VA organizational sites to ensure confidential counseling and reduce barriers to care. All Vet Center services are prepaid through military service.

Appendix N

Transcriptionist Confidentiality Form

Confidentiality Agreement for Transcriptionist

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from Shawn Saylor related to his research study titled Exploring Identity from Military to Civilian Life: A Phenomenological Study.

Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents. ^[1]_[SEP]
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, Shawn Saylor.
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to Shawn Saylor in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices. ^[1]_[SEP] I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____