

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VETERANS'
EXPERIENCES AS THEY TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE USING THE
TRANSITION GOALS, PLANS, SUCCESS (GPS) PROGRAM**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Increased deployments to combat operation areas have resulted in veterans transitioning from the military in more significant numbers. Likewise, African American veterans are also leaving the military in more significant numbers. Transition assistance training is necessary to prepare these veterans for higher education and civilian employment since these areas impact the successful transition of veterans. Moreover, higher education improves African American veterans' socioeconomic status and helps them to gain meaningful employment. Unfortunately, several research studies noted African American veterans were not using their educational benefits at the same rates as other veterans.

This study aims to better understand the transition experiences of African American veterans, their participation in the Transition Goals, Plans, Success Program, and the challenges they face obtaining employment and higher education after military service. Hermeneutic phenomenology guided this study to help understand the lived experiences of the participants. The participants for this study were six African American veterans who served in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, and Army National Guard. Each participant served in their respective branch of the military for 20 years or more. Each participant was interviewed once face-to-face using semi-structured interviews. Veterans in this study highlighted the challenges they faced during their transition from the military to civilian life. They also acknowledged higher education's impact on meaningful employment and the importance of higher education. Participants

acknowledged their fears as they transitioned out of the military and understood the need to develop coping strategies to handle their concerns. The themes that emerged are representative of the participants' life experiences, military transition experiences, and demonstrates higher education's role in a successful transition.

The participants expressed the importance of family during their transitions, but they need help to better understand civilian careers and employment before leaving the military. Furthermore, African American veterans need career counseling to help them to understand their transition experiences and help to prepare an adequate resume that translates their military skills to a civilian job match. Career development and training development for these veterans will also improve their transition success and employability.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who has always been a source of strength and inspiration. A special dedication goes to Jayden and Nola, for keeping me inspired. Thank you. I love you. God bless you. To my comrades, thank you for the words of encouragement and motivation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
Servicemen’s Readjustment Act.....	4
Military Service of African Americans.....	5
Transition Challenges	7
Total Institutions	10
Transition Experiences.....	11
Adapting to Transition and Change.....	12
Problem Statement.....	13
Study Purpose and Objectives.....	15
Research Questions.....	16
Methods.....	16
Definition of Terms.....	18
Assumptions.....	22
Significance.....	23
Limitation.....	24
Chapter Outline.....	24
CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE	26
Background Information.....	27
Literature Search.....	30
Inclusion Criteria.....	34
Exclusion Criteria.....	34

Overview of Articles.....	34
Themes.....	36
African American Veterans' PTSD Rates.....	38
Vocational Services and Compensation.....	41
Effects of Military Experience.....	43
Human Resource Development (HRD) History.....	43
Career Development.....	44
Hayes Career Development Model.....	45
Transformational Learning Theory.....	46
Discussion.....	47
Implications.....	53
Theoretical Framework.....	54
Transition Influences.....	56
Conclusion.....	59
CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	60
Research Question.....	61
Research Perspective.....	61
Research Design	62
Research Participants.....	62
Research Instrument.....	64
Data Collection Procedures	66
Data Analysis.....	67
Audio Recordings.....	68
Transcription.....	68
Research Journal.....	69
Research Setting	69
Reflexivity.....	70
Trustworthiness.....	71
Ethical Considerations	73
Rigor.....	73
Transferability	74
Credibility.....	74
Dependability.....	75
Confirmability.....	75
Summary.....	76
CHAPTER IV ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS	77
Introduction.....	77
Research Questions.....	78

Participants' Demographic Data.....	78
Participants' Life Experiences.....	80
Drew.....	80
Military Transition Experiences.....	82
Transition Program Effectiveness.....	83
Higher Education.....	84
Bobby.....	85
Military Transition Experiences.....	86
Transition Program Effectiveness.....	88
Higher Education.....	89
India.....	89
Military Transition Experiences.....	91
Transition Program Effectiveness.....	92
Higher Education.....	93
Neal.....	94
Military Transition Experiences.....	96
Transition Program Effectiveness.....	97
Higher Education.....	98
Charlie.....	99
Military Transition Experiences.....	100
Transition Program Effectiveness.....	100
Higher Education.....	101
Lisa.....	102
Military Transition Experiences.....	102
Transition Program Effectiveness.....	104
Higher Education.....	105
Emerging Themes.....	105
Family Matters.....	106
Career Expectations.....	108
Education is Key.....	108
Failure to Launch.....	109
Plan Early.....	110

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE,
FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS 112

Discussion.....	112
Research Questions.....	112
Summary of Study and Theoretical Framework.....	114
Situation.....	115
Self.....	116
Support.....	117
Strategies.....	118
Method.....	118

Data Collection.....	119
Data Analysis.....	120
Interpretation of Findings.....	120
Overview of Interpretations of Findings.....	120
Family Matters.....	122
Career Expectations.....	123
Education is Key.....	125
Failure to Launch.....	125
Plan Early.....	127
Addressing the Literature Gap.....	129
Implications for Future Research and Practice	129
Implications for Future Research.....	130
Implications for Practice	132
Resume Writing.....	133
Career Counseling.....	134
Implications for Theory.....	136
Reflecting on the Study.....	136
Limitations.....	137
Conclusions	138
 REFERENCES.....	 141
 APPENDIX A TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM CONSENT FORM	 156
 APPENDIX B INTERVIEW 1 QUESTIONS	 160

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Summary of Literature Search Adapted from Lobo et al.....	33
Figure 2 Collaborative Transition Model.....	52
Figure 3 Outcome Using Schlossberg’s Transition Model.....	55
Figure 4 4S Transition Model for Veterans.....	57
Figure 5 Military Service and Deployments.....	80
Figure 6 Tips for Managing Transitions Adapted from Gaither.....	128

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Database Search Results.....	37
Table 2 Mezirow’s Ten Phases of Transformative Learning.....	47
Table 3 Participants’ Data.....	79
Table 4 Summary of Themes.....	106
Table 5 Military Branches Transition GPS Program Identification.....	110
Table 6 Implications for Future Research.....	132
Table 7 Implications for Practice – Resume Writing.....	134
Table 8 Implications for Practice – Career Counseling.....	135

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Military service is one of the most accessible means for young Americans to gain skills and employment experience. According to Kleykamp (2007), military service is designated as a labor market outcome since the all-volunteer force may have an impact on employment rates. A major impact comes from more significant numbers of veterans transitioning out of the military services as a result of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. As of 2012, approximately 200,000 veterans were projected to transition out of the military to the civilian sector every year (Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

Combat veterans appear to have a harder time of transitioning than other veterans. Minnis (2017) found the most significant challenge for veterans transitioning from the military was finding employment and procuring careers in their new environment. The transition to civilian life for military veterans is a complicated and challenging task. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) found 51% of veterans that served in Iraq and Afghanistan reported their transition and adjustment to civilian life was difficult. These wars have also led to African American veterans leaving the military service in higher numbers as compared to other veterans (Ottley, 2014).

In this study, the problem addressed was African American veterans facing numerous barriers transitioning from the military to civilian life and employment. Additionally, these veterans are not receptive to nor are taking advantage of higher education and/or using the benefits they have earned (Aikins, Golub, & Bennett, 2015;

Keillor, 2009). African American veterans' failure to seek higher education and utilize their benefits may result from their lack of knowledge about Veterans Administration (VA) education programs along with his or her mental status interfering with performance in higher education settings (Veterans Administration, 2017). African American veterans' transition experiences, education, and civilian employment are the focus of the study because seeking higher education and employment are the two primary barriers in which returning African American veterans face and have the most significant difficulty overcoming.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused many African American servicemen and women to transition from the armed forces with severe physical and mental health issues. As African American veterans reintegrate into society and the workforce, they may face more significant challenges because of PTSD, lack of training and/or higher education, as well as failure to participate in one of many vocational services programs. Additionally, being both a female veteran and African American increases the difficulty of the transition because of a variety of complex issues they face (Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

From a historical perspective, African American veterans' needs are greater than other veterans' needs due to racial discrimination embedded into the fiber of America (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Even perceived racial discrimination had been found to have negative outcomes for African American veterans' mental health (Chou, Asnaani, & Hofman, 2012). According to Chou et al., (2012), racial discrimination is viewed as the adverse treatment of an ethnic group because of negative feelings or beliefs about

that minority population. They noted that perceived racism and racial discrimination have the ability to impact the mental health status of African American veterans (Chou et al., 2012; Loo, Ueda, & Morton, 2007).

Thus, factors such as veterans' identity, combat experiences, and military experience also have the potential to affect veterans' health (Sohn & Harada, 2008). Many African American veterans return to the neighborhoods they left before joining the military where opportunities for housing, food, and higher education may be limited. As African American veterans face these challenges they also face lower socioeconomic and educational status if they utilize the VA for medical and other healthcare services (Chou et al., 2012). The reason for this may be due to the number of hours spent waiting in a VA facility to receive care where the estimated rate of unemployment for veterans with mental health—which includes PTSD, substance abuse, and bipolar depression issues—was a staggering 65 percent (Kukla et al., 2015). PTSD is “a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event—either experiencing or witnessing an event” (Roberts et al., p. 71). Combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in more cases of PTSD because of deployment experiences and exposure to combat stressors (Muralidharan, Austern, Hack, & Vogt, 2016). According to Yang and Burr (2016) African American veterans may experience greater stress related to PTSD because of their assignment in a combat theater of operation, firing a weapon to defend themselves, and during an attack by the enemy.

Another concern is the high rate of unemployment among African American veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom which is

currently at 9.6 percent compared to 6.7 percent for all veterans (Stern, 2017). Because of barriers African American veterans face, access to higher education is necessary to help improve their socioeconomic status and reduce the possibilities of African American veterans becoming a burden on society (Kelykamp, 2007). Ottley (2014) found unemployment and incorrect diagnosis of physical and mental health issues coupled with veterans' lack of knowledge about VA housing benefits resulted in 56% of Black or Hispanic veterans' homelessness.

Servicemen's Readjustment Act

The Servicemen Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the Government Issue (G.I.) Bill, was created to help World War II Veterans transition back to civilian life after the war (Mettler, 2005). The Servicemen Readjustment Act provided unemployment benefits, home loans, and business loans to veterans transitioning out of the military (Mettler, 2005). In 2008, Congress passed the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act which expanded the benefits of the G.I. Bill and provided additional benefits based on the cost of attending an approved educational institution (Kapp & Torreon, 2017). The G.I. Bill has provided the opportunity for many veterans to attend higher education institutions, but many African American veterans face additional challenges, such as lack of funds and discriminatory lending practices (Kleykamp, 2007). Unfortunately, African American veterans continue to have lower rates of use than other veterans when it comes to utilizing their G.I. Bill benefits.

Historically, the enlistment of African Americans in the military has been higher than other ethnic groups which may have been in correlation to low labor market

outcomes for African Americans (Kleykamp, 2014; Ottley, 2014). As the labor market for African Americans experiences a downward trend in employment in previous years, this population enlisted in the military as a substitute for unemployment. However, recent research has provided evidence African Americans are not enlisting in the military as before, and there is a decline in their military service (Kellior, 2009). The prison system may actually be replacing the military as an institutional influence on their labor market outcome (Kleykamp, 2014).

Military Service of African Americans

African Americans have served with distinction in the military from the country's first battle to recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan; therefore, committing their lives to the defense of the nation, suffering both in battle and at home (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). African American veterans face the same stressors as other veterans, such as the feeling of isolation, loneliness, and lack of support. Although serving in the military, African American veterans still face institutional racism and discrimination which continues as they transition out of the military (Johnson & Johnson, 2013).

African American veterans have served in the military in more significant numbers than other veterans since they may not have had the same opportunities for civilian employment. Additionally, the levels of unemployment and the struggling economy may influence the enlistment of African American veterans (Kleykamp, 2006). Another factor to consider is serving in the military may be a method of improving the human capital of African Americans, while at the same time providing the opportunity to improve their labor outcomes (Kleykamp, 2006). Also, the service of African American

female veterans demands attention and acknowledgment since they have made enormous contributions to African American military history and are more likely to be homeless and diagnosed with a mental health issue than their male counterparts (Tsai, Pietrzak, Harpaz-Rotem, & Southwick, 2012). After serving their country, all military personnel will face the difficult task of transitioning back to civilian life. Approximately 60% of the personnel serving on active duty transition from the service because of retirement, or they chose to end their military career early after their first or consecutive enlistments to return to civilian life (Stern, 2017).

The differences between military veterans and the civilian population are not that profound. Providing for the care, health, and well-being of their families is the primary similarity veterans and civilians share. Unfortunately, when veterans reintegrate to civilian life, they often face a civilian community and individuals who have no idea of how to cope with veterans. More so, the civilian community may not have any experience with military personnel or their military life. Interestingly, veterans in or out of uniform must face the realization that they will continue to live in two worlds. They will be holding on to the values of their military life as they learn how to be a civilian. The values they learned in the military will always be a part of whom the veteran has become. Civilians have their values as well. However, their values are not institutionally based. Each military service branch sets their values for military personnel to live by on or off duty. For example, military personnel in the Army live by the Seven Army Values which are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless-service, honor,

integrity, and personal courage. The Navy, on the other hand, lives by the values of honor, courage, and commitment (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016).

While in uniform military personnel are under the structure of a chain of command which is the leadership of an organization where instructions flow from the top to the bottom (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016). In civilian life, this structure does not exist, and veterans have to develop their operating structure. Basic needs of military personnel are provided by the military from their first day of basic training until the day they transition from the military. Civilians are responsible for providing their basic needs through the choices they select. African American veterans may struggle in civilian life with their basic needs since the military has provided their basic needs under a structured system. For example, the military provides a time and place for military personnel to obtain military clothing, medical care, dental care, and meals. African American veterans in and out of uniform will also face updating their job skills to transfer them to civilian employment. Freedom of choice is another area that is different for veterans compared to civilians. In the military, there is no freedom of choice since all actions are in the best interest of the team. Civilians, however, practice freedom of choice and individual rights. Self-discipline is also crucial in the military. Civilians have their version of discipline which may not meet the standards set by the military. In or out of uniform, most veterans maintain the level of self-discipline gained in the military.

Transition Challenges

When veterans transition out of the military to civilian life, they receive transition counseling that, in the past, was limited and ineffective in many aspects. This

has been problematic for years. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought veteran's transition to the forefront, and one result was President Obama signing the "Veterans Opportunity to Work and Hire Heroes Act of 2011" (VOW Act) (Parker, 2012). The VOW Act purpose was to help improve the participation in the transition assistance program, support transition out of the military, improve education and job training programs, and help veterans translate their military skills and training (Parker, 2012). In this, President Obama directed all department agencies to have a representative to participate and make recommendations to help prepare veterans for civilian life. Additionally, the president directed all government agencies to work together to create a more detailed and comprehensive transition assistance program that supported the smooth transition from military to civilian life (Claymans & Conlon, 2014).

Under the old transition assistance program (TAP), veterans had the choice to participate or not participate, but the creation of the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) veterans must produce evidence they have met specific requirements unique to their post-service goals (Claymans & Conlon, 2014). Transition GPS is the TAP redesigned to better prepare veterans and their families for civilian life and employment (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). President Obama signed Executive Order No. 13,518, Employment of Veterans in Federal Government, in November 2009. The Executive Order was intended to motivate federal agencies to hire service members and veterans (Claymans & Conlon, 2014). Unfortunately, consideration of the fact that bureaucracy causes the hiring process in federal agencies to be lengthy and time-

consuming was overlooked. For this reason, the executive order did not have its intended result. Many African American veterans have complex issues that may not afford them the opportunity to wait extended periods of time to find employment after they transition from the military.

Connecting veterans with meaningful civilian employment is crucial to the successful transition of African American veterans. The goal of Transition GPS is to ensure all veterans received mandatory transition training to support a successful transition. Unfortunately, Transition GPS may have failed to consider the cultural aspects of veterans' lives, preferences, traditions, and habits. Included in the Transition GPS program are the following:

- Military occupational class work and gap analysis that matches military occupations to their civilian equivalent.
- Resilience training to recognize and handle stress through the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW) is a three-day training program that teaches veterans skills in resume writing, cover letter creation, and interviewing skills. In short, it is a career development course.
- Finance and budgeting training that aligns transition goals with financial resources.
- Continuation of services briefing to provide veterans with information about continued service in the reserves and National Guard.

- Career Readiness Standards (CRS) that require veterans to complete thirteen tasks identified as essential CRS standards (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017).

Additionally, each veteran is required to complete classes and briefings to assess higher education, career and technical training, and entrepreneurship tracks. The transition program does not appear to address the cultural aspect of African American veterans but does take into consideration transition training conducted over more extended periods of time versus haphazard or quick transition training.

However, Transition GPS did not address the needs of veterans based on their goals for transition and civilian employment (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2016). The Transition GPS program has also experienced severe backlogs since its inception as an all branch of service transition program, and many veterans are not receiving the necessary benefits to aid in their transition out of the military (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2016). For this reason, other transition programs must be considered to help African American veterans transition from the military to higher education and civilian employment.

Total Institutions

Looking at the military as a type of societal structure, Naphan & Elliot (2015) categorized the military as a total institution requiring members to lose their self-determination, independence, and freedom. According to Goffman (1961), individuals new to the organization must be shaped and controlled by the establishment. It may be difficult for many veterans to transition from existing in a total institution, such as the

military, to operating and living a civilian lifestyle. Disengaging from the military life of not having total control over their lives to the civilian life of having autonomy is a challenge for many African American veterans. In the military, service members adapted in ways that were essential to survival in combat which could be seen unacceptable in civilian life (Naphan & Elliot, 2015).

Transition Experiences

Looking specifically at African American veterans, they have higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan than from previous wars (Johnson & Johnson, 2013). Therefore, PTSD discussions, experiences, and challenges may have an impact on these veterans' transition. Supporting higher education and career development of African American veterans with PTSD as they transition out of the military is a difficult and challenging task (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2016). Moving from an environment of familiarity to an unknown one can be challenging. Likewise, military and academic cultures are very different and require changes in veterans' perceptions about values, life, and tasks as they transition from the military. Most research on veterans' transition out of the military often discusses acts such as these men and women isolating themselves as a major area of concern. It is also important to address the higher education institutions' role in helping veterans during their transition.

After, observing African American veterans with PTSD transition from the military to college and eventually the workplace, role change become an important factor to consider during a transition. The ability to adapt to change is one of the most

challenging aspects of an individual's life because it is a continual process (Schlossberg, 1981). Applying Schlossberg Analysis Model of Human Adaptation to veterans' transition further highlights the challenge of adapting to change (Schlossberg, 1981). It should be noted that African American veterans may reject change as they still cling to the structured military environment they left. For example, in the military, there is a chain of command that directs the action of military members and gives little room, if any, to debate the decision-making of the leaders. Adapting to change is also tricky for veterans because discipline plays a huge role in their identity as disciplined military members; they lived and survived by performing their duties without questioning authority.

Adapting to Transition and Change

Military personnel experience changes and transition in many forms while on active duty. These changes and transitions occur because of a permanent change of duty station, change in duty position, and deployment to combat operations (Robertson & Brott, 2014). As African American servicemen and women prepare for their transition out of the military career adaptability becomes increasingly essential to a successful transition. Career adaptability is "the ability to adjust oneself to fit new and changed circumstances in one's career by planning, exploring, and making decisions about one's future" (Savickas, 1997, p. 254). In addition to preparing to adapt to a new environment, African American veterans should prepare to face challenges and changes to their daily lives. Their role in the family and family responsibilities also change (Gil-Rivas, Kilmer, Larson, & Armstrong, 2017).

Problem Statement

In this study, the problem addressed is African American veterans are not receiving effective transition assistance training to help with their successful transition to civilian life. Zogas (2017) noted the transition to civilian life was a challenging event for most veterans. The Department of Defense has implemented the Transition GPS program but little has changed to provide African American veterans with the necessary assistance they need to reintegrate back to civilian life. Gaining meaningful employment and earning a college degree has been shown to help with the transition success of African American veterans. Unfortunately, these veterans are not often receptive to nor taking advantage of higher education or using the benefits they earned (Ottley, 2014; Keillor, 2009). These veterans also have difficulty translating their military skills to a civilian job match. African American veterans also have difficulty asking for help when needed.

Likewise, these veterans also leave the military with unrealistic expectation about the civilian workforce which adds to the difficulty of their transition, African American veterans' failure to seek higher education and use their benefits may result from their lack of knowledge about VA education programs and his or her mental status which interferes with performance in higher education settings (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). According to Aikins et al. (2015), African American veterans are underrepresented in American higher education and negatively affect the national economic health because of the costs associated with their care. Furthermore, an adverse impact on social equity is also affected for African American veterans.

The Veterans Benefits Administration offers seven educational benefits programs to aid veterans and encourage their enrollment in higher education (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Also, it is estimated the national economic health cost to care for veterans with PTSD is 6 billion dollars a year and the cost is increasing by approximately 2 billion dollars yearly (Congressional Budget Office, 2012). Improving the mental health status of these veterans is an essential task that must be addressed to improve their social equity and to reintegrate them back into society.

Developing an in-depth understanding of African American veterans and the challenges they face have implications for future research because of the limited research on this topic. Likewise, researchers have not sufficiently addressed why African American veterans have the highest rates of deployment to combat zones than other veterans which may also contribute to the increasing rates of PTSD in African American veterans (Ottley, 2014). Unfortunately, many African American veterans refuse treatment for PTSD because of stigmas associated with their service-connected disability. As of 2012, African Americans made up approximately 16.9 % of the active duty forces of the military. With this being the case, African Americans make up the second-largest percentage of the armed forces compared to Whites, although the African-American population is 13.2% nationally (Ottley, 2014).

Overall, as noted by Aikins et al. (2015), African American veterans' reintegration into society and the workforce face greater challenges because of a lack of training and higher education, and failure to take part in vocational services programs. Although the New Post-9/11 GI Bill has presented more benefits and opportunities for

veterans to receive an education after their transition from the military, African American veterans continue to fail to use their benefits as compared to other veterans (Keillor, 2009). In response to this problem, an investigation about the transition experiences of African American veterans was conducted. This included higher education's impact on their transition and the training African American veterans receive when transitioning from the military. Understanding why African American veterans are underrepresented in higher education may help improve their higher education enrollment and the potential for future employment.

According to Minnis (2017), the successful transition of veterans from the military to the civilian workplace has the potential to improve their employment outcome during their job search. The role of the human resource development (HRD) practitioners will also become significant to veterans' career development plan, education, and employment hiring process to improve the transition experience of veterans. Civilian employment of African American veterans after military service may be limited compared to other veterans due to exposure to combat (Minnis, 2017). However, developing an in-depth understanding of African American veterans, why they have lower college enrollment, the effect of PTSD on receiving a higher education, and the challenges they face transitioning from the military, have implications for future research.

Study Purpose and Objectives

This study aimed to explore the transition experiences of African American veterans, their participation in the Transition GPS, and the challenges they faced

obtaining employment and higher education after military service. This research also examined Schlossberg's Transition Theory and its application as a sufficient framework for African American veterans transitioning to civilian life.

The objectives addressed in this study are:

- Explore African American veterans' participation in the Transition GPS Program.
- Determine the Transition GPS Program's effectiveness helping African American veterans transition to civilian life.
- Identify experiences that led to a successful transition from military to civilian life.

Research Questions

- What were the transition experiences of African American veterans as they left the military for civilian life?
- How effective was the Transition GPS program in preparing African American veterans for their transition to civilian life?
- What were the transition experiences that led to the successful transition of African American veterans to civilian life?

Methods

A qualitative research study using a phenomenological approach was conducted to explore the lived experiences of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Phenomenology is philosophy used to understand phenomena by looking back at the lived experiences of individuals with the goal of gaining knowledge about the

individual's world (Husserl, 1960). Examining the lived experiences of an individual is more than an introspective reflection on those experiences. When conducting a phenomenological study, the researcher must understand the purpose of the phenomenological approach which is to:

- Build rapport with participants
- Conduct in-depth interviews to gain participants perceptions
- Identify the phenomena through participants experiences and individual perspective
- Understand personal knowledge, subjectivity and interpretation of the data

Hermeneutic phenomenology was selected from the various types of phenomenology for this study because of its interpretative inquiry into understanding the truth about lived experiences; and interpretation or making meaning from the view of the interpreter (Anderson & Thomas, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Janes, 2015).

Additionally, hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for this study because researchers should have:

- Knowledge about the phenomenology they are researching,
- Flexible approaches to the research and an understanding that their worldview could change, and
- Be prepared to make changes to their interviewing approach (Anderson & Thomas, 2014).

It is essential to note hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the subject's life experiences whether as an individual or as a group (Creswell 2007; Husserl, 1960).

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data and to determine themes. Using this method to analyze the data from individual interviews was crucial to the study because, of its design for the constant comparison of the incident, respondents' remarks, and grouping data into units that are common (Creswell, 2007). After the themes had emerged, they were categorized and coded.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling in qualitative research helps guide the selection of participants based on the need of the study (Creswell, 2007). Participants answered open-ended questions about their transition experiences and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Transition GPS program. Redundancy informed whether the number of participants was sufficient for the study. The data collection was from the interviews and information provided by the participants. Field notes were kept recording each participant's reactions and body language.

Definition of Terms

- A *veteran* is defined by Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable” (Weimer, 2009).

- *Institutional Racism* is when a person of color is prevented from receiving an equal distribution of an organization's goods or services based on merit, equality, or need (Burk & Espinosa, 2012).
- A *disabled veteran* is a veteran of any branch of the military service who receives compensation from the VA for a service-connected disability (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Service-Connected Disability* is, "a disease, injury, or other medical and mental health condition that occurred during active military service. The disability may have been present at the time a veteran entered the military but became exacerbated due to the veteran's military duty. The VA based on functional ability rates these service-connected disabilities" (Murphy, 2011).
- *Racism* is "a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial group designations; rooted in the historical oppression of a group defined or perceived by dominant-group members as inferior, deviant, or undesirable" (Harrell, 2000, p. 432).
- *PTSD* is "a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event—either experiencing or witnessing an event" (Roberts et al., p. 71).
- *Disabilities* are any physical or mental disorder rated by the military as affecting the individual's quality of life and ability to function normally (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).

- *Acclimation* is “the process of transitioning the returning veteran to the community” (Ottley, 2014).
- *Total Institutions* consist of a vast number of people who are separated from society but live and work together for defined periods of time (Naphan & Elliot, 2015).
- *Military Life Cycle* begins at the first duty station and continues throughout the military career of an eligible service member and includes an individual development plan. Service members should be trained, educated, and potentially career-ready when transitioning from military service (Department of Defense, 2017).
- *Transition* is the process of moving from one situation to another such as a military member leaving active duty and moving on to civilian life, or a student leaving high school and going to work in the community or going to college (Department of Defense, 2017).
- *Transition Assistance Program* provides information and training to ensure service members leaving military service are career-ready for their next phase of their life (Department of Defense, 2017).
- *Transition GPS* (Goals, Plans, Success) is “a redesigned transition program providing service members with the training, services, resources, and tools they need to build competencies, meet the career readiness standards, and successfully transition into civilian life” (Department of Defense, 2017).

- *Career Readiness Standards* is a set of specific standards and associated objectives that must be achieved to demonstrate that service members are prepared to efficiently transition and pursue their personal, post-separation higher education, career technical training, and civilian employment goals (Department of Defense, 2017).
- *The Post- 9/11 GI Bill* is an education benefit program for individuals who served on active duty after September 10, 2001 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Higher Education* is education beyond the secondary level; especially education provided by a college or university (Webster, 2017). In this study, higher education includes community colleges, vocational schools, technical schools, and four-year universities.
- *Deployment* is the movement of active duty, reserve, or National Guard service member from their home station to another area including a combat zone (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Enlisted* is any member of the U.S. armed services who is not a commissioned officer or a warrant officer, especially one ranking below a noncommissioned officer or a petty officer (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Noncommissioned* (NCO) is an enlisted person in the rank of corporal through staff sergeant, holding any of various ranks below commissioned or warrant officers (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).

- *Officer* is a person who holds a position of rank or authority in the army, navy, air force, or any similar organization, especially one who holds a commission (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Military Occupation Specialty* (MOS) is the military job of the service member (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) is the combat operation dates in Afghanistan: October 7, 2001–December 28, 2014 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Operation Iraqi Freedom* (OIF) is the combat operation dates in Iraq: March 20, 2003–August 31, 2010 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).
- *Operation New Dawn* (OND) is the combat operation dates in Iraq: September 1, 2010–December 15, 2011 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017).

Assumptions

Several assumptions were present in the transition experiences of African American veterans in higher education. This study was guided by how the role of their mental status and higher educational experience played in their transition and civilian employment. The assumptions were:

- African American veterans face barriers to higher education and their transition out of the military.

- African American veterans' mental status impedes learning in higher education.
- African American veterans are expected to utilize the benefits they earned during military service to improve employment outcomes.
- African American veterans do not seek higher education because they rely on the training they receive in the military to obtain civilian employment.
- College enrollment of African American veterans was expected to be higher because of improvements made to the GI Bill.
- Truth will be shared during the interviews and interviewees will be honest in their responses while describing their lived experiences.

Significance

The results of this study will be of great benefits to African American veterans as they prepare to leave the military for civilian life. This study will provide African American veterans with important information and tools to assist them during their transition. Additionally, this study will help African American veterans improve their understanding of the challenges they may face during their transition as they leave the military and to help them identify how gender influences their transition. These veterans will also develop a greater appreciation for the role of the family as a support system since Ahern et al. (2015) noted support from family and military mentors that successfully transition as an important factor to help African American veterans during their transition.

Furthermore, managers and professionals of the military's Transition GPS program will find this study beneficial to help prepare African American veterans for their transition to civilian life and employment. Likewise, this study will be of great benefit to career counselors and human resource development professional as they take a more aggressive role in helping African American veterans prepare for life after military service. This study will also support and help transition managers, career counselors, and human resource development professionals as they develop a greater understanding of the necessary training and assistance African American veterans will require during the transition process.

Limitation

The limitation of this research was the utilization of a sample from various military support groups and military organizations. The findings from these organizations do not represent veterans at other support groups and military organizations. The participants in the study were selected based on their service during the Global War on Terrorism. Combat veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were the participants for this study. The veterans selected were volunteers who were willing to share their experiences without any expectation of compensation. Finding African American veterans to participate in the study also presented challenges since many of these veterans do not often take part in studies because of cultural beliefs.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I of this dissertation builds a case for the need for this study and includes the purpose of the study, theoretical framework, introduction of the method utilized,

definition of terms, assumptions, and limitation. Chapter II reviews the relevant literature in the fields of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Transition and, Human Resource Development, as well as gives a foundation and framework for this study. Chapter III describes the methods used to investigate the problem, and Chapter IV presents the data collected and the findings of this study. Finally, Chapter V provides discussion, summarizes the study, situates the study in the field of HRD, discusses its impacts on the field, includes recommendations for practice, and provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of research and literature on challenges African American veterans face during their transition from the military. To promote an in-depth understanding of the challenges they face, this literature review focused on three areas. First, the focus was on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its impact on veterans' transition, employment, and higher education. The next focus was on career development providing a brief explanation of career development and the Hayes career transition model. The final focus was a discussion on Schlossberg's Transition Theory and its relevance to African American veterans' transition and this study.

Conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have caused more cases of mental disorders among military servicemen and women than earlier wars. Additionally, increased deployments to combat operation areas have also resulted in veterans transitioning from the military in higher numbers. As African American veterans prepare to leave the military, obtaining civilian employment is the priority for these veterans. The purpose of this systematic literature review was to explore the experiences of African American veterans and their transition to higher education and civilian employment. The primary findings show African American veterans have higher rates of mental disorders and have lower enrollment rates at higher education institutions. Moreover, military experiences do not affect their employment, and they need educational support services of the Veterans Administration (VA) for a successful transition to civilian employment.

Reintegration back into civilian life is a painful and challenging experience for many military veterans, especially as they seek to return to civilian employment (Moore et al., 2016). In recent years, the topic of mental health has received increasing attention from the government and the military. The rate of mental disorders has noticeably increased among veterans in the years following their deployments (Roberts, Gilman, Breslau, Breslau, & Koenen, 2011). Likewise, as more veterans return from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, mental health must be discussed as veterans reintegrate into society. Moore et al. (2016) found African American veterans were one and one-half times less likely to return to work than White veterans.

Furthermore, the successful return to work for African American female veterans was lower than all veteran ethnic groups. The VA has taken several steps to discuss the work reintegration of veterans in order to help them return to the workforce and have a productive role in society (Kukla, Rattay, & Salyers, 2015). However, African American veterans' higher education is problematic since higher numbers of African Americans enter the military without higher education as compared to other groups (Kukla, Kelsey, & Sayers, 2015). In fact, history has shown African American veterans had higher attendance at a trade school or vocational training for blue-collar employment rather than professional, technical, or managerial work, and this trend needs to change (Kukla, Kelsey et al., 2015).

Background Information

PTSD is “a mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event—either experiencing or witnessing an event” (Roberts et al., p. 71). PTSD treatment and

diagnosis can be difficult for treatment centers and professionals to identify because PTSD can also cause depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Furthermore, the treatment of African American veterans and their involvement with a veteran's treatment center may not be equivalent to the treatment received by White veterans (Moore et al., 2016). According to Alim, Charney, and Mellman (2006), there appears to be a higher rate of PTSD in African American veterans. Admittedly though, there have been conflicting reports on the prevalence of mental disorders among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites (Roberts et al., 2011).

This conflict calls for further research to help understand how to diagnose and treat minority veterans. Unfortunately, African American veterans with mental health issues are not being diagnosed adequately compared to White veterans (Koo, Tiet, & Rosen, 2015). African American veterans also refuse treatment, drop out of treatment plans, or refuse mental health counseling because of stereotypes associated with their ethnic group (Spoont, Hodges, Murdoch, & Nugent, 2009). Some research suggests that matching veterans to counselors who look like them will help reduce veterans' dropout rates from treatment programs. Likewise, matching veterans with counselors who look like them provides veterans with the opportunity to express themselves more freely. This can also help the veteran develop a sense of relief that the counselor understands their pain and position (Johnson, 2014).

As an African American veteran, I was particularly interested in the study, since the effects of living with PTSD are not entirely known. Notably, minority veterans appear to experience mental disorders at higher rates than White veterans (Loo, 2014).

To discuss the issue of African American veterans with mental disorders, ethnicity, race, and culture stressors must be discussed. An essential area of concern is the lack of minority counselors and clinicians to stand for and counsel minority veterans (Johnson, 2014). Furthermore, the lack of minority counselors and clinicians may lead minority veterans to drop out of treatment and continue suffering from the effects of mental disorders. All veterans should receive equal treatment for mental disorders and their effects. Moreover, deciding proper methods to discuss the treatment disparities of the African American veteran must be examined further to help return the minority veteran to a better quality of life and work reintegration.

In this literature review, African American veterans faced many barriers to employment after transitioning to civilian life and the civilian workforce. The barriers most commonly met are gaining and keeping employment, obtaining higher education, reintegration into civilian life, seeking mental health support and treatment, and navigating the administrative procedures and policies of the Veterans Administration. Additional barriers include employer hiring decisions and stereotypes of veterans. Transitioning from the military is a difficult task for many veterans, and African American veterans are not receiving the services necessary for a successful transition. Notably, having mental health issues may increase the probability of higher unemployment of African American veterans. Also, employers' perceptions of the veteran's military experience, physical health, and mental health are factors to consider which may hurt employment opportunities (Kukla, Kelsey et al., 2015).

In earlier literature reviews, the focus has been on veterans in general. In this literature review, the focus is on African American veterans because it is crucial to examine veterans' employment issues from various perspectives including ethnically. Discussing the employment of all veterans is essential. However, African American veterans have received little attention when it comes to helping them obtain higher education and employment.

Literature Search

This systematic literature review involved the examination of peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on the education and employment of African American veterans. In this literature review, the terms PTSD, mental disorders, and disabilities are used interchangeably as mental health issues. The term disability addresses both the physical and mental issues of the veteran. Mental issues are illnesses such as PTSD, anxiety, panic disorder, and depression. The first search for research data was performed utilizing Google Scholar and gave 76,593 results for the keywords higher education, African American veterans, and PTSD. After receiving many results, the keyword search was changed to include career, development, and transition. The inclusion of these three added keywords generated 6,000 results. To narrow the search further, the next step taken in this literature review was a simple search of databases from the United States using the added keyword—employability.

The search with the inclusion of the keyword—employability—resulted in 350 articles, and the articles selected from the list were exported to Refworks. In this literature review, I examined 350 articles from the databases in Table 1 examining their

purpose, method, and findings and selected 20 articles that met the criteria for this literature review. The databases selected for the keywords search were:

- Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), which is an online library of education research and information.
- Academic Search Ultimate, which is a leading provider of peer-reviewed journals and e-journal resource information.
- Medline Complete, which is the U.S. National Library of Medicine and has citations of biomedical literature from around the world.
- PsychINFO, which is an abstracting and indexing database devoted to peer-reviewed literature.

I chose the databases listed above because of their ability to support the research topic. The ERIC database was instrumental because of its extensive educational literature which has over 400,000 documents. The database also consists of several hundred documents on veteran transitions to higher education, veterans' benefits, and veterans' higher education. The EBSCO Academic Search Ultimate database proved useful in this study to review the literature on the topic because the database gave a complete collection of peer-reviewed journal articles on the research topic.

The researcher also used the database to examine peer-reviewed articles on human resource development and e-learning. Additionally, the database allowed the researcher access to quick and efficient streamlined research data on veterans' transition and academic transitions after military service. The Medline database used in this study gave the researcher opportunity to review health journals related to veterans' physical

health and mental health issues. The PsycINFO database was useful because of its extensive amount of empirical research data and investigations on methodologies. Additionally, the database was selected because it supported the topic of this study and helped to find scholarly articles relevant to the study topic.

I removed 49 duplicate articles as well as an additional 212 articles on Vietnam Veterans since the focus of the study was Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. I removed 69 articles because they were published before 2005 and did not contain data for Afghanistan and Iraq War veterans. The remaining 20 articles in Figure 1 are what the literature review is comprised of because they have direct relevance to the study. Furthermore, several different factors noted in the selected articles for this literature review were: First, the participants were veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and their ages ranged from 18-40. Next, their participation was observed through surveys, VA health care centers, and participation in Compensation Work Therapy Program (CWT). In Addition, the articles discussed the physical and mental health of the participants noting PTSD, anxiety, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) as factors affecting Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

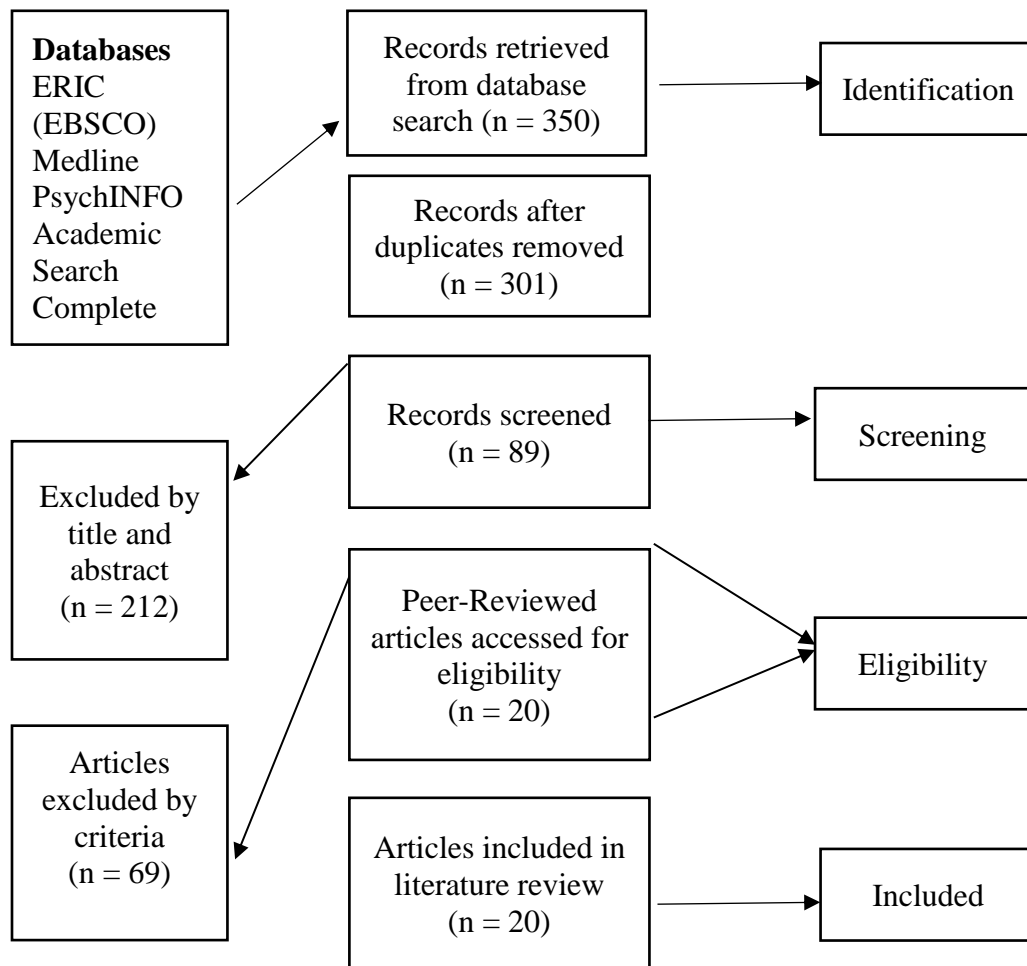


Figure 1. Summary of Literature Search adapted from Lobo et al. (2015).

The search and access of the databases were through online library resources. Likewise, the keywords chosen for the database searches were changed several times and included the following keywords: employability, higher education, career development, transition, and African American veterans.

Inclusion Criteria

The summary, purpose statement, and article titles were only read at this point to help decide if the articles were relevant to the topic or if the articles met the inclusion criteria. As such, the articles selected for inclusion had to be in English language, peer-reviewed journals. The inclusion articles also had to offer empirical research. These articles discussed mental disorders and the combat exposure of veterans. Additionally, the articles had to have been written and peer-reviewed after the year 2005 and later since combat operations in the Iraq and Afghanistan were between the years 2003 through 2014. Included in this study were International peer-reviewed journal articles; however, most of the peer-reviewed articles were from researchers at institutions in the United States.

Exclusion Criteria

Excluded articles included those that discussed higher education and PTSD in civilians because civilians and combat veterans have different experiences. Also, excluded articles included those published before 2005, as I intended to evaluate the current and latest research. Articles not relevant to the topic were filtered out, including those that discussed African American Vietnam veterans. This was due to the fact that the study intends to discuss the higher education of African Veterans during the most recent wars in the last ten years.

Overview of Articles

According to Resnick and Rosenbeck (2008), a thorough examination is needed to address the education and employment of African American veterans. Additionally,

the studies in the literature review showed that there is an active link between higher unemployment of veterans with a disability than veterans without a disability (Ainspan, 2011). The articles in this literature review used quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods to give empirical evidence concerning the employment of African American veterans.

Kukla, Rattay et al. (2014) reported the employment of veterans has resulted in many veterans having difficulties during their transition from the military services to civilian employment due to their perception of barriers in the work environment. Their perception is the result of their physical and cognitive problems. Likewise, combat-related and race-related experiences make it difficult for African American veterans to find and keep employment (Johnson, 2014).

Loo (2014) found African American veterans have higher rates of PTSD as compared to other veterans and continue to have the highest unemployment rates among veterans. After a review of the literature on how military service affects civilian employment, the articles reported military service did not affect veterans' employment status. However, the studies did find a gap in vocational services' potential to cause veterans' unemployment rates to increase because of the Compensation Work Therapy (CWT) Program's exclusion of veterans who do not have a mental health diagnosis (Zeigler et al., 2011). Fortunately, higher education has the potential to reduce high unemployment among African American veterans since higher education has been shown to help develop skills employers need in the workplace (Kukla, Kelsey et al., 2014).

Themes

In this section, I presented an overview of the literature reviewed to decide whether the articles answer the questions and the research objectives. The methods in this literature review were mixed methods, quantitative, and qualitative methods. The use of these methodologies may be helpful in giving a cross-analysis of the data from several perspectives. I used the matrix model in the literature review to record the data according to identified columns. The data collected was organized and placed in an Excel spreadsheet matrix. In the matrix model, I developed several columns and placed data according to the author and year—columns included: journal selected, purpose and research questions, research method, participants, and significant findings. Table 1 presents information on the number of articles retrieved from each database, the year, and the journals.

Table 1

Database Search Results

Databases	Number of Articles
ERIC (EBSCO)	150
Medline	20
PsychINFO	19
Academic Search Complete	38
Years	Number of Articles
2005-2010	4
2011-2015	16
Journals	Number of Articles
Qualitative	13
Quantitative	4
Mixed Method	3

Upon completing the review and analysis of the articles in the matrix model, four themes emerged:

- African American Veterans' PTSD Rates
- Vocational Services and Compensation
- Military Experience Effect
- Barrier to Employment Due to Mental Health and VA Participation

All of the articles were empirical research studies. Three of the articles discussed African American veterans' PTSD rates, and one article addressed veterans' mental

health treatment. Three articles discussed the vocational services and compensation for veterans with PTSD. Two of the articles discussed the effect of military experience on veterans' employment. Seven of the articles discussed the participation of veterans with PTSD in education and employment.

In the next section, the findings from the literature review are presented.

African American Veterans' PTSD Rates

Three of the articles used in this literature review found African American veterans had higher rates of PTSD due to their frequent deployments to the combat front line (Loo, 2014; Moore, et al., 2015; Roberts, Gilman, Breslau, Breslau, & Koenen, 2011). Likewise, veterans with mental disorders had significantly higher rates of unemployment (Ainspan, 2011). The African American veteran population with mental disorders also experienced higher rates of unemployment than White veterans and African American veteran without mental disorders, but little has been done to discuss the major causes of this problem (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011). Veterans' education and employment have been examined from several perspectives to gain comprehensive knowledge of gaps in the literature review. Higher education has been shown to have a positive impact on the employment of veterans since some of their military skills do not transfer nor support civilian employment.

Notably, veterans' disabilities are not always properly diagnosed. Ainspan (2011) explained how veterans with mental disabilities faced difficulty gaining education and employment. Additionally, employers' fears or lack of understanding veterans with physical disabilities and mental difficulties contribute to veterans'

unemployment rates, which was quite common in some of the studies (Ainspan, 2011). Horton et al., (2013) stated unemployment was significantly higher for veterans with mental disorders than veterans who retired from the military without mental disorders. Furthermore, these veterans reported higher rates of unemployment than veterans who did not have mental disorders. Stone and Stone (2015) suggested this population faces greater employment challenges because of stereotypes placed on mental disorders and mental disease which have a greater impact on African American veterans. Kleykamp (2014) noticed African American veterans' unemployment was traditionally higher than that of civilians, and African American veterans had higher unemployment rate than White veterans.

Rausch (2014) reported mental disorders in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans influences the veterans' unemployment status or underemployment status. The lack of education, poor personal skills, and formal training are also factors that contribute to the unemployment of African American veterans (Twamley et al., 2013). In their findings, Twamley et al. (2013) found veterans with one or more of the four common mental disorders—which are PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and TBI—had greater vocational support encounters, meaning they used the service more than veterans with one or no mental disorder.

Additionally, 51% of the veterans that received vocational support were competitive in the employment market compared to 21% of veterans that did not receive vocational support services. The need for vocational services is clear but reserved for those veterans with psychotic disorders which most Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans

are not eligible. Moore et al. (2016) noted many veterans are unaware of their qualifications for civilian jobs because they have failed to understand the transferability of their military skills. These articles bring up critical issues for veterans training and transferability of skills (Kukla, Kelsey et al., 2015). Rausch (2014) mentioned Iraq and Afghanistan veterans' PTSD rates being in the range of thirty percent. However, classifying the veterans by their ethnic population groups may give a better view of their mental health disorder rates.

Rausch (2014) found the barriers facing economically disadvantaged veterans were:

- the lack of education beyond high school,
- a lack of vocational training services, and
- unsuccessful personal adjustments to society.

The unemployment outcome for mental disorders also affects the rate of unemployment for veterans. According to Kukla, Rattray et al. (2015) veterans experienced more difficulties than non-veterans while trying to gain employment, including physical and mental issues.

Moore et al. (2016) noted three distinct return to work probabilities in their analysis of African American veterans' and White veterans' success in returning to work. First, White veterans had the highest return to work success than all veterans. Next, male veterans return to work success was higher than female veterans. Finally, the return to work success was higher for all veterans who held a college degree or vocational-technical education certification than those with only some college or a high

school diploma alone. Therefore, veterans may have to be retrained to gain new skills to help them obtain employment because of their non-transferable military skills and the possible limits placed on the veterans because of physical and mental disabilities (Peterson, Luethcke, Borah, Borah, & Young-McCaughan, 2011). Furthermore, veterans must be able to explain their mental disorder in a way that civilian employers can understand and relate to the skills they gained in the military (Johnson, 2014).

Vocational Services and Compensation

Vocational services can improve the employment of African American veterans (Resnick et al., 2008). The transition of African American veterans will need added vocational services as they transition into the civilian workforce (Moore et al., 2016). Furthermore, being Hispanic, Black, and female were significant contributing factors to being unemployed. The VA has implemented compensation work therapy, incentive work therapy, and transitional work programs to support veteran employment (Ostovary, & Dapprich, 2011). Twamley et al. (2013) sought to decide the relationship among demographic, financial, and clinical factors for veterans who took part in vocational services.

According to Twamley et al. (2013), vocational services had little impact on helping veterans gain employment. The primary reason was due to the veterans' lack of participation in a vocational services program (Moore et al., 2016). Many do not complete the first assessment which is another problem that should be discussed before seeing any gains in the employment of veterans (Tramely et al., 2013). This problem

may increase when only 8.4 percent of veterans with mental disorders received some form of vocational services.

Exploring the various ethnic veteran populations enables us to examine the groups who do not complete the first assessment. The articles used in this literature review presented useful information on the topic of veteran's employment, mental health issues, and rates of mental disorders associated with African American veterans. They also showed the employment challenges facing veterans with mental disorders. Likewise, the articles briefly discussed African American veterans' employment and supported the need for future research.

The military is struggling to deal with many veterans transitioning out, and with recent cutbacks in funding the armed forces, this issue will continue to be a growing problem. African American veterans have viewed their service in the military as being guaranteed employment since the military has been one of the largest employers in the world (Kleykamp, 2007). Frequent deployments overshadow the military's lack of consideration and unwillingness to prepare African American veterans for civilian employment.

Additionally, the mental strain deployments cause on the individual veteran and their life may impact the veteran's civilian employment opportunities. The Post-9/11 GI Bill has made more resources available for veterans to attend college, but African American veterans have not taken advantage of this opportunity. Understanding why African American veterans are not using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, needs more attention since Ottley (2014) links mental disorders as a contributing factor that impedes African

Americans from attending higher education institutions. Unfortunately, the civilian population has been under the perception that veterans have an unfair advantage for civilian jobs because of their military skills and discipline.

Effects of Military Experience

As veterans leave their military experiences behind, they face barriers and struggle to build a civilian life after many deployments (Stone & Stone, 2015). The United States Armed Forces are now in their most extended combat operation since Vietnam which has resulted in higher rates of mental disorders among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (Veterans Administration, 2017). As soldiers return home, they keep their military experiences to themselves and have difficulty adjusting to civilian society (Johnson, 2014). Horton et al. (2013) found no association between veterans' educational or employment opportunities after separation because of their military deployment experiences. Additionally, a veteran's deployments did not play a role in the veteran's unemployment (Horton et al. 2013).

Human Resource Development (HRD) History

Earlier scholars such as Fred L. Otte, Ronald L. Jacobs, Victoria J. Marsick, Gary N. McLean, Karen E. Watkins, Richard A. Swanson, and Darlene F. Russ-Eft influenced the field of HRD. These scholars were early winners of the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Outstanding Scholar Award (Short, 2016). The field of HRD consists of three areas—organizational development, training and development, and career development (Banks & Nafuko, 2008). Numerous scholars have defined HRD, and as a field, but there is no consensus on any one definition for the field.

Swanson (2009) defined HRD as "a process of developing and unleashing expertise to improving the organizational system, work process, team, and individual performance." Whereas, Chalofsky, and Lincoln (1983) defined HRD as "the study of how individuals and groups in organization change through learning."

All of the definitions have their role in the field of HRD. For this study, I focused on McLean and McLean's (2001) definition because of its far-reaching goal to encompass the whole of humanity. McLean and McLean defined HRD as "any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity, and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation, or, ultimately, the whole of humanity" (Swanson & Holton, 2008, p. 8).

The human resource development professional has a significant role in helping veterans transition from the military. However, HRD professionals should develop an understanding of how to help veterans strengthen their career development plan during their transition from their military lives to their civilian lives (Ford, 2017).

Career Development

Career development "is the process of acquiring and experiencing planned and unplanned activities that support the attainment of life work and goals" (McDonald & Hite, 2016, p. 4). Changes in the workplace environment have caused individuals to examine their careers differently. Factors such as a diverse workforce, governmental policy, advances in technology, and a downturn in the economy have changed how individuals view career fields (McDonald & Hite, 2016, p. 7). Career development has

an application for helping veterans transition from the military. At the same time veterans transitioning should manage their careers in this current changing workforce. Therefore, career development of veterans should focus on finding veterans employment in their career fields without examining the veterans' stability within the organization because the days of career employment are a thing of the past (McDonald & Hite, 2016, p. 9).

Hayes Career Development Model

Career development models began with Super's Life-Career Rainbow, and Super's Model is one of the most widely used models (Bank & Nafuko, 2008). However, in this study, Hayes Career Transition Model is examined because of its application to transition and the simple six-step Hayes' Model (Hayes, 2000, p. 14-16). Hayes six-step model process is as follows:

1. Self-Assessment: Employees get to know themselves very well by looking at their skills, values, interests, and personality preferences.
2. Career exploration: Individuals are open to career possibilities and let go of stereotypes.
3. Decision making: People synthesize information and seek similarities among jobs and the marketplace, as well as their values, interests, personalities, and skills.
4. Goal setting: Individuals set up goals to move forward towards their career choices.

5. Acquiring job search skills: People build networks of professional contacts and develop skills to market themselves to their chosen employers.
6. Acquiring career success skills: Individuals learn ongoing career management skills and those that will help them fit into a new organization.

Transformational Learning Theory

Mezirow's transformational learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective, so they are able to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more accurate or justified to guide the action (Mezirow, 2012, p. 76). As an adult learning theory, transformational learning theory has become the new standard in transformative learning in organizations (Yukawa, 2015). Three elements that separate this theory from earlier work and make it the new standard in transformative learning are experience, dialogue, and critical reflection (Yukawa, 2015). Experience is making meaning and fundamental assumptions about troubling situations. Dialogue discusses the beliefs and actions that develop from experiences. Critical reflection is the individual's evaluation of their experiences and making assumptions about those experiences.

Table 2

Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning

Phase	Characteristics
1.	A disorienting dilemma
2.	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3.	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4.	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation is shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5.	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6.	Planning of a course of action
7.	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8.	Provisional trying of new roles
9.	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10.	A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective

Note. Adopted from "The Evolution of John Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory," by A. Kitchenham, 2008, *Journal of Transformative Education*, 6(2), 104-123. Copyright 2008 by Sage Publications.

Discussion

This literature review sought to conduct a systematic review of research articles on the employment of African American veterans. However, articles about African American veterans were limited and discussed African American veterans from the Vietnam Era War. Because of current military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan,

ongoing research is needed to understand African American veteran employment fully. Also discussed in these articles were veterans' military experience, but there should be further discussion focused on the military experiences of African American veterans. Although the literature review revealed vital information about veterans and the struggles they face after transitioning or retiring from the military, future research is needed to understand why African American veterans have higher rates of mental disorders.

Unfortunately, African American veterans have received little attention when it comes to helping them to transition from the military. Zalaquette and Chatters (2016) found veteran transition an arduous task which increased in difficulty because of the VA's failure to give physical and mental health services to veterans. White veterans' transition was not as difficult because of their increased education and availability to rely on family members during their transition. Additionally, Zalaquette and Chatters (2016) also found culture and ethnicity as factors affecting the mental health of veterans and their treatment which has the potential to affect transitioning from the military. After completing many literature searches of African American veterans and their education and employment, it became clear that further research is needed because of the limited amount of research involving African American veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But even so, several key points presented in the articles selected provided evidence that supported the need to discuss African American veterans since they have higher rates of mental disorders and are needing more vocational and educational

services, than other veterans. All above, mental disorders, vocational services, and education services have the potential to affect African American veteran's transition. Determining the demographic, financial, and clinical factors does not detail the process for helping African American veterans. Understanding how the process works will help to understand how the researchers came to their conclusion. Furthermore, the term veteran was used in most of the articles for this literature review. The term veteran encompasses military personnel from all ethnic groups and cultures. Because each culture has its set of values and norms, knowing how to discuss the challenges faced by each ethnic group of veterans is crucial.

Although the government and the Veteran's Administration have implemented various programs to help veterans gain employment, they do not examine whether these programs are culturally acceptable, meaning whether the services offered consider racial roles, cultural heritage, and socioeconomic status (Zalaquette & Chatters, 2016). For example, in the article by Resnick and Rosenheck (2008), the researchers noted that the work Compensation Therapy Program of the Veteran's Administration was contributing to higher unemployment of African American veterans. The researchers noted African American veterans were seeking higher compensation for their disability, so they would not have to work because of their mental disorder rating.

The VA must do a better job of understanding the veterans they serve since not all veterans are the same. They share commonalities in their military experiences, but their cultural heritage and beliefs appear to have an adverse impact on their seeking employment services. Higher education may be a choice to help improve the

employment of African American veterans because their skills learned in the military and military experience do not influence their employment (Ruh, Spicer & Vaughan, 2009). Military experience is not valued as much today as it was in earlier years. (Twamley et al., 2013). Twamley et al. (2013) addressed veterans and their employment, but this article could make a stronger case for the employment of veterans if it would discuss the employment of the various veteran ethnic groups individually.

Furthermore, consideration should be given to veterans' military experience and the understanding of how their experiences can be used to help them on college campuses as well as to gain employment. Training programs should be considered as options to help veterans transfer their military skills to college credit. More importantly, the failure to transfer military skills will continue to have adverse effects on employment for African American veterans.

In an effort to improve the transition experiences of African American veterans, a collaborative approach to help improve the transition experience of these veterans is required. Schlossberg's 4S Model has implication to help veterans understand their transition and to develop strategies to cope with their transition. Likewise, Hayes Career Development Model lists six steps the veteran can use to develop a systematic process for their transition. Through the use of Hayes's model veterans can perform an assessment of their transition and start to look at methods of improving the transition throughout their transition cycle. The Transformational Learning Theory provides a new perspective for veterans during their transition. The veteran begins to develop a sense of what is required of them to assist in their transition.

Self-reflection becomes important, so the veteran can realistically view their changing world. The Transformational Learning Theory changes the way the veterans see themselves and creates a change in relationship with the veteran's personal life and experiences. Taking a collaborative approach using these models collaboratively and enlisting the help of veteran organizations that support veterans transition as shown in Figure 2 will change the negative view of transitioning out of the military. The collaborative model will lead to a success-based transition model and become the standard for returning veterans to civilian life after military service.

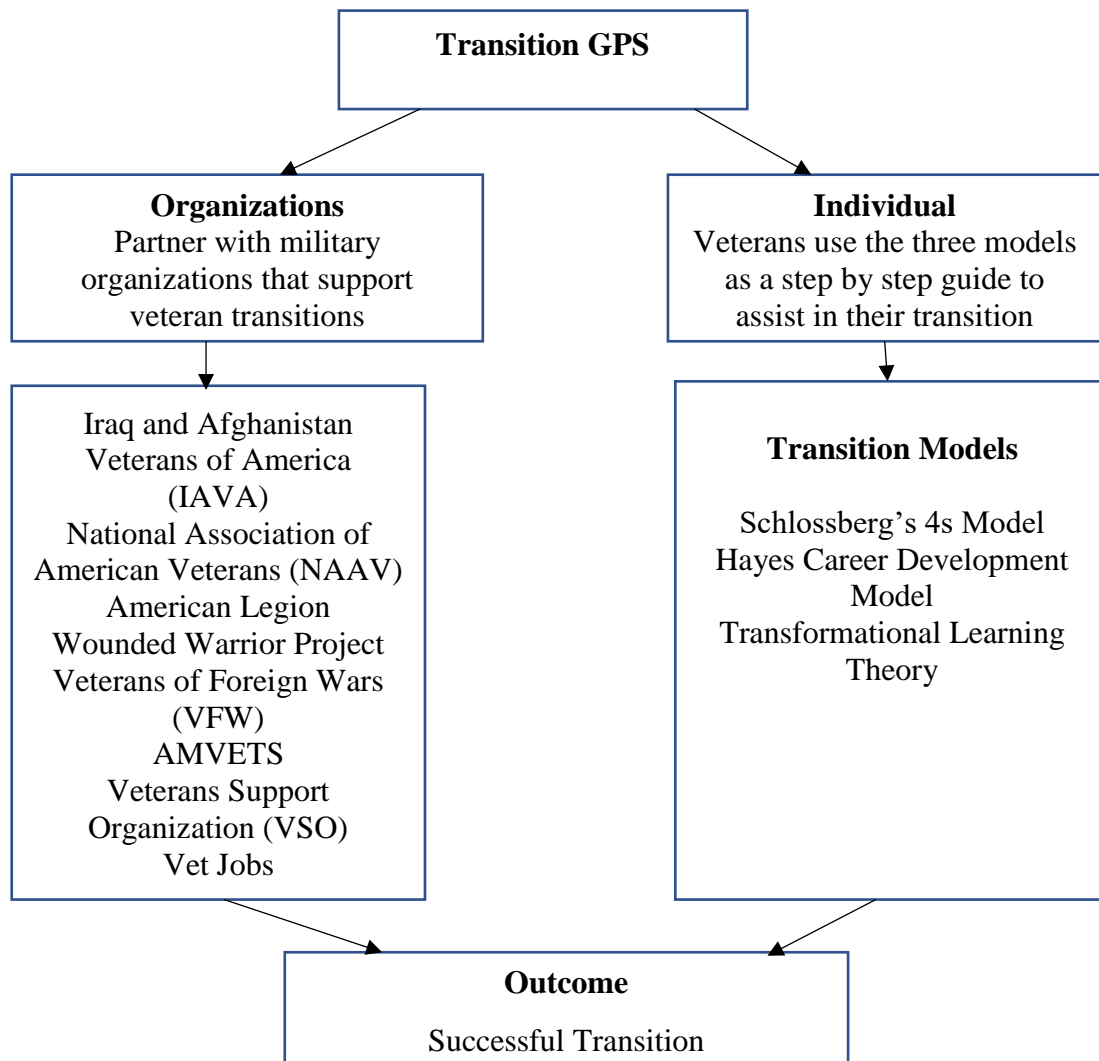


Figure 2. Collaborative Transition Model. Schlossberg’s 4S Model, Hayes Career Development Model, and Transformational Learning Theory to support Military Transition Assistance Groups as a combine and unified effort. Following this transition model step-by-step will improve the transition experiences of African American veterans.

The VA has endured many embarrassing moments. In recent years, the Veterans Administration’s leadership has changed under the scrutiny of integrity violations at VA

hospitals. President Barack Obama accepted the resignation of former Army General Eric Shinseki to regain the trust of veterans and the political leadership of the United States who called for Shinseki's removal from office (Robbins, 2014). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led to increased requests for education, transition, employment, and especially, mental health services. The increased demand for mental health services revealed that VA hospitals were not adequately prepared to care for veterans, and some veterans eventually died waiting for appointments to receive treatment (Devi, 2014). Future research is needed to figure out how VA hospitals can improve to help the growing number of veterans who are transitioning out of the military.

Implications

One significant implication for future research is discussing the noteworthy causes of low college enrollment and unemployment among African American veterans as well as the potential to increase education rates and reduce the high unemployment rates of this population. Likewise, addressing problems that are contributing factors to African American veterans' unemployment may lead to meaningful discussion and practical solutions to help end these problems for this group of veterans. To address the gap in the literature that exists, another researcher can use this research to further the study by contributing more to the literature on African American veterans' transition and their employment after military service.

Furthermore, additional research is needed to assist in discussions about the concerns and fears of employers relating to the employment of African American veterans. Discussing the concerns of employers will reduce their fears and help them to

understand that veterans with mental disorders can benefit their organizations because of the skills and leadership abilities they possess. It is assumed employers only fear what they do not understand, and it is crucial that future research address employers' fear to build an understanding of African American veterans' military experiences.

The findings of this review can help organizations improve their overall hiring and organizational effectiveness. Likewise, organizational policies can be drafted to help employers support veterans. The findings have the potential to create a working relationship that can aid the VA in putting veterans to work. The partnership could give an unlimited source of employees and supply the employer with benefits since the VA has the resources necessary to compensate organizations for their role in helping to reduce unemployment for veterans. For managers, the findings can be applied to ensure there is a better understanding of veterans and having the ability to aid in the development of organizational programs that support veterans.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a psychological model that examines the individual aspects of a person's life. The theory primarily examines the way adults handle academic and career changes. The person's perception of the transition is essential to understand because of the changes it may have on the person's life. These changes include life-altering events such as the type, context, and impact of the transition itself (Schlossberg, 2011). According to Reger (2016), "transition," a concept, holds within it the notions of both connection and new beginnings. A transition is a movement from one state of being to the next. The individual must accept the fact that

the transition is a process that is neither quick nor easy, and the individual must understand the process requires moving through each stage (Schlossberg, 2011). Within each stage, critical reflection on the part of the individual is essential since each person will have different experiences and experience transitions within different phases of their life. For example, someone who is changing jobs will have a different experience with their transition than an individual who is just starting their first job (Schlossberg, 2011). The purpose of the transition model is to help the person understand the transition, cope with the transition, and apply the model to work-life transitions as shown in Figure 3 (Schlossberg, 2011). The design helps offer clarification by guiding the individual to find the type of transition, measure the degree to which the transition alters their life, observe where they are in the transition process, and locate resources for making the transition a success (Schlossberg, 2011).

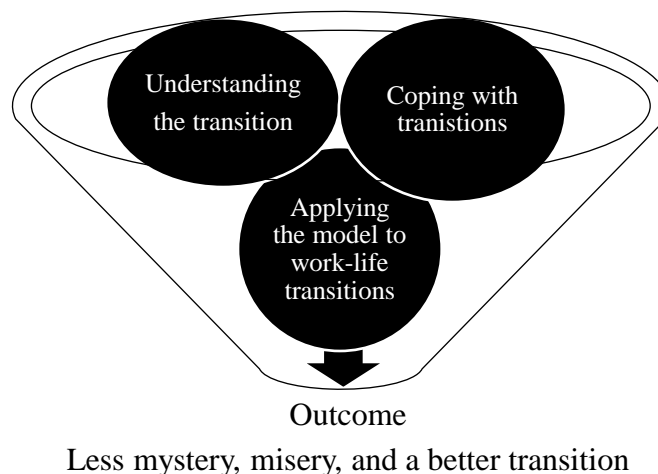


Figure 3. Outcome using Schlossberg’s Transition Model. Adapted from “The challenge of change: The transition model and its implications,” by N. K. Schlossberg, 2011, *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 48(4), 159. Copyright 2011 by the American Counseling Association.

The types of transitions are: anticipated, unanticipated, event, non-event, and chronic. Schlossberg defined a transition as “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.” It is essential to note that perception plays a crucial role in transitions as an event, or non-event, and meet the definition of a transition only if defined so by the individual experiencing the transition. Additionally, predictable occurrences in a person’s life are also known as anticipated transitions. On the other hand, when the individual does not expect an event to occur it is an unanticipated event. Schlossberg defined events as transitions that a person anticipated happening and which occurred as expected. A non-event according to Schlossberg is a transition a person counted on occurring but did not happen as hoped.

Schlossberg outlined the transition process with the terms of “moving in,” “moving through,” and “moving out” (Schlossberg, 2011). Moving in is the first stage of any transition and requires the individual to get accustomed to their new situation, role, and processes. Moving through which is like the moving in stage with the exception that the individual knows what is going on with their transition and understands their role. Moving out is the final stage where the individual has completed their transition and starts to look for their next transition.

Transition Influences

Schlossberg developed four factors, also referred to as the 4S process. Schlossberg’s transition involves the 4S system of coping: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2011).

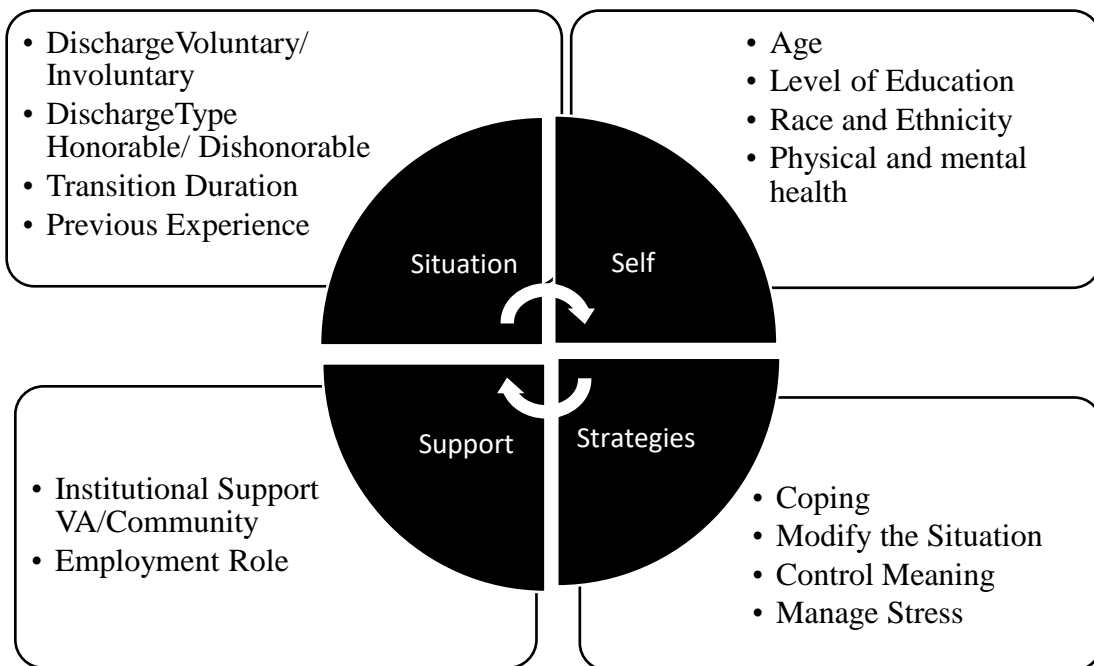


Figure 4. 4S Transition Model for Veterans. Adapted from Schlossberg, 2011.

The situation deals with the state of the person at the time of the transition. The situation also examines the circumstances behind the transition and considers the following:

- Trigger or what precipitated the transition
- Timing which discusses whether the transition is on time or off time socially for the individual
- Control or what the individual controls during the transition
- Role change, if needed
- Duration whether the change is temporary, permanent, or uncertain
- Previous experiences and how individual dealt with earlier transitions
- Concurrent stress from multiple sources of stress

- Assessment as to who handles the transition, and their behavior

Self in the 4S model describes the personal and demographic characteristics of the individual. The Self factor takes into consideration: ego development, outlook, commitment, and values. Self is the person's inner strength to handle the transition. Social support considers intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and institutions and communities. Support involves the individual's full scope of their support system at the time of the transition. Strategies are the coping responses that change, control the meaning, and manage the stress of the transition. Strategies are the actual coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of the transition.

Leaving the military and returning to civilian life is a crucial transition. Also, many military veterans will transition to higher education. Transitioning from a structured environment such as the military to our unstructured, or self-structured, ones such as a college campus will need veterans to learn to adapt to the ways of their new environment. According to Ackerman, DiRamio, and Garza (2009) transitioning to college was the most challenging transition for veterans as they transition from the military. Previous research of veterans' transition to higher education has used Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and it has proven effective to understand veterans' experience of change (Ackerman et al., 2009). Schlossberg's Transition Theory was selected because several empirical studies that examined veterans' transitions provided evidence that the theory was shown to have a positive impact on helping veterans transition to civilian life and higher education (Wheeler, 2012). Additionally, the theory has potential to help counselors guide veterans through their transition to civilian life.

Conclusion

Mental health disorders are increasing due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the mental health of veterans become interrelated to their career issues (Zalaquett & Chatters, 2016). As the military has cut funding and personnel, the number of veterans transitioning out of the military will rise. This increase will cause African American veterans' education and employment to become an area of greater concern. Likewise, the services they receive at the VA will be in more and more higher demand along with vocational services to aid with veteran reintegration into the workforce. Along with the increase of veterans transitioning out of the military, HRD professionals should develop an understanding of how to manage the veteran's transition to civilian life (Zalaquette & Chatters, 2016). Veterans with mental health problems face greater difficulty obtaining employment since their mental health issue may affect employers' decision to hire veterans with mental problems. Discussing the high PTSD rates of African American veterans, helping them obtain vocational services, transferring their military skills, and participating in services offered by the Veteran's Administration should help increase their enrollment in higher education and obtaining employment. The goal is to improve the African American veteran's outlook for civilian employment.

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the transition of African American veterans from the military. Also discussed was an overview of the relevant literature on mental disorders, Transitional Learning Theory, Career Development, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, and the services offered by the VA. Chapter III will explain the method used in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore the transition experiences of African American veterans, their participation in the Transition Goals, Plan, Success Program, and the challenges they face obtaining employment and higher education after military service.

The three objectives of this study are:

- To explore African American veterans' participation in the Transition Assistance GPS Program
- To determine the Transition Assistance GPS Program effectiveness helping African American veterans transition to civilian life
- To identify experiences that led to a successful transition from military to civilian life

In the next section, the researcher explains the method used to gather data. Additionally, the researcher explains the process used to determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This chapter highlights the research methodology and procedures used in the study. The procedures used in this study are the study design, research questions, population, and sample, unit of analysis, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, credibility, ethics, reliability, and transferability.

In this study, the problem addressed is African American veterans face numerous barriers after transitioning from the military and are not receptive to nor are taking

advantage of higher education nor using the benefits they earned (Aikins, Golub, & Bennett 2015; Keillor, 2009).

Research Question

The research questions that guided this study are:

- What were the transition experiences of African American veterans as they left the military for civilian life?
- How effective was the Transition GPS program in preparing African American veterans for their transition to civilian life?
- What were the transition experiences that led to the successful transition of African American veterans to civilian life?

Research Perspective

The phenomenology approach guided this study since the focus of the study was to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of African American veterans as they transition from the military. Descriptive or hermeneutic phenomenology provides a description or interpretation of the personal experience and meaning of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1960). Phenomenology as a research method is a “rigorous, critical, systematic investigation of phenomena” (Husserl, 1960). Using the phenomenology approach supported this study since it supported the framework of understanding the transition phenomenon from the veterans’ perspective of their lived experiences (Quick & Hall, 2015). Additionally, purposeful sampling was required since phenomenology is considered a directive approach (Diaz, 2015). A limitation of phenomenology is that the

researcher must develop their interpretation and analytical skills of what participants say and mean.

Research Design

In this study, I used a qualitative methodology with the central focus on phenomenology. Mathematician Edmund Husserl, also known as the father of phenomenology, described phenomenology as the study of meaning that describe experiences and ideal objects (Husserl, 1960). Various scholars have defined phenomenology in numerous ways. The three types of phenomenology are descriptive or hermeneutical phenomenology, eidetic or transcendental phenomenology, and genetic or constitutional phenomenology (Diaz, 2015). Descriptive or hermeneutical phenomenology addresses the personal experiences of the individual, whereas eidetic or transcendental phenomenology analyzes the essence of the individual's experiences. Likewise, genetic, or constitutional phenomenology examines the self as a conscious entity. In this study, I used Hermeneutic Phenomenology because of its descriptive and interpretative nature. Hermeneutics is the result of numerous evolutions focusing on the experiences of others. Likewise, the transition from interpretive narration to the description of the experiences occurs. Hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to become a part of the participants' experiences.

Research Participants

The sample population for this study was African American veterans from veteran resource centers, National Guard units and Veteran Service Organizations in southeastern Texas. I selected these organizations because of my ability to access them

and the large number of veterans who use their services. Furthermore, these organizations support veterans with mental disorders daily. I also selected these organizations because they encourage veterans to participate in studies and projects that will benefit other veterans from all service organizations and wars.

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. Purposeful sampling in qualitative research can guide the selection of participants based on the need of the study (Glaser & Straus, 1967). I asked participants open-ended questions about their transition experiences and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Transition GPS Program. I contacted participants face to face and through email to request their participation in this study. Participants in this study are African American veterans from military support groups and military organizations that have a diverse population of veterans. Also, participants were selected using state veteran resource offices and workforce agencies.

Selection was based on their military service in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard. The veterans selected have served in the military services at least twenty years or more. This group has typically spent most of their adult life in the military service and may have more significant transition challenges than younger African American veterans. I informed veterans their participation is voluntary, and they could opt out of the study at any time.

The veterans' length of service was noted for the study to verify their service during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The veterans' combat experiences were also criteria for inclusion since combat veterans have higher levels of mental health issues

than veterans who do not have combat experience. Additionally, the veterans' character of service at discharge/retirement and mental health were essential aspects of the study. The rationale for allowing veterans from all branches to participate in this study is because each branch has a responsibility for the transition of its service members and operates individual transition services under the authority of the Transition GPS Program. The services offered by all branches are short and focus on transitioning the veteran to civilian life and initial employment (Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

The purpose of the interviews was explained to the participants focusing on their transition experiences, their thought process during the transition, and gaining an understanding of their transition experiences after they left the military. An informed consent document was also provided to participants to review concerning their rights and participation in this study. I informed participants that their identity would remain confidential and only pseudonyms would be used to distinguish participants in the study.

Research Instrument

I served in the U.S. Army for 23 years. I retired from the army after several combat deployments to Iraq. During my transition from the military, I experienced a transition training program that was a mandatory requirement. The training was ineffective and did not provide me with the necessary skills to prepare me for civilian life. I was required to attend the one-week mandatory briefing before I could begin the transition process of leaving my unit and the army. I readily participated in the mandatory presentation to speed up my process of leaving the military. The challenges I

experienced during my transition were similar to the transition experiences of the participants in this study.

My transition experiences informed my interest in conducting this research both during and after my military service. Similar to most of the participants in this study, I had a few challenges with my transition, but my transition was an overall success as a result of earning my college degree before leaving the army. I explored the experiences of both officer and enlisted service members being careful not to ask leading questions during the interviews which could result in data that was not representative of the participant's experiences.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). As the primary research instrument in this study, I developed an interview guide which consisted of 17 questions for the veterans to answer during semi-structured interviews. The questions were developed to determine the veterans' perceptions about their transition from the military. The questions were also designed to help determine each veteran's military experience, background, and education level. Additionally, the interview questions assisted in determining the veterans' demographics which included the veterans' age, gender, grade, education, and length of service. I acknowledge biases in this research study since my interpretations would have an impact on the data. Additionally, I acknowledge personal bias that African American veterans need additional services from the VA to be a success.

As the research instrument for this study, I asked a sample of participants that met the inclusion criteria for this study to participate in an informal interview process before I conducted the actual interviews. I used this opportunity to practice my interviewing skills. I explained to the participants their rights while participating in the study. The participants were informed their participation was voluntary and they had the right to answer or not answer the research questions. Participants were also informed they could stop the interview process at any time. I provided each participant with a copy of the informed consent and reviewed the entire informed consent with each participant before having them sign the consent. After the informed consent was signed, I provided a copy of the informed consent to the participants for them to review later if they had additional comments about their rights and participation. The goal behind this practice was to ensure I was proficient at interviewing the participants and to help reduce my biases.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews of African American veterans. I interviewed African American veterans until redundancy occurred. Redundancy is defined as the point when no new information or themes are noted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Redundancy informed me the number of participants was sufficient. It was essential to maintain the integrity of the study by ensuring this study only included African American veterans who met the inclusion criteria. I recorded the inclusion criteria for each veteran in field notes before each interview.

I conducted one interview with each participant during the data collection process. A follow-up interview was scheduled during the data collection process with individual participants to gather additional information to clarify their responses to interview questions or to ask additional questions. The field notes were maintained in a secure location and I had the only access to the location. Data collected from interviews were processed throughout the study immediately following each interview. The veterans selected were from local community military support groups, veteran resource offices, workforce offices, and military organizations in the southeastern part of Texas. Veterans were asked a series of preselected questions during semi-structured interviews about their experiences in the military and their transition. Follow-up questions were asked during the interview process to verify what each participant was saying. The rationale for using interviews is that the interviewees will be able to provide rich descriptive data from their experiences and redundancy informed me when to stop the interview process.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, I looked for relationships and connections to determine themes. The constant comparison method was used to analyze the data from individual interviews because it looks for constant comparison of the incidents and respondents' remarks and grouping data into units that are common (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interview notes were written to provide a detailed account of the interview environment, the participant's demeanor, and how the participant responded to the interview questions. I also recorded each interview to reflect on the interview and to

ensure accurate reporting of the participant's responses. I listened to the audio recordings and compared the recording to the transcribed field notes.

Audio Recording

The data collected for this study was audio recorded and downloaded to my computer and kept locked in a safe. The recordings were assigned a pseudonym name for each participants' identification. Immediately after downloading the audio recordings I transcribed recordings. I destroyed the audio recording after the completion of the study, and the transcribed data was placed on a flash drive and stored in a safe.

Transcription

I transcribed the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. I listened to the interviews and transcribed the recordings immediately after each interview to ensure the data was transcribed accurately and captured the interviewees' remarks. After transcribing the semi-structured interviews, I examined the data for common themes and codes. I labeled the results and matched the themes and codes according to their category. Content analysis is the most commonly used technique for analyzing data in qualitative research (Oliveira, Bitencourt, Teixeira, & Santos, 2013). In this study, NVivo software was used to assist in the analysis. The rationale for using this software was its ability to increase the process, enhance rigor, provide flexible data analysis, streamline the exchange and reproduction of data, and allow for more significant reflection by the researcher (Oliveira et al., 2013).

Research Journal

Annink (2016) highlighted five phases of when the research journal is useful in a research study. The five-phase are: before data collection, while contacting participants, after the first interviews, during interviews, and after the interviews are conducted.

Along with these phases, Annink (2016) provided two critical reasons for keeping a research journal. The first reason helps the researcher to stay focused and in touch with people. Secondly, intrinsic motivation is necessary and taking notes can help the researcher maintain their drive and motivation for conducting the research. During this research, I maintained an awareness of these reasons for keeping the journal.

Furthermore, I kept journal notes of the methodology and key personnel in the veteran service centers, reserve, and National Guard units. I also kept a written journal of participants' vital information and contact information. I kept journal notes on the collection of data for each collection location. I also kept journal notes on the observations of each participant. I recorded the participant's non-verbal actions and behaviors immediately after each interview. Additionally, I recorded long wait times, hesitations answering questions, and monitored their conversation for signs of contradictions.

Research Setting

This research was conducted at several veteran resource centers, Reserve and National Guard units, and Veteran Service Organizations in Southeastern Texas. These organizations are located near urban areas north of a major city in Texas. These organizations were selected because of the ability to access the participants and a large

number of veterans who utilize their services. These organizations support veterans with mental disorders daily with the goal of helping veterans seek employment and transition to civilian life. The office space in these organizations was limited and not supportive for collecting data because they shared operational space with other organizations for the state of Texas. Due to the limited space, data collection occurred in areas selected by the participants where they felt comfortable discussing their transition experiences.

Reflexivity

Through the implementation of bracketing and reflexive journaling, I monitored biases and error. Bracketing is an inquiry which requires the researcher to put aside personal beliefs about the researched phenomenon (Carpenter, 2007; Chan et al., 2013). The objective of bracketing is to capture the lived experiences of the participant without having the researcher's knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences influencing the interpretation. Reflexivity involves the researcher examining their actions, feeling, and perceptions. Additionally, the researcher self-reflects on their role and actions during the research (Darawsheh, 2014). To ensure the credibility of the researcher's findings, reflexivity is required to improve transparency in the researcher's role conducting the research and analyzing the data.

I used a reflexive journal to write personal thoughts and feelings about the research experience. Consequently, the reflexive journal assisted in making decisions because I was able to reflect back through the journal and examine personal thoughts before making final decisions (Chan et al., 2013). I acknowledge and understand personal biases may be a result of my prior military service in the United States Army.

Furthermore, I have personal experiences in common with these veterans and I am able to connect with the veterans on a personal level. I served in some of the same locations during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan which may bring comfort to the veterans and encourage them to share information more openly.

I implemented reflexivity and bracketing to control personal bias. I made a conscious effort to control influence on the research and not to rely on military experiences to make decisions. I utilized personal military experience as a veteran to seek an in-depth understanding of the participants and their lived experiences. As a veteran, I understand that all veterans have a different appreciation of their military service. I employed personal knowledge about how veterans appreciate their service to draw on similarities and differences in their experiences and thoughts. I reflected on personal thoughts, actions, assumptions, and expectation ensuring they did not influence the interpretation of the data. During the interviewing of the participants, I used reflexivity to allow for alterations and additions to the interview questions. As noted earlier, reflexivity refers to the background of the researcher and the interest the researcher has in the research process. Likewise, the researcher's perception has an impact on the reflexivity assessment (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Trustworthiness

The integrity of the research occurred through the concept of member check and purposeful sampling. Member check is a “process of returning an interview or analyzed data to the participant to verify their response” (Brit, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walters, 2016, p. 1803). Member check interviews are relevant to this study because it

is grounded in the theoretical interpretative position and supports co-constructed knowledge and new meaning (Brit et al., 2016). To reduce the potential for personal biases to influence this study, participants checked and confirmed the results of the data provided from their interviews (Brit et al., 2016). Member check interviews were conducted using the transcription of the audio recordings and were provided to the participants to review their responses. Member check interviews were used because they provided a shared discussion of the interviews, along with allowing for modification, confirmation, and verification of the interview data (Tong et al., 2007).

Additionally, member check interviews allowed for the addition of new data and further analysis of these interviews. Member check interviews also allowed for an interactive method of evaluating the collected data. I ensured the integrity of the research through triangulation, ethics, transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Overall, trustworthiness ensured the data was collected, managed, and interpreted so that it could be used by other researchers.

Strategies that increase the credibility of the research in qualitative research are reflexivity, member checks, and peer examination. Member check occurs when the researcher checks back with the participant to ensure the information received during the interview process accurately reflects what the participant experienced. Peer examination provides the researcher with peer-reviewed responses to their coding process. The benefit is the researcher will receive feedback from other experienced researchers.

Ethical Considerations

The participants selected for this study were chosen because they met the criteria for inclusion. I explained to the participants their rights while participating in the study. The participants were informed their participation was voluntary and they had the right to answer or not answer the research questions. Participants were also informed they could stop the interview at any time. The participant interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, so the researcher could not rely on personal interpretations. I provided the participants with a copy of the informed consent and reviewed the entire informed consent with the participants before having them to sign the consent. After the informed consent was signed, I gave a copy of the informed consent to the participants for them to review later if they had additional comments about their rights and participation.

Additionally, I did not use any identifying information for the participants. The participants' names were not used; therefore, I assigned pseudonyms for each participants' identification. I did not share the participants' names with anyone to ensure their identity would not be revealed in this study. The study was sent to the Texas A&M Institutional Review Board for approval and to ensure the study met the ethical requirements of the institutions.

Rigor

Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig (2007) note rigor as “ensuring that the participants’ own meanings and perspectives are represented and not curtailed by the researchers’ agenda and knowledge.” Trustworthiness of the data collection process, analysis, and interpretation of the data determines rigor in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba

(1985) developed four criteria for rigor. Their criteria for rigor is through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the transfer of findings from one research study to another. In a qualitative research study, the strategy to accomplish transferability is to ensure the establishment of demographic and geographic boundaries of the study. It is also crucial to ensure the researcher provides a detailed and vibrant description of the population studied (Prion & Adamson 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “by describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people” (p. 306).

Credibility

Credibility is the interpretation of the participant’s experiences and is achieved when the researcher reviews the transcribed interviews and identifying similarities within the study and participants (Darawsheh, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Strategies that will increase the credibility of the research in qualitative research are reflexivity, member check, and peer examination (Darawsheh, 2014). Reflexivity refers to the background of the researcher and the interest the researcher has in the research process. Likewise, the researcher’s perception has an impact on the reflexivity assessment (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Member check occurs when the researcher checks back with the participant to ensure the information received during the interview process accurately reflects what the participant experienced. Peer examination provides the

researcher with peer-reviewed responses to the coding process. The benefit is the researcher receives feedback from other experienced researchers. I used these methods to ensure the study was rigorous and could be repeated by other researchers at different locations and with participants who are similar to the participants in this study.

Dependability

Dependability is the ability of other researchers to be able to follow the decision-making trail of the researcher (Darawsheh, 2014). An audit trail is a process that allows the researcher to check the dependability of their qualitative study. Steps in the audit trail include (a) the study description, (b) explanation of participant selection, (c) data collection description and data collection duration, (d) data analysis, (e) research interpretations and findings, and (f) credibility techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To verify dependability, it is beneficial to have a peer researcher repeat the initial steps to see if they can achieve the same results (Darawsheh; & Magilvy, 2011). I utilized a peer researcher to help with the analysis process and providing the research methods descriptions for determining dependability.

Confirmability

The researcher's biases are not presented in the research. However, if the researcher's biases are present, they must be identified (Darawsheh, 2014). I will control for bias by examining the impact of personal biases on the research process and the subjectivity of the research. Confirmability also examines whether the findings are correct. Additionally, the researcher examines other methods to ensure the results are

accurate. Audit trails and reflexivity are the two strategies for supporting confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

Chapter III has detailed qualitative research design, research questions, interview questions, research instrumentation, selection process, data collection, data analysis, triangulation, and ethical considerations. This chapter also included Lincoln and Guba's criteria for rigor which are transferability, credibility, dependability, and conformability. A qualitative design was used in this study to guide the research of the transition of African American veterans to civilian life, employment, and higher education. The phenomenology approach was used because the goal of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the veteran participants. Understanding the experiences of these veterans can help guide future research and the development of transition programs to help eliminate barriers African American veterans face when transitioning to civilian life, employment, and higher education. Chapter IV will discuss the results of the data gathered in this study.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV begins with an introduction, profile, and demographic characteristics of the study participants. This basic information is provided to gain an understanding of the participant's experiences. I collected this data from each of the participants during individual hermeneutic interviews. In this chapter, the common themes are presented using the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), which offers information on how the themes are characterized and grouped. Each incident was coded into as many categories as possible. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) rule for the constant comparative method states: while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the earlier incidents coded in the same category.

The reason for the characteristics of the participants is to document information about their military service, deployments to combat operations, and military careers. By providing this information about the participants, the researcher gained a better understanding of the participants and their military experience as they related to the purpose of the study.

Introduction

The study explored the transition experiences of African American veterans, their participation in the Transition GPS Program, and the challenges faced obtaining employment and higher education.

Research Questions

- What were the transition experiences of African American veterans as they left the military for civilian life?
- How effective was the Transition GPS program in preparing African American veterans for their transition to civilian life?
- What were the transition experiences that led to the successful transition of African American veterans to civilian life?

Participants' Demographic Data

Participants for this study were six African American veterans who served in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, and Texas Army National Guard. Participants were interviewed using a hermeneutic interview at the county library conference room and a private conference room at the veteran center. Participants' ages ranged from 47 years old to 52 years old with a range of 2 to 7 years since transitioning out of the military. Each of the participants had 20 or more years of service. After transitioning from the military, all participants obtained civilian employment. Additionally, the participants are all college graduates with bachelor's and master's degrees. These results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Participants' Data

Participant	Age	Branch	College Degree	Career
Drew	52	Army	Bachelor's Science Organizational Leadership Management	Real Estate Agent
Bobby	47	Air Force	Bachelor's Science Management	Secondary Education Teacher
India	49	Army National Guard	Bachelor's Science Information Security	Information Security Officer
Neal	47	Army/Navy	Bachelor's Science Human Resource Management	Secondary Education Teacher
Charlie	48	Army	Bachelor's Science Human Resource Management	Secondary Education Teacher
Lisa	49	Army	Master's Science Management	Secondary Education Teacher

All participants served twenty years or more in the military and had at least one deployment to a combat zone. The average deployment rate was two deployments during the veteran's career. One veteran who served in the Army's Special Operations Unit had six deployments to a combat zone. Figure 4 summarizes this data.

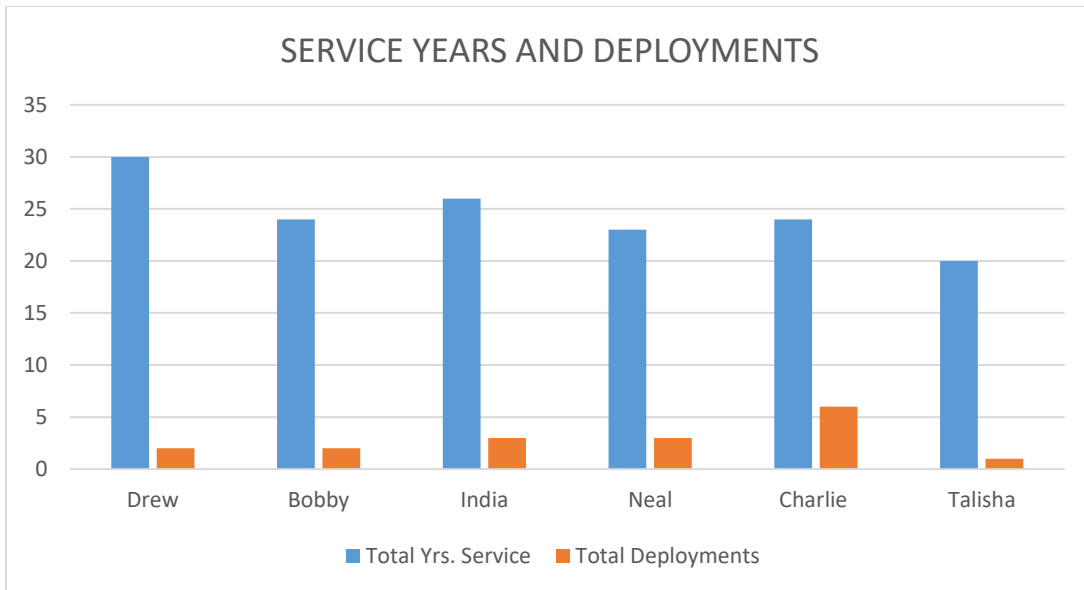


Figure 5. Military Service and Deployments.

Participants' Life Experiences

Drew

Drew is a 52-year-old African American female army veteran. After high school, she began considering how she would take care of herself financially, but she had no plans on attending college because of her academic flaws. Moreover, her family could not afford to finance her college education. She grew up in a rural area of South Carolina where the prospect of employment was marginal for the people of the area. The military was her way of establishing a better life and changing her socio-economic status. The army was her first choice; therefore, after discussing her plans with her mother, she enlisted in the army as a means of gaining a skill and securing employment.

Drew's first enlistment was in 1983 as an automated logistical specialist. As an automated logistical specialist, she ensured the accountability of supplies and equipment

through proper records maintenance. She communicated with army units to ensure requisitioned supplies and parts were received. She reenlisted five times throughout her career in the army. Furthermore, she was excited about her future with plans for a family. Although single at the time, the vision of having a family was an influencing factor in her decision to enlist in the army.

Drew spent thirty years in the army before retiring and transitioning to civilian life. She left the army because of combat deployments and being away from her family. She said, "I feel like my freedom was lost," which she was not willing to accept. She also felt the stress of the army which became an increasing concern. After her last deployment, she feared having a mental health problem and sought help from the VA. Drew felt she could not do the things she wanted to do and began to believe confinement to the military structure was not suitable for family. She noted, as a young soldier, the military structure did not bother her because she needed structure and discipline in her life. But after getting married and building her family, the military structure made it challenging to spend time with her husband, daughters, and distant relatives.

Drew deployed to combat operations two times during her thirty-year career. Her first deployment was to Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1997 and later Afghanistan in 2008 during the surge of President Obama's Administration. Unfortunately, she was not able to finish her college degree while on active duty because of her many deployments and military obligations. In her first year of retirement, she did not seek employment, so she could complete her degree in organizational leadership and management.

Military Transition Experiences. Drew described her transition experience as challenging but said she was prepared to transition regardless, due to her military training. She expressed the lack of having a mentor as the reason she characterized her transition as challenging. She knew the time would come when she had to transition from the army. Drew transitioned to several military installations during her military career. But her last assignment was on a small army installation which had a small military presence. Most of the installation was civilian workers and contractors. Due to the military installation population being small compared to other military installations, it did not have the capability nor need to run a transition assistance center. Drew was forced to travel to the nearest transition center four hours away.

Drew had expectations of transitioning to a government job on a military installation since many retirees find transitioning to those positions more comfortable than transitioning to civilian employment. Many of Drew's peers left the military for federal employment, and she anticipated she would seek federal employment as well. However, during the time she was preparing to transition out of the army, the federal government placed a hiring freeze on all federal employment. The government shutdown resulted in some federal employee furloughs. Drew believed that ended her possibility of getting hired by the federal government.

The Veterans Employment Initiative of 2015 supports the hiring of veterans. The initiative helps veterans understand the federal hiring process, and it also helps federal agencies prepare qualified veterans for federal employment and assistance adjusting to the civilian workplace (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2014). Military members

transitioning out of the military often seek employment in the federal government. Seeking employment in the federal government is attributed to veterans' desire to maintain a connection to the military.

Transition Program Effectiveness. Drew did not feel the transition program was adequate to help meet African American veterans' transition needs. After helping many first and second enlistment soldiers transition out of the military, she had an idea of what to expect. She knew she would attend the mandatory transition briefing and receive help writing her resume, but throughout the transition training she felt the briefings did not provide enough information for veterans to make informed decisions. She was especially critical of the briefings by the Veterans Affairs representatives and believed the briefings should have given more information on how veterans could get help if they lived in a rural area or away from a military installation. She felt the briefings were tailored to the local military installation and did not consider veterans who would return to their hometowns away from military installations.

Drew was very concerned about the resume writing class during her transition. She never had a civilian job and was concerned with transferring her skills to their civilian equivalent. Drew believed an effective resume would help her secure civilian employment. She had the standard military resume which consisted of pages and pages of her military career, duty locations, military awards, military education, and jobs performed in the army. The standard military resume is excellent for writing a command biography but has the potential to confuse civilian employers.

She directed her attention on the instructor during the class to ensure she understood the resume writing process. However, she felt the class did not provide enough information about how to write a resume and the instructor was only concerned with providing the basics of resume writing. She stated information about civilian careers would be beneficial during the resume writing process to help veterans explain their transferable skills.

Drew made several recommendations for the Transition GPS Program. The first recommendation was for a career counseling part to help transition veterans, especially retiring veterans. Secondly, she recommended mock interviews to support the interview skills training program. Lastly, she recommended the length of the program should be longer to give veterans more opportunity to attend more extensive training.

Higher Education. Drew believed education was necessary for success in all areas of life. Throughout her military career, she attended college and took college courses at various military installations where she was assigned. Due to several deployments and her responsibilities as a soldier, Drew was not able to complete her college degree before she left the army. After transitioning out of the army, she did not seek employment so that she could complete her college degree. She recommended veterans take advantage of their educational benefits because getting a college degree increases the probability of getting employed after leaving the military.

She used her GI Bill benefits to attend a local university. She said using the GI Bill was an easy process and the campus veteran's education center was able to help answer her questions. Drew received her bachelor's degree in Organizational

Leadership and Management a year after her retirement. Upon completing her degree, Drew began to think about employment to combat the feelings of being depressed, unemployed, and discouraged from having no social life. Drew had started a realtor licensing course while in the military because being a real estate agent had been her dream job. After obtaining a college degree, she completed the licensing course and started working as a real estate agent. She said helping people find their dream homes has been a satisfying experience.

Bobby

Bobby is a 47-year-old African American male veteran who served in the United States Air Force for 24 years. Immediately after graduating from high school, Bobby attended a local community college; but unfortunately, he was not meeting academic expectations, so his mother told him to look at other career options. He explored all branches of the military and decided to enlist in the air force. The air force gave him the opportunity to excel as a security forces airman. His first duty station took him to the Midwest for four years, and his next assignment sent him overseas for two years. At the end of that assignment, he changed his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) to become an air force recruiter. He wanted to help individuals join the air force and change their future as his recruiter had done for him years prior. His recruiting assignment took him to the southwest region, which is also the same region as his hometown.

Bobby has been married to his wife for 25 years, and they have two children. His family was a significant factor in his decision to leave the military. He progressed

through the military ranks and was promoted to Senior Master Sergeant. His promotion placed him in a position of increased responsibility and resulted in the family being separated for extended periods of time. He commuted between his home and duty locations, spending most of his time in his duty location and going home on weekends. He started to have the feeling that it was time to look at a career change. He said:

I think we all know when it is just getting to the point where it is time for a change. It is time for a change in life.

Military Transition Experiences. Bobby's transition from the air force was not what he expected, and the experience left Bobby frustrated with the entire process. As he prepared for life as a civilian, stress played an essential role in his decision to leave the air force. As he started to explore civilian career opportunities, he realized he had not considered the type of career he wanted after the air force. After he left the air force, he tried to become a financial advisor but realized the position was not a career match for him. He attended the company's training program which lasted about a month and a half in duration. While attending the training program, he realized the position was not suitable for what he wanted as civilian employment. He tried to continue that career path but grew more frustrated with the position.

Military work environments can have a negative impact on veterans' ability to prepare for civilian employment. Veterans may have unrealistic expectations entering civilian employment (Zogas, 2017). Veterans need to understand their skills and how they relate to civilian employment. Veterans also need to develop and understand that civilian employment will equate to starting over at a lower level position with lower pay.

Bobby decided he would not continue the financial advisor training and stopped seeking employment to choose a career path that matched his military job. He was financially secure because of his military pension and could take his time to find suitable employment.

While examining other career options, he continued to improve his resume with the hope of getting a job interview. He was growing more frustrated with the civilian employment process because he believed his military skills should have helped him get hired. He noted that as a military veteran he thought he would not have any challenges getting a job. He tried several different career opportunities but was unsuccessful. He attributed his unsuccessful career opportunities to culture shock. He explained that his military training and the discipline he learned in the air force had become a part of his daily life but was undervalued in civilian employment. He held several jobs and left all of them because he felt the organizational structure did not meet his personality. He also noted his discontent for fellow employees. He often felt as though he could not adapt to the culture and climate of the organization, as well as feeling alienated by his coworkers.

Barriers to a successful civilian employment are the soft skills they learned in the military such as persistence, reliability, and attention to detail. In view of this, his expectation was for all employees to show these skills. In the military, teamwork was an integral part of his military success. Bobby did not believe private organizations value teamwork because it appeared to him most workers were only concerned with their success and not the team's success. The military transforms every civilian who enters and gives them a new military identity built around duty, honor, and country. When

veterans return to civilian life they are misunderstood and some of these veterans isolate themselves from their new community and culture (Demers, 2011).

Transition Program Effectiveness. As he prepared to transition, Bobby attended the mandatory transition assistance program at one of the local air force bases. The military provides service members with some of the best training in the world but has done a miserable job of preparing service members for civilian life as they transition out of the military (Zogas, 2017). He readily admitted the importance of the transition program but did not believe the program helped him during his transition. He transitioned using the air force's Transition GPS program, which was designed to give transitioning veterans more assistance and guidance during their transition. He emphasized the importance of the resume writing class and believed more training on resume writing would have a positive impact on the transition. He mentioned how important it was constructing a resume that translated his military career and skills so civilian employers could understand the skills he had to offer.

Bobby believed the structure of the transition program itself prevents the program from supporting transitioning veterans as it was designed. The program did not have a structured design to help veterans at various stages of their career with their transition challenges. Airmen, who served only a few years went through the same transition program with career airmen who served 20 or more years of service. Bobby believed the needs differ within these groups of veterans and require a different approach to transition.

Bobby highlighted his discontentment with the transition assistance program not having an emphasis on career veterans' transition preparation. He noticed younger airmen had a misconception of what they would face after the transition versus career veterans who knew they needed more individualized transition assistance. In many cases career veterans never had civilian employment. Additionally, he felt younger veterans were not taking the transition program as serious as career veterans because younger veterans do not have family who depends on a veteran's successful transition.

Higher Education. Before entering the air force, Bobby attended college but was unsuccessful in his attempt to finish. Bobby was not focused or prepared to meet the academic challenges of higher education. After several years in the air force, Bobby realized a college education was crucial to his advancement in the air force. He cited the demands of his air force recruiting job as the primary reason for not being able to attend face-to-face classes.

As he started to think about leaving the air force, the excuse ended. Bobby completed his college education through online courses and earned his bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management. He attributed higher education to the success of his transition from the air force. He was not certain of the career path he wanted to take, but as he tried several career options, his college education always helped in getting hired.

India

India is a 50-year-old African American female veteran who served in the United States Army and Texas Army National Guard for 27 years. She deployed three times during her service in the army. Her first two deployments were in 2004 and 2005 to

support Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her last deployment was in 2010 to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. In 2015, India decided to retire from the army after 27 years of service. She is one of five children from a single parent home. She described the family's financial status and said:

It was terrible, and my mother never had money, especially for college. I initially joined the military, so I could go to college and take advantage of the GI Bill.

She expressed her feelings about being lucky to get out of the neighborhood she grew up in and viewed her hometown as the number one city for crimes in America. She still has family there and cherishes her mother's fierce love and discipline. She expressed how her mother taught her to take responsibility for her actions which helped her to deal with the stress of the army.

She was enlisted for her first 15 years of service before transitioning out of the army to attend college. While in college she was informed that she could return to the army as an officer through the Reserve Officer Training Corps Program (ROTC). She took full advantage of the opportunity since her only reason for leaving the army was to attend college. While attending college, she served eight years in the Texas Army National Guard and was promoted to the rank of Staff Sergeant. It was at this point she received a four-year National Guard scholarship and was accepted into the ROTC program at a prominent university in the southwest region of the country.

Shortly after earning her bachelor's degree, she was commissioned and promoted to the rank of second lieutenant. She returned to active duty in the army with 15 years in

service. Upon returning to the army, she was assigned to be an ordnance officer in a maintenance unit for four years. She was asked to transition and become an information systems officer because high-level information systems officers were needed due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Her last eight years in the army were served as an information systems officer until she decided to retire in 2015. Her reasons for retiring were many, but, however she only gave her top three reasons.

Her first reason was she wanted to have more input and control over her career. Secondly, she wanted a husband and a family but did not believe she could have a successful marriage while in the army. She never wanted to be single during her military career. Her third reason was that she wanted to spend more time with her family. Having a relationship with her family became more important the longer she served in the army. She also believed the constant deployments and training exercises put a strain on her family relationships.

Military Transition Experiences. India transitioned from the army and gained employment a United States Department of Defense contractor. India worked on the engineering team because of her background as an Information Technology (IT) systems engineer. She worked with engineers twenty years younger than her and felt they were threatened by her when she made suggestions about problems or presented problem-solving issues ideas, which were met with rejection by her coworkers. Her vast military experiences were not important to her coworkers, and she believed her wealth of knowledge was wasted in the organization, so she left the defense contractor to pursue other career options.

Transition Program Effectiveness. India believed she was lucky to be stationed on a navy base during her transition. She attended the Navy's Transition GPS program. She was stationed in the southeast region in a naval area but worked in the Joint Chiefs of Staff's office. She went to the Navy's Transition GPS program which she believes was beneficial because they allow the retirees to go through a separate transition course versus the army where everyone goes through the transition program together. When army personnel process through the army Transition GPS program, they attend transition training and briefings as one group and everyone attends the same training. Alternatively, the navy has all the retirees, whether they were enlisted or officers, in one group together. Then they had everyone else transitioning from the military in another group. She believed career veterans were serious about their transition because they are concerned about their earned benefits, especially the disability benefits.

She believed younger soldiers do not care because their focus was getting out of the military. The navy's transition program followed the guidelines set by the Transition GPS which required transitioning veterans to attend the mandatory briefing (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). The navy's transition program required attendees to come in business attire during the two weeks course which was advantageous because it gave a better perspective of how she would be required to dress in a civilian workplace. As far as being prepared, she did not believe her supervisor supported her transition.

She gave an example of how her peers had a chance to take a few months off while still on active duty to attend more training to prepare for their transition. The Transition GPS requires military commanders to provide transitioning service members

time away from their duties to meet the requirements of the Transition GPS. However, she was not given time away from her duties to meet the requirement of the Transition GPS, and she worked until the month she left the army. After leaving the army, she took a few months to physically and mentally relax before seeking employment.

Once she started seeking employment, she realized she would need to get some IT certifications to support her master's degree because she was not getting any job offers. It took her three months to get the necessary IT certifications while seeking employment. She recommended to start networking by going to networking events and talking with other veterans that have already transitioned out and found employment. Get a mentor who has transitioned out, someone who transitioned well, and keep in contact with them. She also recommended having a detailed plan for seeking employment and emphasized the importance of creating a great resume. She felt the transition center taught her how to write a resume that was mainly focused on veterans' military careers which is difficult for civilian employers to understand. She found this to be true during a veterans' hiring event. She was told her resume was too long and not practical for seeking civilian employment. She recommended the resume writing instructors spend more time and emphasis on helping veterans produce better resumes.

Higher Education. As noted earlier, India always valued education and took every opportunity to earn a college degree. She believed it was crucial for military personnel to earn a college degree before transitioning out of the military, especially for career military veterans. India left the army in 1995 to attend a university in the southwest region. She stated her experience there was okay, but she had a difficult time

trying to access her benefits from the VA program. She also had difficulty trying to understand the educational benefits she would receive once she transitioned out of the army. After learning to operate within the system and how to apply for her educational benefits, then the system proved to be useful.

At the university India did not have any issues using her benefits. She received detailed information about veteran support programs offered on the college campus. She received information about scholarship opportunities which led to an ROTC scholarship through the Texas Army National Guard. India believed veterans need to be informed about the educational benefits available to them after they leave the military, especially scholarships. She believes the university offered more information about veteran support than the VA program.

Neal

Neal is a 50-year-old African American male army veteran. He served six years in the U.S. Navy during his first military enlistment and 17 years in the U.S. Army. He graduated from high school in 1985 and took part in football, track, and theater. He was from a small rural community in the eastern part of Texas. The single parent home he was raised in did not prioritize education. He did not place any importance on academics while in high school. His original plan after graduating from high school was to join the air force with his best friend on the buddy system. However, while still in high school, his best friend failed the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test several times ending their opportunity to join the air force on the buddy system.

Neal found joy in his high school theater class. His theater teacher recognized his talent and convinced him to apply to the local university's theater program. Due to her support and mentorship, he was accepted into the university's theater program. He admits that his time at the university was short lived because he struggled in the core subjects and did not have the academic ability to stay in college. After withdrawing from the university, the navy gave him an opportunity to serve his country and the military. He enlisted in the navy because he believed it would provide job skills he could not get anywhere else. He enlisted for three years and had a successful first enlistment. During his second enlistment, Neal applied to the Navy's Enlisted Commissioning Program but was denied because he did not meet the acceptance requirements.

He was devastated after being rejected by the enlisted commissioning program and decided to leave the navy and attend nursing school at the end of his navy enlistment. He was accepted into the nursing program of a university in the southwest region. Once again, his academic weaknesses resulted in him leaving the nursing program; but, before withdrawing from the university, an ROTC recruiter on campus suggested he speak with the campus Primary Military Science Instructor (PMI). Neal was not excited about the thought of having anything to do with the military; however, he did meet with the PMI. While meeting with the PMI, they developed a plan which could allow Neal to become a commissioned officer in the army.

The PMI took the credit hours Neal had earned to the central office and started an adult education program and degree plan for Neal's journey to become a commissioned

officer. In 1996, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and was sent to a military installation in the southwest as an air defense officer. Neal's next assignment took him overseas where he met several mentors that gave him advice on how to be successful as an army officer. He continued to take college courses while on active duty to pursue a master's degree in Human Resource Management. After several assignments and three deployments to combat zones, Neal ended his military career on his last assignment at the Army Recruiting Battalion in the southeast. He stated the military was alright, but he only stayed in as a means of supporting his family and improving his financial status.

Military Transition Experiences. Neal's transition from the military was influenced by several factors, his personality began to change, and he observed negative patterns of behavior in the leadership. Additionally, the frequent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan started to impact his relationship with his wife and children. He also viewed his experience with his supervisor as negative and strained which led to his decision to leave the army. He wanted to transition into federal employment with the VA, but the opportunity never became available. He began to seek civilian employment and was hired by a major retail store as an assistant manager immediately after his first interview.

He gave credit to his military leadership and the discipline he learned in the army for a successful interview. He believed using the leadership skills he learned in the army made the difference with him being hired. He reflected saying, the store manager and the co-manager didn't give him a chance to walk away from the assistant manager position. After he accepted the position he received training at the major retail store

which made him feel like he was part of the organization. However, the organization's policy required all new assistant managers attend training at the organization's regional headquarters. The training he received at the regional headquarters gave him a reality check about civilian employment.

Organizations are focused on profit margins, and the corporate training addressed how assistant managers would handle meeting their profit goals. Assistant managers were instructed to reduce employee hours to meet profit margins. Neal was not willing to make that decision because he came from a structured military environment where leaders took care of their soldiers at all cost. He believed he would still be working for the major retail store because it was a good organization, but the structure for subordinates went against his military training and values:

I could not sleep at night knowing that I had to take hours from this person who's depending on those hours to support their families just to meet profit margins.

Transition Program Effectiveness. Neal transitioned from the military through the new Transition GPS program. He believed the most critical part of the transition program was assistance with writing his resume. However, he thought the Transition GPS program should be longer in duration. The Transition GPS program offered many briefings by different agencies that supported veterans. One agency, the Veterans Administration, conducted briefings on veteran benefits, but Neal was not impressed with their presentations:

The presenters did not go into any detail about how to apply for the benefits earned. I learned after I left the army they should have done a better job briefing the program and their role supporting veterans.

He shared his disappointment with the transition assistance program. He declared he knew most of the information the transition center provided before attending the training, and he did not believe the transition program helped him during his transition. Career transition information was not available, and he was not given information about transitioning to other career opportunities. Additionally, he felt the structure of the program was ineffective. He expressed his feeling about spending 23 years in the military and only receiving two-weeks of transition assistance training to prepare for civilian life and employment. He felt it was vital for military career service members to have a transition program developed for them since they have been in the military for 20 years and have different transition needs than younger service members.

Higher Education. Education became an essential part of Neal's military successes. He realized how important education was if he was going to be successful in life. He reflected on his academic weaknesses in high school and committed to improving his ability to learn. Neal earned his bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management. He attributes his college degree to helping him obtain civilian employment. After he left the army he used his GI Bill benefits to attend college to continue his education earning a master's degree program in counseling. As an African American veteran-student, he used the university's veteran's service center to help with

his transition to higher education. He believed the veterans service center made the process much easier to navigate.

Charlie

Charlie is a 49-year-old African American male army veteran and served 26 years with 14 years as an enlisted soldier and 12 years as an ordnance officer. He enlisted in the army because his family could not afford to send him to college. His father was also a military veteran who served 30 years in the army. He advised Charlie to enlist in the army because of the benefits and opportunities the army provided.

Charlie's first assignment in the army was as a vehicle mechanic. His military occupational specialty allowed him to be assigned to various types of army units during his career. The Special Forces were one of those units he was assigned to, which resulted in an unprecedented number of deployments. He deployed three times to Iraq, two times to Afghanistan, and once to Bosnia. When he arrived at the unit, he assumed the worse because of the demographic makeup of the unit. He was the only African American in the unit. Charlie always believed he would join the army and achieve the rank of sergeant major like his father. It was his dream to become a sergeant major because of his and his father's competitive nature.

However, his father influenced him to become an army officer because of the higher military pay and opportunity for assignments with greater responsibility. He did not understand his father's reasons for him to become an officer, because he did not have institutional knowledge on how the military operated at the time. Reflecting on his decision to become an army officer, Charlie believed he made a great decision. He

received an excellent education and experiences of a lifetime throughout his military career. He was thankful for his father's advice and persistence on him to become an army officer.

Military Transition Experiences. Charlie described his transition experience as manageable and uneventful. He was able to secure employment quickly but transitioned to several jobs after leaving the military. He was not sure if a civilian job was for him due to the structure of the organizations where he was employed. The organizational structure did not have a team concept, and many of the co-workers in the organizations were not pleased with his hiring. Furthermore, he felt confined by the small spaces in his work areas which led to him finding employment with another organization that had some similarities with his Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). He believed veterans should seek employment related to their MOS since they are more comfortable performing work based on their prior military experience.

Transition Program Effectiveness. Charlie was not satisfied with the services provided by the transition program. The Transition GPS program was in place during his transition, but Charlie believed it was the same as the earlier transition program. He had always planned to leave the army once his daughters started college. He stayed in the army, so he could transfer his GI Bill to his daughters. As soon as he submitted his documents to transition out of the army, he scheduled his mandatory briefings. The army transition program was two weeks. Week one was designated time to complete his transition documents and apply for the benefits he earned. The second week was reserved to account for military property in his possession.

Charlie felt six months would be a more reasonable time to prepare for civilian life and employment. He believed the entire transition program was flawed. He did not believe two weeks was enough time to attend all the benefits classes if they were provided with care and concern for the veteran's transition. He believed the training was conducted to meet the guidelines of Transition GPS but was not adequate to provide veterans with truly beneficial information.

He made a comparison between his father's transition from the army 30 years earlier and his transition using the Transition GPS program. He believed the program has made some progress over time, but some things stayed the same. He felt it was safe to say that while Transition GPS is the new transition program, it still has some of the same issues when it comes to preparing veterans to leave the military. He highlighted the importance of presenters knowing the information they are giving to transitioning service members and not having to rely primarily on presentation slides.

Higher Education. Charlie completed his college degree while on active duty. He admitted it was a difficult challenge attending college and being an active duty soldier. The military deployments were also a barrier to completing his degree and resulted in him taking more time to complete his degree. Charlie's assignments at specific military bases allowed him time to complete more college credits. His assignment at a military installation in the southeast region gave him the best opportunity in his career to complete his degree.

The assignment kept him from deploying to a combat zone because he was in a training unit preparing other soldiers for deployment. Completing his college degree

was the most satisfying moment of his military career. He credits his transition success to his college degree. He noted attending college was a challenge for active duty soldiers mainly when they were deployed and supporting the military mission. However, he suggested active duty soldiers should take an interest in completing a college degree before they leave the military. He believes a college degree is the difference between a successful transition and a failed transition.

Lisa

Lisa is a 49-year-old African American female army veteran who served 19 years on active duty and one year in the Texas Army National Guard. After graduating from high school, Lisa attended a local college with the goal of one day helping her mother, who had raised her as a single parent. College was expensive which led to her joining the Texas Army National Guard to pay for college. When she enlisted in the Texas Army National Guard, her first MOS was a metal worker and welder. After serving a year in the National Guard, Lisa requested and was approved to enlist in the regular army. Her MOS in the regular army was as a personnel administrative specialist. Her duties were to keep personnel records and file, as she progressed through her career, she supervised a section and department that kept personnel records at the headquarters level. She found great satisfaction in her job. She is also married to a military veteran.

Military Transition Experiences. Lisa's last duty station was at a military installation in the southwest region. She selected this duty station because it was close to her hometown and the fact that she was preparing to transition out of the military. She felt being close to home would help during her transition from the army. Lisa's

husband was still on active duty in the army on a deployment to Afghanistan. She mentioned her transition from active duty soldier to the wife of an active duty soldier was challenging because she was used to having a purpose and mission. She found life as a military spouse to have unique challenges. Although as she began to interact with other military spouses, she found her purpose and became involved in the family support group. The family support group takes care of and supports the families of deployed soldiers.

Her husband left the army one year later and transitioned to civilian life and employment. They relocated the family to her hometown. Once relocated, she began to consider employment, so she attended several job fairs and volunteered at various veteran organizations to experience the civilian workplace. Coming from the structured environment of the military, she called to attention her dissatisfaction with co-workers who did not come to work on time. She could not understand why workers came in late or did not come in at all for work. The military teaches soldiers to report to their place of duty at the appointed time. Failure to report for duty was not tolerated, and soldiers were disciplined for failing to report as ordered.

She realized she could not change the culture of the organization or the performance of the workers. Her volunteering led to a job offer which was similar to her military career. She accepted the job offer and stated it was the best civilian experience she had because she could help support employees and their careers. She believed it was vital for transitioning veterans to seek employment that was similar to their military careers. She recommended veterans in MOS's that do not have a civilian job match seek

higher education or vocational training before leaving the military to be competitive in civilian employment.

Transition Program Effectiveness. Lisa believed her experience with the Transition GPS program was positive compared to that of her counterparts that used the Transition GPS program on the army installation. She often heard complaints from fellow soldiers who used the army transition program expressing their dissatisfaction with the briefings, the time allotted for training, and resume writing classes. Her husband transitioned out through the army's transition program and allied with many veterans had complaints about the services offered. Lisa was assigned to an air force base and used their Transition GPS program to transition out of the army. She was satisfied with the services and time allotted to receive the training. Her last assignment was on an air force base, which gave her the required time to prepare for her transition. She commented on the support of her commander and supervisor to ensure she attended the mandatory briefings. She did not have any difficulties scheduling more classes or training:

I was able to go all the appointments and then some. Go to job fairs and networking events, all the classes, so it was an excellent experience learning what to expect when I got out.

She was impressed with the air force transition program because the program gave her so much information to get prepared for life outside the military. The program reinforced the information transitioning service members should know. More importantly, she felt the resume writing class was focused on creating a functional

resume for civilian employment. The instructors took their time to make sure all attendees had a resume that translated their military experience and skills for civilian employers. Lisa was pleased with the resume writing class because it was thorough, and she had her resume established before she left the army.

Higher Education. After entering the army, Lisa took classes to finish her bachelor's degree and said the experience was great. She did not finish the degree as quickly as she wanted to because she was young and focused on other activities. Over time, she realized she needed to get serious and finish her degree. She admitted earning her degree in Human Resource Management was a challenge while serving, but it was worth the struggle. Lisa believed in the importance of higher education and its ability to affect employment after transitioning from the military.

Her belief in higher education's importance also led her to complete two more degrees after leaving the army. She also used the GI Bill after leaving the army and received another bachelor's degree and a master's degree. She recommends all soldiers on active duty should attend college while serving. She highlighted the importance of completing higher education before leaving the military because it enhances veterans' opportunity for civilian employment.

Emerging Themes

The research data revealed five themes, as shown in Table 4. The themes are representative of the participants' life experiences, military transition experiences, and higher education's role in a successful transition.

Table 4

Summary of Themes

Theme	Characteristics
Family Matters	Family had an impact on the veteran’s decision to enlist in the military service and to transition back to civilian live.
Career Expectation	Career veterans had employment expectations that were not realistic because of their lack of previous civilian employment.
Education is Key	Veterans who served 20 years or more of military service place more importance on completing higher education than other veterans. Career choice also impact veteran’s decision to pursue higher education.
Failure to Launch	The Transition Assistance GPS Program did not provide sufficient transition training to veterans at various military installations and branches of military service as directed by federal policy.
Plan Early	Veterans took an active role in their transition from the military. Career veterans need longer transition support due to not having any experience in civilian life.

Family Matters. After military service veteran families also transition from military life to civilian life. The spouses, parents, children, or siblings of a veteran who served in the military meet the definition of a family member. It should be noted that when veterans transition their families experience the loss of community and secure connections to their military community and identity. Military family life includes relocation to many geographical locations around the world and many separations of

parents and children. Consequently, the responsibility role shifts from the veteran to the spouse or other family members. The loss of their support system during the transition from military to civilian life is the most significant challenge faced after the service member's military career.

All veterans expressed family influenced their decision to join the military, whether it was as a means of paying for college, an alternative to college, or plans for a family in the future. Military families face many challenges and struggles at the expense of service members and the missions of their military branch of service. Military families are left behind during deployments to uphold the family unit while service members are away protecting the interest of America. Additionally, frequent permanent change of duty station means a constant building of new friendships and learning new procedures at the new duty station.

The same way family influenced veterans to join the military, family also influenced veterans to leave the military. All participants in this study were married except for India. The married participants cited their spouses and children as their primary reason for leaving the military. India, on the other hand, left the army because she wanted to get married and start a family. Reintegration with the veteran's family was a painful process, and the veterans in this study noted reintegration as an area of concern. After deploying to Iraq and returning to his family, Charlie found it difficult to reintegrate into his family. Charlie expressed feeling isolated and experienced stress because he did not have a role in the family after returning from a deployment:

While I was deployed, my wife took care of the family. She made all the decisions and took care of our daughters. I talked to her all the time while deployed, but she was the boss and kept the family going.

Career Expectation. Veterans must adapt to their new environment since some employees will not be receptive to their arrival in the organization. The military way of doing business is over. Veterans are no longer in a structured military organization and consequently, must adapt to their new jobs and co-workers. Veterans need to understand their transition will result in a change of their status, and the military rank they had will have little or no bearing on any of their employment outcomes. Civilians, in most cases, do not understand the military rank structure or care about the rank structure. After achieving civilian employment, veterans must understand they cannot expect to have a role equivalent to their prior military rank. Veterans may be required to start at the lowest level in the organization and work their way back to the top:

I hear these commercials all the time, hire veterans. I don't know who they were hiring but they weren't hiring me. The one job I did get was not what I expected. I am educated and thought I could leave the military and walk in to a high paying job. I would tell any veteran leaving the military to get that thought out their head and just get a job that can take them to higher pay.

Education is Key. Veterans in the study realized achieving higher education was necessary to accomplish before transitioning from the military. Not being able to afford college was another factor that led veterans to serve in the military. Although, some research reports African American veterans are not using their GI Bill benefits for

education (Aikins et al., 2015; Kellior, 2009), this is not the case for this group of veterans. The study participants noted military service was a challenge to completing a college degree, but the tuition assistance and GI Bill made it possible for them to get an education. As noted earlier, these veterans either dropped out of college as civilians because of not being academically prepared or not being able to afford the cost of college.

Earning a college degree carried several vital meanings for Charlie. First, it was essential to obtain the degree for his parents and to become a role model for his younger siblings. Secondly, he wanted to disprove the stereotype African Americans from the south were uneducated and needed handouts to be successful in college. Lastly, he wanted to earn his college degree to be competitive when applying for a commission as an army officer:

If you do not have a college degree get one before getting out of the military. I believe a college degree opens doors to jobs. My college degree automatically opened the door for me and with my leadership abilities and being able to communicate that improved my chance of getting the interview.

Failure to Launch. Each branch of the military service is responsible for operating their transition assistance program to help ease the transition of its members to civilian life and employment. The services provided are supposed to mirror those of the Transition GPS program. The main difference between each program was only in name because each branch's transition program has different names. Table 5 highlights the names of each of the military service branches programs. Participants in this study

attended the Transition GPS mandatory briefing, but 50 percent of the participants felt the transition program was not sufficient to meet their transition needs. All of these participants transitioned out of the military through the Army’s Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program. Charlie expressed his view of the Transition GPS program:

We need more training and I think the two weeks is not long enough. I feel like I needed six months to properly prepare for my transition. This new transition is just like the old one in my opinion.

Table 5

Military Branches Transition GPS Program Identification

Military Service	Transition Assistance Program Name
Army	Soldier for Life: Transition Assistance Program (SFL-TAP)
Navy	Transition Assistance Program (TAP)
Air Force	Transition Assistance Program (TAP)
Marine Corps	Transition Readiness Program (TRS)
Coast Guard	Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

Note. Transition GPS is the overall transition for the military, however each branch manages their own transition program under different transition names.

Plan Early. The new transition GPS gives opportunity for veterans to prepare earlier for their transition. According to the guidelines of the program, commanders

must provide service members with the available resources necessary for a successful transition (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Participants in this study acknowledged the need to start the transition process early and develop an individual transition plan as soon as possible. Participants highlighted the importance of each veteran to take an active role in their transition and fight for the time they are allotted to complete transition training. Bobby discussed the importance of networking and said:

I would recommend researching the transition assistance program. Start working on creating a great resume and network, get out there and go to networking events. Network with other veterans that already transitioned out. Get yourself a mentor that has transitioned successfully. Find someone that you know that transitioned well and keep in contact with them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

Chapter V begins with an overview of the theoretical framework of the study, the method used, data collection, and data analysis. The Chapter also discusses the broader interpretations of the findings and the contributions to the literature. Furthermore, it articulates how this study addresses literature gaps, as well as discusses implications for HRD research and practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and reflections on this study. The research data and findings are the results of the lived experiences of African American male and female career veterans.

The study aims to explore the transition experiences of African American veterans, their participation in the Transition Goals, Plans, Success Program, and the challenges they faced after military service.

Research Questions

- What were the transition experiences of African American veterans as they left the military for civilian life?
- How effective was the Transition GPS program in preparing African American veterans for their transition to civilian life?

- What were the transition experiences that led to the successful transition of African American veterans to civilian life?

Participants in this study highlighted the challenges they faced during their transition from the military to civilian life and higher education's impact on meaningful employment. Hermeneutic phenomenology guided this study to help understand the lived experience of the participants. The participants were career veterans retired from the military with over 20 years of service to the country. The participants overwhelmingly cited their families' influence and the desire to take control of their lives for the decision to leave the military.

Participants in this study acknowledged the importance of higher education and most completed their college degree before they left the military. The participants believed earning a college degree before leaving the military improved their possibility to gain employment. Although they experienced several setbacks assimilating into the organizational culture, participants acknowledged their fears as they transitioned and understood the need to develop coping strategies to handle their fears.

This study also aimed to contribute to the sparse research on African American veterans' transition to civilian life and employment by examining their lived experiences and feelings about the world through semi-structured interviews. Analyzing the participant's transition experiences as they left the military for civilian life and employment also contributed to the limited research in human resource development of this population.

Summary of Study and Theoretical Framework

In this study, Schlossberg's Transition Theory was used to ground the study and to interpret the findings. According to Schlossberg, a transition is any event or non-event that results in change. Relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles are affected by change caused during a transition (Anderson et al., 2012; Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Schlossberg's Transition Theory has been used in counseling adults in transition and has implications for counseling veterans. Several studies have found Schlossberg's theory to have valuable application for veterans transitioning to civilian life and employment (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). As previously noted in Chapter II, Schlossberg's Theory 4S Model as a framework has the potential to help African American veterans understand their transition experiences and to develop a perspective approach to interpret their transition.

Schlossberg's 4s Model was used to help analyze and interpret African American veterans' understanding of their transition. Schlossberg identified three types of transitions: anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event transitions. Expected life events are anticipated transitions and occur as expected; but, unexpected life events are unanticipated transitions that are not expected to occur. Non-event transitions are the expected events that do not occur. The veterans in this study experienced anticipated transitions because they planned to leave the military for civilian life.

As an assessment and intervention tool, the 4S Model focuses on the situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012; Anderson & Goodman, 2014). According to Wheeler (2012), veterans experience the moving-in-stage when they

entered the military, developed their military identity, and learned what the military culture expects. The moving-through-stage is like the moving-in-stage with the exception that the individual knows what is going on with their transition and understands their role. Veterans experience this stage while they are serving their country, whether on the military installation or in a combat environment. In the final stage, the moving-out-stage, the individual has completed their transition and starts to look for their next transition. For veterans, this involves leaving the military and becoming civilians (Wheeler, 2012).

This study incorporated the 4S Model to help answer the research questions. The 4S Model is used to develop a model of the veterans' transition in their present phase. In this study I applied the results from each interview of the participants to the 4S Model to determine the answer to my research questions. The 4S Model was also necessary to help with the collection and analysis of the data. The 4S Model can also help in the analysis of any type of transition and assist individuals to understand and decide if their resources are enough to support their transition (Schlossberg, 2011).

Situation

Situation in the 4S Model refers to what is happening at the time of their transition. The situation differs according to the trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, prior experience, concurrent stress, and assessment as discussed in Chapter II. In this study, the veterans were aware of their situation involving leaving the military for retirement and becoming unemployed until they found civilian employment. The participants also moved their families to start their new lives in a civilian community.

Leaving the safety of the military community was one of their fears that affected their situation during a transition. According to Demers (2011), 65 to 80 percent of veterans leave the military without a job and have unreasonable expectations of finding employment quickly.

Understanding the situation will help veterans to make better decisions during their transition. Participants were focused on leaving the military and have not fully considered their situation. Many of these veterans believed being financially secure would lead to a successful transition. During the interviews, veterans expressed their transition experiences from their limited knowledge to analyze their situation. Career counselors are necessary to help veterans gain a better understanding of how to move through the transition process.

Self

Self in the 4S Model examines the individual experiencing the transition and what they bring to the transition. The individual's socio-economic status, demographics, gender, ethnicity, age, and state of health impacts how individuals cope with their transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). These factors also affect how the individual navigates through the transition. African American veterans need more guidance in this area since they are members of a marginalized population that experiences discrimination in all areas of life. Discrimination has been shown to have negative outcomes on minority populations and their ability to function in society.

Support

Support in the 4S Model discusses the four types of support systems available during a transition. The four types of support—intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions or community—help ease the transition process (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The individual should use these support structures to help them get through their transition. The Transition GPS program provided the mandatory briefing for veterans but did not assist veterans with an effective transition plan.

Transition GPS requires veterans to receive mandatory training from the Department of Defense and the VA about their benefits, health and life insurance, education benefits, financial planning, resume writing, and relocation assistance. Improvements to the transition assistance program has not resulted in meaningful transitions for veterans because the training is brief and held in the last weeks of a veteran's military service (Zogas, 2017). The participants' knowledge about the Transition GPS was limited, and their focus was on attending the mandatory briefing and not on developing an effective transition plan. The transitioning service members' excitement about leaving the military contributes to an unsuccessful transition because they are not concerned with their transition training.

Participants repeatedly discussed family support during the semi-structured interviews. After serving in the military and making it a career, the participants began to place more importance on their families and spending more time with family. Participants highlighted the importance of family and how the military caused relationships with family to become challenging to manage.

Strategies

Strategies in the 4S Model are those coping mechanisms used during stressful situations. The coping strategies can be used before, during, and after a stressful or challenging situation (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Understanding coping strategies and how to develop coping strategies is crucial in a stressful situation. Transitions are the stressful events in a person's life (Schlossberg, 1985). Servicemen and women transition often during their military service to include deploying to combat. The transition to combat is something servicemen and women train for and are excited about initially (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). As the excitement wear off these servicemen and women face challenges that can hinder their reintegration into society. Loss of family and military friendships can cause the veteran to withdraw from relationships which increases the difficulty of their transition. Career counselors could help African American veterans develop strategies for their successful transition by helping these veterans to understand the importance of family and military friendships since this population does not readily seek help or transition counseling.

Method

A qualitative research study was conducted to answer the research questions. The goal of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the transition experiences of African American veterans and whether the Transition GPS program supported a successful transition. A phenomenological approach guided this study because of its capability to help explore the lived experiences of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the transition experiences of African American veterans, their participation in the Transition Assistance Program and the challenges faced obtaining employment and higher education after military service. Veteran organizations and a military headquarters unit were used to recruit participants for this study. The organizations and their leaders were supportive of this research study. Additionally, these organizations support veterans with mental disorders daily. These organizations also encouraged veterans to take part in studies and projects to help other veterans from all service organizations and wars. From the interview questions, five themes emerged. The themes aligned with the research questions which guided this study. Constant comparison of the transcribed interviews and the observation notes proved crucial to analyzing the data. Participants reviewed transcribed interviewed data to ensure the correct information was captured and accurately stood for what they meant to express to the interviewer.

Data Collection

Communication between the researcher and the participants occurred several times to confirm participants met the criteria to take part in the study before conducting the first interview as well as to develop trust and build rapport. Participants agreed to one recorded interview during the data collection. During the interviews, each veteran was asked to discuss their transition experiences from the military to include experiences with family, higher education, and the Transition GPS Program.

Data Analysis

As Chapter III discussed in depth, after completing the data collection from each interview, then the interview was transcribed and inputted into the NVivo software system. The transcriptions were read and reread looking for similar responses to the interview questions. The data was examined again to identify the key ideas that emerged to help understand the veterans' experiences. Coding of the analyzed data was grouped according to the topics that arose repeatedly and nodes developed from those experiences. Before running a query to justify the themes, sorting of the nodes by themes and sub-themes occurred. Some interview responses aligned with several nodes or themes. Therefore, listing the themes under the corresponding nodes played a significant role in developing the categories. Five overarching themes were developed based on the semi-structured interviews and data collected from those interviews: (a) Family Matters, (b) Career Expectation, (c) Education is Key, (d) Failure to Launch, and (e) Plan Early. Schlossberg's Transition Theory 4S model was used to explore each theme with the goal of answering the research questions.

Interpretation of Findings

Several key findings emerged from the data analysis. In this section, I presented the discussion and interpretation of the main findings from the study.

Overview of Interpretation of Findings. African American veterans face many inequalities that are racially manifested including employment opportunities, substandard housing, and health care inequalities (Fleury-Steiner, 2012, p. 8). Veterans, in general, face many challenges and, after serving their country, are released to the

civilian community to continue a fight for their lives and benefits they earned. African American veterans may face additional challenges due to their feelings concerning their role and status in society. In his book, “Disposable Heroes: The Betrayal of African American Veterans,” Fleury-Steiner discussed several presidents and the political system which implemented and made decisions aiding in African American veterans leaving the military for a socio-economic condition in distress. As African American veterans leave the military, transition assistance training and career counseling should be the first steps in their path to a successful integration into civilian life.

In this study, several findings emerged and were analyzed. After completing the analysis of the findings, I was not surprised at the findings. Although there was one unexpected finding, I expected to find African American veterans’ transition experiences challenging and difficult at best. However, only one veteran characterized their transition experience as challenging. This participant had not earned a college degree at the time of their departure from the military. This finding highlights the importance to earn your college degree before transitioning. Career veterans may have a better understanding of their transferable skills and feel their military pension will ease the transition process to civilian life. Career veterans may have more significant difficulties transitioning because they have been under the rigor of military life for the majority of their lives. This group may also face challenges securing employment because of their age at transition.

The Transition GPS program was implemented and restructured to help improve the transition experiences of veterans as they left the military for civilian life. Many

veterans do not feel the program helped during their transition. The Transition GPS program has failed to provide sufficient transition assistance to African American veterans. The failure of the Transition GPS program is rooted in the lack of knowledge veterans have about the benefits they have earned, and the services offered by the Transition GPS program. Likewise, military officers are adding to the ineffective transition assistance, since they are not allowing service members to attend the Transition GPS program as mandated by the Department of Defense.

Family Matters. Military families have a critical role in the success of their service member's career. The family support group includes parents, spouses, partners, siblings, children, grandparents, and other loved ones who may give care to wounded warriors (Calhoun, Beckham, & Bosworth, 2002; Hazel, Wilcox, & Hassan, 2012). During deployments, military families are left behind to maintain the family's functionality and provide emotional support during deployments. Families transition several times during the career of their service member and relocate to military installations across the United States and internationally (Hazel, Wilcox, & Hassan, 2012). Military families living off the military installation in a civilian community face challenges of poor schools and little employment opportunities for spouses. Living on the military installation provides families with a supportive community compared to those families that live off the military installation who may also face isolation and a lack of community support.

Family support during the transition was also crucial, and veterans felt it was essential to include the family in their decision to transition. Consistent with

Schlossberg's 4S Model (1985) the participant's social support system was important, and the participants acknowledged the support they received from their families. They emphasized leaving the military was a family matter. Married career veterans' transition was not significantly different from single career veterans' transitions. After transitioning from the military, the participants returned to the geographical area where they joined the military because they understood the importance of family support and desired to be near family after a long military career.

Career Expectations. Many organizations do not provide mentor-based orientation training to its employees, or the orientation is ineffective leading to frequent turnovers. Veterans transitioning to civilian life and employment need orientation training and clear expectations of the organization's operational procedures and norms (Miles, 2014). Consistent with Miles (2014) veterans must have career expectations that are realistic. Their military role, status, and rank have little if any bearing on the organization. Entering civilian employment requires veterans to understand the expectations of supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 165).

The role and impact of military culture on a veteran's career expectations and employment success are necessary to understand. Consistent with Ahern et al. (2015) lack of discipline and control in the civilian community impacts a veteran's career expectations. Military and civilian differences have always existed but have noticeably increased over the last decade highlighting issues in lack of discipline and control as a challenge to veterans (Ahern et al., 2015). Several participants expressed how they were

not able to maintain employment because of the organizational structure. Leaving the structured environment of the military for the fragmented and unstructured civilian environment presents challenges for veterans. The distinct needs of African American veterans may interfere with their transition as this population may have a higher feeling of isolation because they have lost the bond of comrades and the security of the military community. The military culture is built on creating strong relationships with comrades which make combat operations successful. During the soldier's time away from the families they need to be reassured their families are safe and being cared for on the military installation. As a total institution organization, the military installation restricts the entry of civilian personnel and ensure the safety of personnel on the installation through monitored systems. Furthermore, as expressed by several of the research participants, discrimination is always in the back of their minds, and they are always on the lookout for discrimination. This may interfere with their view of the situations they face.

The Transition GPS program provides transition support to all military personnel leaving the military. The career veterans in this study attended the required briefings. Their reason for attending was to meet the military requirement that all transitioning veterans attend the mandatory briefings. More emphasis may be needed to get veterans to attend more transition training. After serving in the military, veterans may not attend additional transition training because they are in a rush to exit the military. The participants expressed concern about the level of support received with writing a resume. The participants had difficulties identifying their transferable skills and equating those

skills to civilian jobs. This finding is consistent with the research of Davis and Minnis (2017). Ainspan (2011) noted translation of military skill as a barrier to the hiring of veterans and could have an impact on employer's decision to hire.

Education is Key. Participants in this study acknowledged education as a factor in their successful transition. Although the participants faced challenges attending college while on active duty, they always saw the benefit of earning a college degree. Noticeably, 50 percent of the participants in this study attended college before entering the military services which may have an impact on completing college before leaving the military. The participants that attended college before entering the military were influenced by family to attend college with the goal of changing the participant's socioeconomic status.

The participants in this study took advantage of the Post 9/11 GI Bill which was not consistent with the research of Kellior (2009) which indicated African American veterans were not using their educational benefits as compared to other veterans. Likewise, consistent with the research of Ruh et al. (2009) the veterans in this study acknowledged higher education's role improving their potential for employment because some of their military skills may not transfer to civilian employment. The participants in this study may have used their Post 9/11 GI Bill educational benefits because of their experiences and that they understand the need for education since most of their life was spent in a military culture that took care of their needs.

Failure to Launch. The Transition GPS Program is designed to prepare service members for a successful transition from the military to higher education, the workforce,

or their own businesses (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). The program is designed to give service members, commanders, and Transition GPS managers roles and responsibilities in creating a successful transition plan. Transitioning service members are responsible to attend the mandatory training and meet three required goals 180 days before being released from active duty:

- Participate in pre-separation counseling to develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) which focuses on career planning needs;
- Attend VA Benefits Briefings I and II, which explain what benefits the service member has earned and how to obtain them; and
- Attend the Department of Labor (DOL) Employment Workshop, which focuses on the mechanics of obtaining employment in today's job market and includes resume preparation and interview skills practice (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017).

Commanders and TAP managers are responsible to ensure service members are educated on the importance of career planning. Additionally, commanders and TAP managers must communicate and coordinate services for these service members transitioning out of the military service. A new component of the transition assistance program, known as the military life cycle, was launched in 2015 and is meant to help service members prepare for transition earlier in their military service.

Failure to Launch highlights the importance for service members to develop knowledge about the programs and services available to help them transition from the military. Although the military service branches under the guidance of the President of

the United States has developed and revamped the transition assistance program, many of the participants in this study had little knowledge about what programs were in place when they transitioned out of the military. Many participants could not distinguish the differences between the old and new transition programs. Several of the participants believed it was the same old program with a new name.

Service members, commanders, and Transition GPS managers should be held accountable for ensuring the guidelines of the transition program are being met. The participants in this study worked until the last minute maintaining mission readiness before attending the mandatory briefing and were not able to plan early for their transition. Consistent with Zalaquett and Chatters (2016) veterans in this study were not provided effective transition support. The veteran's lack of knowledge about the services offered through the Transition GPS program may attribute to the veteran not receiving the necessary help during their transition.

Plan Early. Participants in the study recommended preparing early for transitioning from the military. Their transitions were successful, but they also felt earlier preparation would have assisted in their resume writing and developing skills relevant for civilian employment. The participants did not have negative perceptions about themselves or their military careers. They did note discrimination was an issue they faced in the military and feared it would be more prominent in civilian life and employment.

Consistent with the findings of Gaither (2014), discrimination is a problem on many levels, and the participants noted discrimination during their military service.

Military veterans leaving the military face discrimination because of their military service. Not all civilians nor all employers support military service. Age discrimination may also be a challenge faced by African American veterans seeking employment. This type of discrimination may be devastating to career veteran who are all over the age of 40 at the time of their transition from the military. Race and ethnicity discrimination adds to the challenges veterans faced during a transition. Managing transitions should be an area of concern for career counselors. Gaither (2014) provided a list of tips for managing a transition in his article Tips for Managing Transition.

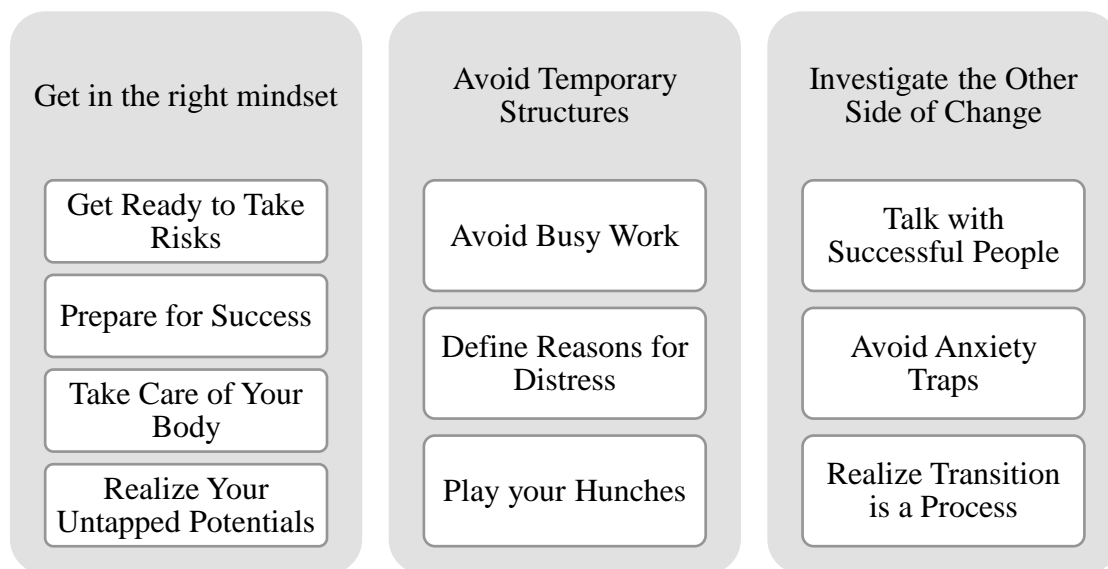


Figure 6. Tips for Managing Transition adapted from Gaither, 2014.

As previously mentioned in this study, the transition of African American veterans to civilian life is a challenging process. However, Wands (2013) noted a successful transition was critical for veterans' well-being throughout their lifetime. In

this study, several factors were highlighted that improve veterans' opportunity for a successful transition. First, the support provided by the family was the most crucial factors for the successful transition of African American veterans. Secondly, veterans expect their service to be honored and to receive support from the community and the VA. The support from the community and the VA were necessary for veterans' successful transition back to civilian life. Finally, the development of peer support and mentoring for transitioning veterans supported the successful reintegration of veterans to civilian life.

Addressing the Literature Gap

In Chapter II, a gap in the literature exists about African American veterans' transition to civilian life, employment, and higher education. The mental health of these veterans increases challenges to their transition. Military culture may hinder a veteran's transition to civilian life since service members live according to military language, symbols, norms, standards, and institutional expectations (Hazel, Wilcox, & Hassan, 2012).

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Career Counseling is needed for African American veterans and should be researched to examine methods to improve career counseling services for African American veterans. As noted in the findings, African American veterans view education and obtaining a college degree as an essential step in preparing to transition from the military to civilian life. However, the transition assistance training they receive does not meet the needs of this population. Career counseling has the potential to help African

American veterans identify skills they learned in the military and translate those skill to meaningful employment. Employment plays a vital role in the successful transition from the military and adds a sense of purpose to the life of veterans (Miles, 2014). A future research study on the experience of African American veterans' transition can add additional knowledge to help human resource development practitioners in training and development.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should explore the impact Transition GPS has on helping veterans to avoid becoming homeless. Specifically, future research should explore the transition of homeless veterans to determine whether ineffective transition programs increase the possibility of African American veterans becoming homeless. African American veterans account for 33 percent of the homeless veterans in American (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). In 2017 veteran homelessness was down 47 percent because of the VA Open Door strategic plan implemented in 2010. The VA Open Door strategic plan is the combined efforts of federal agencies that coordinate and share responsibility to assist veterans with housing and services intervention (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). Like all veterans, African American veterans are leaving the military at unprecedented rates. It is crucial for HRD practitioners to understand this populations career concerns, so they can potentially help reduce the number of homeless veterans.

Another area of consideration for future research is the transition experience of female veterans. Greer (2017) found female veterans faced unemployment,

underemployment, and career development challenges in greater numbers than their male counterparts. Compounding female veteran transition challenges is helping career development practitioners to understand the military culture of these veterans in order to make meaning of their experiences and transition to civilian life (Repert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014). The population of females in the military is expected to increase while the population of males in the military is expected to decrease (Repert, et al.; US. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013). The Business and Professional Women's Foundation conducted a research study for the Women Veterans in Transition Project and found women veterans needed practical and psychological support when transitioning to civilian life and employment (Business and Professional Women's, 2007). Future research on African American female veterans could improve their transition experiences and civilian employment outcomes. Table 6 highlights some of the directions for new research. Future research in the focus areas listed could help to improve African American veterans' outlook on transitioning from military to civilian life.

Table 6

Implications for Future Research

Focus	Implication for Future Research
Career Counseling	Career development staff training on how to aid veterans with résumé development and interview preparation is necessary to help practitioners understand African American veteran’s culture and experiences with the nuances of military work.
Preventing Homelessness	Homeless veterans need transition assistance and should be researched to discuss ways that can help these veterans. Minority veterans may face higher odds of being homeless.
Female Veterans Transition	Female veterans face more significant challenges than male veterans. African American female veterans may face more significant challenges than their White counterparts. African American female veterans’ transition assistance is necessary to help improve their successful transition to civilian life.
Training and Development	Training and development programs are necessary to help veterans understand their transition experiences and to help African American veterans make better decisions during their Transition GPS program briefing.

Implications for Practice

This research sought to better understand the transition experiences of African American veterans as they transitioned to civilian life and employment. Veterans made recommendations which may lead to a smoother transition to employment and civilian

life for African American veterans. The veterans consistently highlighted assistance with resume writing as a crucial skill to support them during a transition, and the veterans also noted feeling isolated in their employment experience which led to them seeking employment that was similar to their earlier military occupation.

Resume Writing. The participants in this study expressed their desire to have more training and help with resume writing so they would have an excellent resume that translated their military skills. Many of the veterans had the feeling they were not competitive for civilian jobs because of their resumes. Resumes are crucial to helping veterans secure the first interview when seeking civilian employment. Several factors are challenges for veterans getting the first interview, but the transition from a military to civilian resume was the most challenging (Sargent, 2014). Table 7 displays areas for potential new research. The focus areas may help veterans with their job searches, interview skills, and resume writing.

Table 7

Implications for Practice – Resume Writing

Focus	Implication for Practice – Resume Writing
Professional Coach	Give veterans the choice to seek professional coaching and writing assistance with their resume.
Transferable Skills	Veterans need to develop skills to help them translate their military occupational specialty and duties into articulated skills employers understand. Practitioners can also play a role in helping African American veterans translate their skills.

Career Counseling. The veterans taking part in this research study recommended those responsible for the transition of veterans provide career development services as well. The veterans suggested the implementation of career-focused training in conjunction with the education services office on each military installation. Education and employment are crucial to the success of transitioning African American veterans and gives meaning and purpose to their life (Miles, 2014). Table 8 highlights future direction for new research in career counseling. Research in the focus area could provide insight into counseling and mentoring African American veterans through a successful transition. Several career counseling theories have application for helping veterans transition. These theories include the Super’s Developmental Theory and Happenstance Learning theory.

Table 8

Implications for Practice – Career Counseling

Focus	Implication for Practice – Career Counseling
Transition GPS	Implement human resource development practices into Transition GPS training. Staff members at all Transition GPS locations should receive training in human resource development so they can help veterans identify careers related to their military skills and provide training to help veterans understand their transition.
Mentor or Sponsor	Implement a sponsorship program for transitioning veterans. Throughout their career veterans are supported by a sponsor when they arrive at a new unit. Sponsors help with the acculturation of unit members. Therefore, it is important for career counselor to understand how to help veterans transition into their new roles as civilian and employees.

Implications for Theory

The theoretical frameworks for this study were Schlossberg’s Transition Theory, Hayes Career Development Theory, and Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory has been shown to have application for veterans’ transition. Consistent with Anderson and Goodman (2014) the participants in this study will find the 4S Model helpful during their transition. The higher education and successful transition of African American veterans will require veterans to take an active role in their transition. Consistent with the research of Ahern et al. (2015) the participants expressed the lack of civilian structure as a challenge during their transition.

After serving in the military, many veterans return to their old communities expecting to find the transition easy because of their military service.

Diamond (2012) Adaptive Military Transition Theory focuses on the transition of veterans to higher education. Transition theory states that individuals manage transitions differently. The variability stems mostly from differences in people's resources and deficits as they approach transitions (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

Thoroughly understanding the participant's transition stages using Schlossberg's (1985) Adult Transition Theory led to the emergence of constructs for the development of the Adaptive Military Transition Theory. A holistic representation of transition, the Adaptive Military Transition Theory was created for application to further the understanding of individuals experiencing life changes and transition.

Likewise, Hayes Career Development Model and Mezirow's Transformation used collaboratively results in a new transition model that becomes an Adult Learning Model for organizations and veterans to use as a guide to manage their transition from military to civilian life. This theory gives veterans the ability to reflect critically and have more control over their transition. The theory also presents a model of strategic steps and emphasize the importance of collaboration between the military's transition program and military support organizations that support veteran transitions.

Reflection on the Study

As a collective force, veterans lose their cultural identity when they joined the total institution environment of the military. It is crucial to understand veterans according to their ethnic group because the challenges veterans face during their

transition are different based on their ethnic group. This study was challenging but resulted in significant joy in some instances and distress in other instances as participants discussed their experiences. Precautions to prevent getting too close to the veterans were taken to maintain the integrity of the research and data.

There were several moments during the research where assumptions were made about the participants' experiences. I listened to the recorded interviews three times and reread the transcribed interviews to reduce personal biases and assumptions. I acknowledge that there may be some bias in this study since it may not be possible to eliminate all research bias. Leading question bias, respondent bias, and cultural bias may be present in this study. However, I made every attempt to ensure that I did not lead questions by avoiding summarizing what the participant said. Furthermore, I ensured the research questions were open-ended questions, so the participant could tell their story. Lastly, I acknowledged as an African American veteran the need to remain positive and keep culture from impacting the participant's responses.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the limited number of African American veterans used to collect the data. It was challenging to get African American veterans to participate in the study which may be a result of their cultural beliefs. The veterans that did volunteer all served in the military over twenty years. The participant's age and the length of time they have been out of the military is also a limitation of this study since the military is always changing its policies and procedures. The study did not examine the experiences of younger veterans which have their own unique set of challenges and

barriers when transitioning from the military. It may have been helpful to have a broader range of veterans taking part in this study to get a picture of African American veterans in all age groups. Unfortunately, when asked to participate in the study the younger veterans refused. The African American veterans recruited for this study were recruited using veterans service centers and a military unit which may have an impact on the analysis of the data depending on the veterans' motivation for taking part in the study. The hope is that the veterans positively took part, gave honest answers, and were not taking part through a negative lens of their military experiences and service.

Another limitation of the study was none of the participants were combat arms veterans; the participants served in the combat service support specialty for their branch of the military which do have civilian equivalent job matches. Another limitation of this study was it included the lived experiences of officer and senior enlisted members from various branches of the military. Researching younger groups of enlisted service members may yield different results. Additionally, the participants were male and female veterans which are a limitation of the study since female veterans have a unique set of challenges when transitioning from the military.

Conclusions

This phenomenological study was conducted to understand the transition experiences and higher education experiences of African American veterans. In this study, six African American veterans shared their transition experiences and made recommendations to improve the transition training for military personnel leaving the military service in the future. The findings from the in-depth interviews of the study

participants resulted in several areas of concern for this population of veterans as they transition out of the military. The veterans expressed their concerns about employment as they transitioned because of their desire to take care of their families financially. Furthermore, the participant's willingness to share their lived experiences during the in-depth interviews contribute to the sparse literature on this population of veterans. This research also highlights the need for further research on African American veterans' higher education experiences and employment after they leave the military.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory has application for helping veterans transition and to understand their transition. The 4S Model Framework was presented as the guide to support veterans understanding of their transition. The desire was for this study to provide meaningful contributions to the understanding of the theory and research on African American veterans' transition. It was also the hope that human resource development practitioners will develop a deeper understanding of African American veterans' military service, culture, language, rank structure, and cultural norms to assist them with a smoother transition to civilian life and employment.

This research contributes to human resource development and African American veteran's employment by presenting the transition experiences of military career African American veterans. The need to provide career counseling for African American veterans will help them to identify their skills gained during military service. Faced with the challenges of civilian life this population need to understand and be prepared for life after the military. Higher education and employment will improve the socioeconomic status of this population. Gaining a better understanding of this population will help to

improve their transition experiences and result in successful transitions to civilian life and employment. Moreover, this research should inform human resource development professional on how to help this unique population with their career development and transition challenges.

Another contribution of the study was to inform African American veterans about their role during their transition to civilian life, higher education, and employment. The successful transition of African American veterans requires not only for key individuals to follow the guidelines of the Transition GPS program but for this population to take charge of their transition. It is my hope that this population will take an active role in their transition and seek more transition training beyond the required mandatory training. Like other veteran ethnic groups, this population has made significant contributions during their military service and as they leave the military, it is important to ensure their successful transition.

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APPENDIX A

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM CONSENT FORM

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: A Phenomenological Study of African American Veterans' Experiences as They Transition to Civilian Life Using the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) Program

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Robert L. Bartee Sr., a Ph.D. student, and Dr. Larry Dooley, an associate professor from Texas A&M University, College of Education and Human Resource Development. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the higher education and civilian employment experiences of African American veterans after transitioning out of the military.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are an African American veteran and transitioned out of the military to higher education and civilian employment.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

Eight to ten participants will be invited to participate in this study locally.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

The alternative to being in the study is not to participate. No other activity will be given if you choose not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

You will be asked to take part in a face to face interview, which last one to two hours. A short follow up interview may be conducted face to face, by telephone, or email. You may also be asked to review the transcript of your own interview afterwards. Your participation in this study will last up to three hours and includes a maximum of two visits.

Visit 1

This visit will last about two hours. During this visit the interviewer will introduce the study briefly and walk through the consent form. You will be provided (as much time as you require) to read through the consent form and ask questions. After you sign the consent form, the interviewer will proceed with the interview.

Participant's Initial _____



**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

Visit 2

If the interviewer have further questions or need clarification about the interview, they may contact you and ask for a second visit. During the second visit, the interviewer will ask follow-up questions that may arise from the first visit. These questions may be asked through a face to face interview, by telephone call, or an email.

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

Your participation in the interview will be audio recorded with your permission.

Language for Required recordings: English

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the interview can be transcribed verbatim. The researcher will take notes of your comments during the interview, if you do not give permission for the audio recording to be obtained.

The researcher will make an audio recording during the study so the interview can be transcribed verbatim only if you give your permission to do so. Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

_____ I give my permission for audio recording to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

_____ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

The things that you will be doing are no more/greater risks than you would come across in everyday life. There are no physical, criminal, social, financial, economic, psychological risk as well as risks associated with breach of privacy or confidentiality.

Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

Are There Any Benefits To Me?

The direct benefit to you by being in this study is you will have an opportunity to reflect on your military experience, transition, and employment experiences.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Participant's Initial _____



**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

If you suffer any injury as a result of taking part in this research study, please understand nothing has been arranged to provide free treatment of injury or any other type of payment. However, all needed facilities, emergency treatment and professional services will be available to you, just as they are to the community in general. You should report any injury to 979-219-7475. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will receive a \$25 Visa Gift Card. Disbursement will occur after the interview is completed. The interviewer will hand you the gift card at the end of the interview.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Dr. Larry Dooley and Robert L. Bartee Sr. will have access to the records.

Information about you will be stored in a locked file cabinet; computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A& M University Human Research Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

The agency that funds this study and the institution(s) where study procedures are being performed (Texas A&M University) may also see your information. However, any information that is sent to them will be coded with a number so that they cannot tell who you are. Representatives from these entities can see information that has your name on it if they come to the study site to view records. If there are any reports about this study, your name will not be in them.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Larry Dooley, Ph.D., to tell him/her about a concern or complaint about this research at 979-845-5300 or l-dooley@tamu.edu. For alternate contact you may also contact the Protocol Director, Robert L. Bartee Sr. at 832-623-0922 or barteerl@tamu.edu.

Participant's Initial _____



**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your academic standing as a student, medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want, and I can still receive services if I stop participating in this study. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name Date

Participant's Initial _____



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN VETERANS' EXPERIENCES AS THEY TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE USING THE TRANSITION GOALS, PLANS, SUCCESS (GPS) PROGRAM

Interview Questions

1. What factors influenced your decision to join the military?
2. What were your experiences as you transitioned out of the military service?
3. How prepared were you for your transition after receiving transition assistance counseling and training?
4. Describe your experiences as an African American student veteran.
5. What were some of the responses from employers during your employment search?
6. What factors influenced your career transition and the pursuit of higher education?
7. Describe your experience utilizing the GI Bill.
8. What advantages did you notice as an African American student and veteran?
9. What was the top three reason you decided to leave the military?
10. How do you perceive yourself as an African American veteran?
11. Do you believe your military experiences were an advantage for civilian employment?
12. How do you believe other perceive you as an African American veteran?
13. How would you describe your satisfaction with your civilian employment?
14. After completing the transition assistance program, what changes would you recommend to help with the transition of other African American veterans?
15. How did higher education prepare you for civilian employment?
16. As an African American veteran, how did career transition help in preparing you for civilian employment?
17. What recommendations would you give an African American veteran preparing to transition from the military?



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