CALIFORNIA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Riverside, California

Military Retention: Quit Decision-Making Process of Servicewomen

A Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Public Administration

Julian Vincent Taylor

School of Online and Professional Studies

Department of Public Administration

February 2020

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This dissertation written by

Julian Vincent Taylor
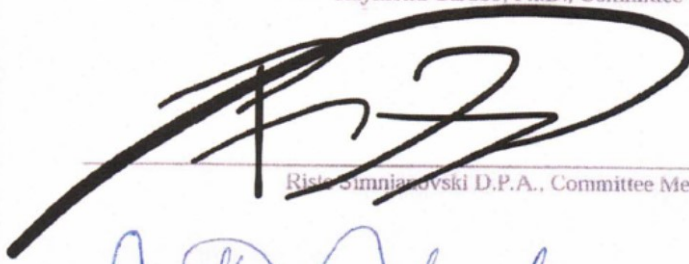
has been approved by the

Division of Online and Professional Studies at California Baptist University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Public Administration

Raymond Garubo
Raymond Garubo, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Risto Simnianovski D.P.A., Committee Member

Jon Delgado, D.P.A., Committee Member

Dirk Davis, Ed.D., Associate Vice President of Academics

ABSTRACT

This qualitative grounded theory study examined the decision-making process of female U.S. military veterans who chose to leave active duty service and who are civilian federal employees with the Department of Defense (DOD). To date, the military community continues to experience widespread voluntary turnover of its female workforce who are critical to the mission readiness and functional capability of the armed forces. Understanding of consistent voluntary turnover remains limited in the literature and does not sufficiently explain the organizational exit behavior of servicewomen. Data were collected through semistructured interviews involving 15 female veterans of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force military branches. From participants' rich descriptions, the researcher developed a narrative to understand the process of withdrawing from military service. By using a synthesis grounded theory design to analyze data, the basic social psychological process (BSPP) *opportunity cost* (a commonly shared problem among research participants) was identified (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1996). Moreover, the basic social process (BSP) emerged as a 3-stage process that explained servicewomen's decision-making process when leaving the military. The 3 stages include (a) motivational interests, (b) influential factors and experiences, and (c) psychological impacts. The findings of this study may contribute to the limited military turnover and retention literature as well as extend the knowledge of government officials, military leadership, and public administration practitioners concerned with female exit behavior. Recommendations for future research are provided. *Keywords:* Active duty service, grounded theory, service member, veteran, quit decision

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

Most importantly, thank you, God, for giving me strength and endurance to complete this journey. When I was tempted to give up, you were there to lead me forward.

To my son, Christopher, who is the inspiration and joy of my life. I love you with all my heart. I could not have done this without your unconditional love and support.

To my extended family and friends, thank you for your continued prayers and support. You will forever be in my heart.

To the men and women of the armed forces. Thank you for your service and for defending our nation and freedom!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Military Retention: Quit Decision-Making Process of Servicewomen

This study sought to explore the decision-making process of female servicemembers who have chosen to leave the U.S. Armed Services, which they voluntarily joined. The intent of this qualitative study was to examine with a purposive sample of female veterans their deliberation approach concerning their career longevity in the military. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this inquiry would perhaps afford new insights and help to increase female retention throughout all branches of the U.S. military. This research employed a systematic grounded theory research methodology to illustrate the phenomenon under examination. Participants of this study included a nonprobability selected group of female veterans who are federal employees with the Department of Defense (DOD).

This chapter begins with an overview of the background and context that frames the study. What follows is the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Also included in this chapter are assumptions and delimitations as well as key definitions of terms used throughout the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion outlining the organization of the study.

Background and Context of the Problem

A priority and concern for many businesses within the United States is securing employee retention in a competitive talent market (Al Mamun & Hasan, 2017; Bryant & Allen, 2013; Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Lee, Hom, Eberly, & Li, 2018; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016). Failing to fortify employee retention may give rise to direct and indirect costs for organizations. Direct costs manifest as monetary expenses incurred by

organizations as a result of administrative processing fees, training and development

costs, recruitment expenses, and employee orientation expenses (Al Mamun & Hasan,

2017; Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011). On the other hand, indirect costs are indicated

with losses in production and customer service, diminished employee diversity, loss of

organizational strategic knowledge, and subject matter experience (D. G. Allen, Bryant,

& Vardaman, 2010; Lee et al., 2018). Research has suggested that poor retention

management could cost organizations upwards of 100% of the annual salary for the

position being filled (Cascio, 2006). Likewise, consider a business that employs 500

workers at an average salary of $30,000 with a 3% turnover rate. In this scenario, the

business would bear a turnover cost of $450,000. By reducing its turnover rate by 1%,

the company would yield a bottom-line savings of $150,000 (Gupta-Sunderji, 2004).

Indeed, strong employee retention is cost-effective for American businesses to thrive. In

the same way retention management is a pressing concern for American businesses, the

same is true for the U.S. public sector workforce.

Retention among U.S. public sector employees has been a consistent concern for

researchers within the past 2 decades. In fact, many researchers have investigated

workforce retention within the U.S. government and its many agencies (Piatak, 2017;

Pitts, Marvel, & Fernandez, 2011; Light, 1999). Government employee retention is a

pressing issue, in part, because of the significant financial burden that poor retention

management can create for government agencies. Poor employee retention imposes

substantial costs on government agencies, including separation costs, such as severance

compensation, as well as replacement costs, such as talent acquisition expenses (D. G.

Allen, 2008; Pitts et al., 2011). Similarly, research has suggested that direct replacement

costs can rise to as much as 60% of an employee's yearly salary with overall costs associated with turnover reaching as high as 200% of annual compensation (Cascio, 2006). Economic conditions may also affect public service employee retention. Research examining sector switching (i.e., moving from public to private industries) concluded that government and nonprofit employees are more inclined to move into the private workforce during periods of labor market instability (Piatak, 2017). Clearly, inadequate retention management may have a dire impact on government organizations' efficiency and effectiveness. In this respect, retention management has also been a major point of interest for U.S. military organizations.

Several studies have investigated retention concerns within the U.S. military (Kapp, 2002; Sminchişe, 2016; Snodgrass, 2014). Since the 1990s and continuing well into the late 2000s, U.S. military organizations have endured retention deficits of their active duty workforce (Kapp, 2002; Snodgrass, 2014). Three major factors have been identified to have a significant influence on military retention: quality of work (e.g., the environment and locations of military operations); quality of life (e.g., the shortage of needed supplies and equipment on hand); and quality of leadership, in particular, inadequate senior leadership (Kapp, 2002; Sminchişe, 2016). Moreover, retention in the military lacks sustainment of enlisted service members overall, the retention of officers in certain paygrades, and the retention of critical specialists of both enlisted and officer servicemembers (Kapp, 2002). For example, in 2013, the U.S. Navy's junior-officer retention rate was the lowest of lieutenant commanders opting to stay for advancement to the next pay grade; in fact, it marked the worst in history for the Navy's special warfare community (Snodgrass, 2014). Additionally, there has been a shortfall in the number of

strike-fighter and electronic-warfare aviators eligible for department-head positions; this occurrence is highlighted by the "take rate" (i.e., monetary compensation selectees receive in return for assuming department-head job duties) decline to 36%, far below the optimal end strength goal of 45% (Snodgrass, 2014). The retention of military personnel is essential to the mission readiness of the armed services, as well as the morale of servicemembers, and to limiting the expense for recruiting, training, and replacing human capital (Kapp, 2002; Sminchişe, 2016). Thus, two critical questions must be asked: (a) What can be done to improve military retention rates; and (b) what demographic is best served to help improve retention rates? While the former question has been addressed through congressional and executive branch initiatives, such as the repeal of the Redux retirement plan and Personnel TEMPO or PERSTEMPO management (Kapp, 2002), the latter question has been the focus of researchers concerned with female employees and their presence in the labor force (see Definitions of Terms section for "Redux" and "Personnel Tempo").

Numerous studies have examined retention concerns regarding female employees in the labor market (Gadekar, 2013; Gupta-Sunderji, 2004; Lyness & Judiesch, 2001; Still, 2006; Yousaf, Humayon, Rasheed, Ahmed, & Danish, 2014). In today's global economy, female employees have significantly increased in the labor market; as a result of this growth, organizations have been forced to be diligent in understanding and acting upon the factors that compel employees, specifically women, to either stay or leave their organizations (Gupta-Sunderji, 2004). While the number of female workers has increased in the labor market, their turnover rate has also increased (Yousaf et al., 2014), which influences female retention. In a meta-analysis study, researchers determined that

there are higher levels of organizational turnover among women than there are for their male counterparts (Cotton & Tuttle, 1986). A study of 127 female managers found that women had a higher propensity to change firms than men even after controlling for the following variables: age, tenure, education, and mobility (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1996). Moreover, research that examined graduate degree holders found that women experienced durations of voluntary career interruptions (i.e., blocks of time spent unemployed) more often than men since receiving their degrees (Schneer & Reitman, 1990). Thus, the literature suggests that females may be more likely to voluntarily leave their organizations, consequently reducing the retention rate of their respective organizations. Such a phenomenon has sparked research that examines female retention in public organizations such as the U.S. military.

A number of studies have examined the concerns of military organizations in retaining female servicemembers (Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services [DACOWITS], 2017; DiSilverio, 2003; Moore, 2002; Smith & Rosenstein, 2017). Since the advent of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) and the repeal of the ground combat exclusion rule, which removed the institutional barrier and allowed women to integrate into all military occupational specialties, women have become a critical component to the male-dominated U.S. military workforce (Moore, 2002; Smith & Rosenstein, 2017). However, despite the imminent need to retain women servicemembers, many leave the military before fulfilling their first term of service (Smith & Rosenstein, 2017), and as a result, they are underrepresented throughout the military ranks, especially at the higher levels of leadership (DACOWITS, 2017). Since July 2017, the ratio of women in the highest levels of authority has been much lower than

in the junior officer ranks; the proportion of female officers decreased two thirds from the lowest to highest ranking position and by approximately 50% from the lowest to highest ranking enlisted paygrades (DACOWITS, 2017). The previously mentioned data raise questions about the underlying causes of early separation among female servicemembers in today's military. Unfortunately, due to a lack of knowledge by the services on the underlying causes of female attrition and a lack of definitive data that pinpoint the main reasons for their separation, the low retention of servicewomen may persist (DACOWITS, 2017; Moore, 2002). The need for female servicemembers will continue to proliferate as policy reform continues to expand for servicewomen and as military organizations increase their female population. Research that examines the process by which females make decisions and the factors influencing their choice is a topic of inquiry that may help draw military organizations closer to an optimal female workforce end strength.

Considerable research attention has been directed toward female servicemembers and the factors surrounding their retention decision (Dichter & True, 2015; Kelley et al., 2001; Lancaster et al., 2013; Majkowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). Factors such as quality of life (i.e., personal and work/military quality), post-deployment social support, and both gender and sexual harassment experiences have been found to be at the crux of female servicemembers' deliberation process as they decide on the longevity of their military careers (Lancaster et al., 2013; Majkowski et al., 2015). Moreover, other interpersonal factors that conflict with the rigor and demand of military service (e.g., mental/behavioral health problems, inadequate caregiving, and domestic violence) appear to be at the forefront of the minds of females as they move toward their retention decision

(Dichter & True, 2015). While there is some consensus among researchers that the aforementioned factors influence female servicemembers' retention, the literature lacks research that focuses on females' decision-making process, which ultimately leads to their retention choice. In a longitudinal study that examined predictors of male and female servicemembers' likelihood to remain in the military, researchers suggested that while factors such as command/unit social support and mental health support guided female retention decisions, many unidentified factors may also be swaying servicewomen's decision-making process (Lancaster et al., 2013). Therefore, this study sought to shed light on the decision-making process of female veterans and the factors influencing their process.

The Problem Statement

The imminent problem concerning this study is that the U.S. military is failing to retain females at an optimal rate. Female retention in the U.S. military as a whole is deficient, with women representing only 16% of the U.S. military's workforce in 2017 (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2017). However, women currently account for approximately 50% of the U.S. population (Howden & Meyer, 2011). This disparaging percentage difference illuminates the fact that the U.S. military is not retaining women on par with the population they are charged to protect. Government officials and military leaders have spoken out concerning the importance of integrating more women into military service organizations. For example, former Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) Raymond Mabus in an address to the National Press Club noted, "We don't have enough women in either the Navy or the Marine Corps, and we've got to do a better job of recruiting and we've got to do a better job of retaining those women" (Jones, 2015, para.

1). Moreover, current female retention rates are below targeted goals of senior military leaders. One of the Navy's top leaders, Admiral Michelle Howard, asserted that the U.S. Navy needs a workforce of at least 25% female to normalize workplace retention, deter acts of sexual assault, and diversify thinking (Kovach, 2015). With the Navy's current female retention rate of 19% (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2018), the organization may lack the required female end strength to ensure mission readiness. In light of the U.S. military's female retention problem, the literature has revealed some factors that may influence their decision-making process.

What researchers know concerning servicewomen's decision-making process is that factors such as impediments to caregiving, military pay, sexual harassment and assault, unit support (i.e., motivation and support from senior leadership and fellow servicemembers), quality of leadership, career progression, and work-life balance are contemplated and heavily weighed during their retention choice (DACOWITS, 2017; Dichter & True, 2015; Moore, 2002; Vasterling et al., 2015). The decision to stay in or leave the military is a major undertaking for any servicemember because the choice can have life-altering consequences (DACOWITS, 2017; Dichter & True, 2015). In situations where females must make critical decisions that could impact their future in the military, some recurring factors emerge that guide their choices. Research that examined parenting in the military, military pay, access to childcare resources, and female pregnancy found that the economical and psychological challenges associated with child rearing in the military factored significantly into women's decisions to continue their military service (DACOWITS, 2017; Dichter & True, 2015). In a phenomenological study of 35 U.S. women veterans who examined their military retention decision,

researchers found that experiences of sexual assault contributed significantly to women's decisions to separate from service. Participants in the study pointed to the military's poor handling of their sexual assault cases and the risk of being assaulted again as a major consideration in their decision-making process to leave the military (Dichter & True, 2015). The study by Vasterling et al. (2015) examined the demographic and psychosocial predictors of military retention after deployment and determined that unit support was a key factor for a soldier's retention decision-making. Participants in the study who reported reduced levels of unit support were twice as likely to separate from service as participants who reported elevated levels of support from their command leadership and peers. Lastly, a study utilizing focus groups to examine the midcareer retention of women on active duty found that participants frequently indicated that the strain between work-life balance and career progression guided their decision-making process to stay in or leave military service (DACOWITS, 2017). Although researchers have identified some factors that may influence a female's decision-making process, efforts to improve these identified factors may not be yielding the desired retention outcomes expected by the U.S. Armed Services.

In light of the aforementioned impeding factors and U.S. government officials' efforts to mitigate the impact these factors have on female servicemembers' decision-making process, females continue to leave active duty service more often than their male counterparts (DACOWITS, 2017; Moore, 2002; Snodgrass, 2014). In response to female servicemembers' retention concerns and in an effort to improve female retention within the U.S. military, Congress, along with the executive branch and military senior leaders, taken steps to combat factors influencing servicewomen's decision-making process

(DACOWITZ, 2017; Kapp, 2002). For example, Congress passed many legislative initiatives to increase pay, increase reenlistment bonuses, and reform the services' outdated retirement plan (Kapp, 2002) as a means to improve servicemembers' quality of life, thereby enticing servicewomen to stay longer. The executive branch, in conjunction with U.S. military leadership, has enacted many administrative policies aimed at improving the following retention concerns: better access to childcare facilities, better military housing resources, and better oversight regarding sexual harassment and assault claims (DACOWITS, 2017; Kapp, 2002). However, despite the efforts of government and military officials, female servicemembers continue to have shorter periods of service and communicate dissatisfaction with their time in spent in the military (Caforios & Nuciari, 2006; D'Amico & Lee, 1999). More pointedly, research conducted by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission (2011) concluded that both enlisted women's retention rates and female officers' continuation rates have been on a downturn for the past decade. Thus, there may be more pressing, undiscovered factors infringing on servicewomen's decision-making process.

Numerous contemporary scholars have been urging researchers to seek out and examine the critical factors influencing servicewomen's decision-making processes (DACOWITZ, 2017; Kelley et al., 2001; Lancaster et al., 2013; Majkowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). In communicating the limitations of their study, researchers acknowledged that while many decision-making factors have been identified that guide servicewomen's retention decision-making process (e.g., caregiving, sexual harassment, organizational support, quality of leadership, career progression, and work-life balance), the amount of variance explained in reenlistment intentions of women, as well as the low

correlation between these decision-making factors and voluntary turnover, has suggested that there are other important, unmeasured factors swaying females' decision-making process (Lancaster et al., 2013; Lyness & Judiesch, 2001). In a qualitative study that examined 18 servicewomen's enlistment and retention motivations and postdeployment experiences, researchers concluded that although themes, such as pay and benefits, guided many women's decisions to make the military their long-term career, more expanded studies on the female retention decision-making process would elicit a framework for future military programs and policies that would address female servicemembers' specific needs (Majkowski et al., 2015). Significant amounts of time and money are invested in recruiting and training female servicemembers, but these efforts are futile if military branches cannot retain women long term. An informed understanding of a female's decision-making process and the factors influencing their choice may shed light on why women leave military service. Thus, this study explored the retention decision-making process of female military veterans and the factors that influenced their choice to leave active duty service.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore the decision-making process of female U.S. military veterans who chose to leave active duty service and who were civilian federal employees with the DOD in 2019. The study led to explanatory circumstances using grounded theory that described and highlighted the different elements of female veterans' decision-making processes. Semistructured interviews with the study participants were used to help elicit a deep cognitive understanding of the experiences and influences that contributed to a female's decision to leave active duty

11

service. Moreover, this study was designed to aid military leadership in developing tools and policies focused on increasing female retention throughout the U.S. military. Thus, this study examined servicewomen's lived experiences and described their decision-making process for leaving active duty service.

Qualitative research allows researchers to explore problems substantively and in great detail (Patton, 2002). Similarly, grounded theory research goes beyond the realm of descriptive and interpretive research and aims at developing a theory of a process, action, or interaction (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this study aimed to develop a theory from themes that emerged from data concerning the retention decision-making process of female servicemembers who left their affiliated military organizations.

Research Questions

The following research questions served to guide this study:

1. What was the conscious decision-making process female servicemembers followed when deliberating their decision to leave active duty service?

2. What are the noteworthy experiences and factors that led female servicemembers to leave active duty service?

3. In what ways did these experiences and factors contribute to female servicemembers' decision to leave active duty service?

Significance of the Problem

This study provides extended knowledge on the analysis of female retention within the U.S. military. The findings of this study are intended to equip military organizations with information that may aid in highlighting causes and factors that influence females to leave active duty service. Many studies have highlighted factors that

contribute to the U.S. military's female retention rate; however, none have examined the decision-making process females experience when leaving active duty service. This study aimed to explore this phenomenon, thus adding to the current body of knowledge.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) suggested that grounded theory is best suited for studies lacking ample research on a phenomenon of interest. This study provides research directly from the servicewomen's point of view as to why they chose to leave active duty service. The theory developed in this study could assist with future research and provide government organizations and public administration practitioners a tool for female retention analysis.

Assumptions and Delimitations

An assumption of this study was that the researcher would attempt to understand the context in which the participants in the study described the process of leaving active duty military service. Moreover, it was assumed that the process servicewomen experienced prompted them to leave active duty military service. Furthermore, it was assumed that the participants in this study were forthcoming and impartial with their responses.

Overall, the researcher was cognizant of the potential bias that participants may have harbored toward their respective military organization. If participants displayed contempt concerning their decision to leave active duty, then they may have overstated their experiences and the processes that resulted in their exit in order to cast the U.S. military in a bad light. Therefore, the researcher was vigilant and sought out potential indicators that highlighted participants' resentfulness and strife for leaving active duty service. Additionally, participants may not have been overtly honest because they may

have feared that disclosing their experience could adversely impact their standings with peers or career prospects. Therefore, the researcher continuously ensured that the identities and data given by the participants were safeguarded.

There were a few delimitations within this study that must be addressed. First, the researcher chose to narrow the focus of this study to female military veterans. This allowed for a consistent investigation of those that have served in the U.S. military and experienced the retention decision-making process. Second, the research was focused solely on female U.S. military veterans who at one point served on active duty status. In doing so, the descriptive accounts of the participants' experiences stood alone as valid and reliable data, which is essential for qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Third, this study excluded female reservists, female DOD contractors, and female veterans of the Department of Homeland Security (excluding Coast Guard veterans). While there is unquestionable merit for including these additional populations, the study focused predominantly on female U.S. military veterans because they are underrepresented, and very few studies have examined the decision-making process within this population (Majkowski et al., 2015).

Definitions of Terms

The follow definitions were used to frame this study:

Active duty service is a full-time military person who must be "available for duty 24 hours per day, 7 days a week . . . active duty members fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Defense and can serve in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard" ("What is a veteran," 2019, para. 3).

Grounded theory is "a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or an interaction about a substantive topic" (Creswell, 2015, p. 426).

Personnel Tempo or PERSTEMPO is the "rate at which military personnel are deployed away from their home station. Until recently, this was usually measured on a unit basis, rather than an individual basis . . . each of the Services now track the personnel tempo of each individual" (Kapp, 2002, p. CRS-38).

Quit decision is the process of voluntarily leaving one's current employer.

Redux retirement plan is concerned with public law or P.L. 106-65, sections 641-644. P.L. 106-65 "repealed compulsory Redux and gave military personnel the option of retiring under the old, more generous, pre-Redux retirement pay computation formula, or retiring under Redux with an immediate cash bonus" (Kapp, 2002, p. CRS 33).

Servicemember is "a member of the 'uniformed services,' consisting of the armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard), the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Services" ("What is a veteran," 2019, para. 1).

Veteran is defined as "a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable" (Pensions, Bonuses, and Veterans' Relief, 2019).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 has presented the background and context of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, assumptions and delimitations, the definitions of terms, and the organization of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature. It discusses the following: a historical overview of women in the U.S. military occupation, female retention issues in the U.S. military, and quit-decision models concerning workplace retention. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and procedures used to answer the research questions developed in Chapter 1. Additionally, this chapter includes the research design, target population and participant selection, detailed procedures, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings as well as identifies and discusses the specific themes that emerged from participant interviews. The final chapter, Chapter 5, reiterates the theory formulated through the findings; the chapter culminates with conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore the decision-making process of female U.S. military veterans who chose to leave active duty service and were civilian federal employees with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) in 2019. Specifically, the researcher sought to understand how the experiences of these individuals may have been influenced by unidentified factors that guided their decision to quit their military careers. To ensure that this study was comprehensive in scope, it was essential to complete a review of current literature. Admittedly, a comprehensive literature review within grounded theory research is controversial and has been vehemently argued by classical grounded theory researchers who suggest that the review can induce preconceptions in investigators who use this methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, a literature review is critical for setting a foundation to understanding the existing literature on factors influencing female veterans' decision-making process as well as provide context to seminal and contemporary models of decision-making within the literature. Idrees, Vasconcelos, and Cox (2011) suggested that the literature review plays an essential role at the initial stages of grounded theory research, but not to the extent that it leads to the development of preconceived themes and categories—the purpose of the review at the onset is to provide context and a general understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

This literature review explores the interconnectedness of the decision-making process of participants and the factors influencing their retention choice. In light of this, five major areas of literature were reviewed: (a) history of women's role in the U.S. military; (b) turnover; (c) female retention issues in the U.S. Armed Services; (d) quit

decision-making models; (e) grounded theory. A review of women's role in the U.S. military provides an understanding of the background and context in which women have embedded themselves in the U.S. labor force and have established their place in the armed services. Turnover was reviewed because of its relationship with employee retention. As the reciprocal of retention, turnover represents an employee who leaves an organization, whereas retention is the proportion of employees who remain in an organization. Understanding employee turnover underscores the significance of employee retention.

Female retention in the military was reviewed to provide context for understanding the harm military organizations face due to inadequate female retention. Additionally, this section outlined factors highlighted in the literature that may influence servicewomen's decision-making process. Quit decision-making models were reviewed to provide a conceptual understanding of how researchers have clarified and described the process of decision-making as it relates to workplace retention. Lastly, the qualitative grounded theory method literature relevant to this study was presented. The literature review summary presented salient points guiding the inspiration behind this grounded theory study of the quit decision-making process of females who chose to leave active duty military service and revealed the literature gap that necessitated this investigation.

To conduct this selected literature review, the researcher used multiple information sources such as books, professional journals, periodicals, dissertations, and Internet resources. These sources were accessed through California Baptist University Online Library, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). The researcher did

not adhere to a hardened time frame while conducting the literature search. Because of the significance of the four bodies of literature reviewed, the historical development, for example, of women in the workforce was essential to understanding the phenomenon under study—an established time frame might have precluded the identification of important relevant material.

Throughout the review, the researcher attempted to highlight significant gaps and oversights in particular sections of the literature as they became apparent. Moreover, relevant areas of contention or concern were identified and discussed. The review concludes with a summary section of the chapter and illustrates how the research material contributes to the current body of knowledge.

Women's Role in the U.S. Military

The history of women in the military dates back to the American Revolutionary War. Although women did not serve "formally under military command until the early part of the 20th century" (Department of Veterans Affairs [DVA], 2007, p. 2) due to inadequate legislation, women functioned in predominantly supportive roles from the Revolutionary War to the present-day wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Presently, approximately 16% of active military or one sixth of the workforce, 19% of Selected Reserves/National Guard (as of 2016), and 20% of new recruits are women (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2018; DOD, 2017). Nevertheless, until recent legislative changes, women were limited in their efforts to formally serve in all armed service branches, thus creating a representative disparity among men and women in the military that continues to exist today.

In an effort to serve in the U.S. military, women would disguise themselves as men or as servants during the Revolutionary War because they were not officially welcomed into the military until the formation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in the 1940s (Morden, 1990). Prior to the creation of WAAC, women fought alongside men in pivotal U.S. conflicts such as the Civil War, during which at least 400 women assumed combat roles by disguising themselves as men; moreover, during World War I, approximately 34,000 women served as nurses throughout all branches of the military during this historic time (DVA, 2007). Although women had a calling within themselves to serve their country and often during times of conflict, they were not formally recognized as servicemembers because of their gender. More pointedly, the nursing corps, which was institutionalized as an auxiliary division of the Army in 1901, was given "only marginal status, since military women still had no military rank or were not given the benefits provide to men in the military and to male veterans" (DVA, 2007, p. 3).

The establishment of WAAC served as a legislative turning point for the active role women would have in the military. In 1942, WAAC was created as a supplementary branch of the U.S. Armed Forces in response to a shortage of military personnel. WAAC worked with the military but the organization was not formally part of the military; therefore, benefits such as overseas pay, government life insurance, veterans' hospitalization, death gratuity, and prisoner of war protection were not afforded to women (Morden, 1990). In 1943 during World War II, the U.S. Congress voted to remove "auxiliary" from WAAC's title, and in turn, women were given full military status with the newly named Women's Army Corps or WAC (DVA, 2007). As a result

of WAC's elevation in military status, members received monetary compensation as well as other benefits not previously offered to them; however, they were still restricted from serving in combat, weaponry training, holding senior leadership ranks (e.g., the highest officer paygrade was O-5; the highest enlisted paygrade was E-7), and commanding men (Morden, 1990). Although WAC was a legitimate division within the U.S. Army, due to cultural ideology at the time and male servicemembers' unfavorable attitudes toward WAC members, women who chose military serve were portrayed as shameful, immoral, disreputable, and even obscene (Morden, 1990). Nonetheless, WAC membership continued to grow along with women's roles in military conflict. In 1945 on Victory in Europe Day, approximately 100,000 women had served in WAC, and throughout World War II, roughly 350,000 women participated in the war effort (DVA, 2007; Morden, 1990).

On June 12, 1948, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act (WASIA) was signed into law by President Harry Truman, which enabled women to serve in the active duty and reserve forces of the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. Unfortunately, legislators embedded conditions within the act: The law limited the number of servicewomen to 2% of the total workforce in each branch, and women officers on active duty would be commissioned in three or four increments as opposed to one (Morden, 1990). Notwithstanding its restrictions, WASIA was a success for female integration throughout the entire U.S. military. Indeed, in 1950 there were roughly 22,000 women in the U.S. Armed Forces, and with the Korean Conflict, women military service increased to nearly 49,000 (DVA, 2007).

Shortages of military personnel and the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War prompted the justification to increase women's roles in the armed services. In 1967, President Johnson signed into law Public Law 90-130, which gave women in all branches of service equal promotion and retirement rights and removed the 2% cap on female military service, though the law retained the combat limitations imposed on servicewomen (DVA, 2007). With the passing of time, American societal views and beliefs began to shift regarding female servicemembers. During the Vietnam era, social division and political discontent was widespread throughout the country with numerous disenfranchised groups, particularly women, lobbying to gain equal status in society, and Public Law 90-130 removed many legislative barriers for women to advance through the military ranks (DVA, 2007).

Although the armed services began integrating women throughout their ranks, there were still limitations on what duties females could perform in the service. Servicewomen were restricted from working in direct ground combat occupations such as frontline battle operations and Special Forces (Middleton & Craig, 2012). Despite the military's occupational restrictions on females, they served in professions such as military police, fighter pilots, different components of convoy duties, intelligence, maintenance, medics, nurses, and doctors that exposed them to combat environments (Street, Vogt, & Dutra, 2009).

In 1973, the U.S. military transitioned into an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) at the end of the draft, and as a result, more occupational roles within the military opened up for women (DVA, 2007). Despite having trouble retaining servicewomen after the establishment of the AVF, data indicate that the military's total quantity of female

personnel, as well as the proportion of servicewomen, increased significantly (DVA, 2007). More pointedly, in 1973, approximately 55,000 women served on active duty, accounting for roughly 2.5% of the armed forces (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2018). By September 30, 2005, the total number of servicewomen on active duty status increased to more than 202,000, which equates to approximately 14% of the active duty military personnel (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2018).

The Gulf War of the 1990s marked "the first-time females were deployed in great numbers and were embedded in combat situations with their male counterparts" (Middleton & Craig, 2012, p. 234). Media outlets covering the Gulf War offered the American public a visible account of females serving in military conflict. These servicewomen represented 7.2% of those servicemembers who deployed to the Gulf War. Moreover, these women were seen accomplishing multiple military assignments and duties, taking up arms, and engaging in wartime conditions (Yoder & Naidoo, 2006).

On November 30th, 1994, on the back end of the Persian Gulf War, President Clinton signed Public Law 103–160 which repealed legislation that had prevented women from serving on combat aircrafts and combat vessels. The lifting of the law opened up 32,699 new job opportunities for servicewomen (Yoder & Naidoo, 2006). Subsequently, in 2011, the following figures were reported by the DVA regarding female servicemembers' active role within the military: (a) women represented nearly two million of U.S. military veterans; (b) roughly 450,000 women were currently serving in the military; (c) 200,000 women were on active duty; and (d) 250,000 women were in the Reserves and National Guard. Moreover, female servicemembers represented 13.6% of the Army, 6.8% of the Marine Corps, 16.4% of the Navy, 19.1% of the Air Force, 15.7%

of the Coast Guard, 19.5% of the Reserves, 15.5% of the National Guard, and 14.5% of DOD personnel as a whole (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2018). Yet, while women's service to the U.S. Armed Forces has been a long and devoted one, current retention rates suggest some unforeseen factors that may be infringing upon their longstanding commitment to military service (Kelley et al., 2001; Lancaster et al., 2013; Lyness & Judiesch, 2001; Smith & Rosenstein, 2017).

Turnover

Various perspectives concerning employee turnover were found throughout the literature. This study focused predominantly on how voluntary turnover progressed over time and identified the actions taken by individuals during their decision-making process. This perspective is significant because it aided in answering the research questions and offered insight for mitigating voluntary turnover within the U.S. Armed Forces. Dysfunctional voluntary turnover was at the crux of this study. While there are other forms of voluntary turnover, such as retirement and internal transfers, they are more functional and are therefore not a primary concern and outside the scope of this study.

There are two types of turnover, voluntary and involuntary, and often the literature does not differentiate between the two types. Involuntary turnover refers to employee termination. Reasons can range from poor performance or conduct issues to fiscal cuts or a reduction in force. However, involuntary turnover is not a criterion for inclusion and is defined for clarity purposes only. This study defined voluntary turnover as individuals' conscientious decision to leave their place of work but are desired by their employer for retention. Indeed, voluntary turnover and salient literature around its history was the aim of this discussion.

March and Simon's (1958) groundbreaking research introduced the concept of organizational equilibrium. The concept is based on the choice of the employee to continue his or her employment with his or her organization. The concept suggests that employees remain with their employers when they are compensated at a higher level than their perceived value and that employees remain satisfied, provided that their employer continues to compensate them above their perceived value (March & Simon, 1958; Tosi, 2009). March and Simon's (1958) work has become the groundwork for subsequent literature research (Hom, Mitchell, Lee, & Griffeth, 2012; Price, 1989). Nonetheless, compensation alone does not have a significant influence on the voluntary turnover behavior of military servicemembers (Boesel & Johnson, 1984).

Succeeding March and Simon's (1958) research on organizational equilibrium, numerous researchers developed several turnover models that have explained employee turnover and its consequences (Mobley, 1977; Price, 1977; Price, 1989; Price & Mueller, 1981). Dissatisfied with the widely held notion that suggests that there is a direct relationship between turnover and job satisfaction, Mobley (1977) posited that once an employee experiences dissatisfaction with his or her workplace, a series of thoughts develop that guides the employee through a withdrawal process. Alternatively, other turnover models (Price, 1977, 1989; Price & Mueller, 1981) have attempted to discover the direct and indirect turnover relationships broadly among satisfaction, commitment, and job alternatives. Several years later, voluntary turnover remains a continuous challenge for organizations, and the ability to anticipate voluntary turnover continues to drive research today.

During the same time, Boesel and Johnson (1984) argued that as the military becomes increasingly dependent on a skilled and experienced workforce, it is incumbent upon the armed forces to understand why individuals remain in the service and why they leave. By evaluating the literature and examining retention survey data, the researchers examined servicemember turnover. Previous research focused primarily on surveys and service records, and throughout the literature, Boesel and Johnson identified a general sense of theoretical inconsistency. Therefore, they evaluated factors from a monetary perspective in relation to personal and job characteristics (Boesel & Johnson, 1984).

Boesel and Johnson (1984) used the available data from the Air Force, Army, and Navy for their study. The Marine Corps did not maintain exit survey data, thus they were excluded from the research. They focused on individual characteristics such as education, test scores, age, race, marital status, dependents, attitudes, location (Buddin, 1981), and job characteristics. The results suggested that younger servicemembers withdraw the earliest. Age was the largest significant factor that influenced military longevity (Boesel & Johnson, 1984). Enlisted Air Force servicemembers who viewed educational benefits favorably were less likely to leave the military (Boesel & Johnson, 1984). In direct conflict with prior research results, family separation related positively to a significant number of reenlistments (Boesel & Johnson, 1984).

Although military research has examined turnover factors, it has not been undertaken beyond the scale and depth of civilian turnover research (Mustamil Yazdi, Syeh, & Ali, 2014; Palanski, Avey, & Jirapon, 2014). Nonetheless, military turnover research has made some strides in examining factors associated with servicemember turnover. Military voluntary turnover research has examined racism (Antecol & Cobb-

Clark, 2009), sexual harassment (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2006; Firestone, Hackett, &

Harris, 2012), hope/optimism (Bressler, 2010), post-training attrition (Buddin, 1981),

repatriation challenges (Bull Schaefer, Wiegand, MacDermid, Wadsworth, Green, &

Welch, 2013), spousal support (Bull Schaefer, Green, Saxena, Weiss, & MacDermid

Wadsworth, 2013), met expectations (Capon, Chernyshenko, & Stark, 2007; Griffeth,

Hom, & Gaertner, 2000), work-home conflict (Capon et al., 2007; Heilmann, Bell, &

McDonald, 2009; Zhang, Griffeth, & Fried, 2012), attitudes (Capon et al., 2007; Price,

2001), person-organization fit (Holtom, Smith, Lindsay, & Burton, 2014), personal and

job characteristics (Price, 2001), first-term women exits (Royle, 1983), and community

embeddedness (Smith, Holtom, & Mitchell, 2011). Many initiatives in military research

have tried to adapt civilian theoretical models into a military organizational framework.

While some of these investigations have yielded promising results, voluntary turnover

remains a concern for the military.

Female Retention Issues in the Armed Services

Retaining women in the military has been a continuous dilemma for the armed

services and has been studied extensively throughout the literature (DACOWITS, 2017;

Dichter & True, 2015; DiSilverio, 2003; Moore, 2002, Smith & Rosenstein, 2017).

Challenges unique to the military pose as barriers to female retention rates among the

different services. For example, the armed services are bound to develop their senior and

midlevel leadership from within their own ranks; the military's workforce pool is limited

to the servicemembers it has trained and retained long enough to yield sufficient seniority

and experience for mission readiness (DiSilverio, 2003). Therefore, losing midlevel

servicemembers, servicewomen in particular, is much more detrimental to the U.S.

military (DiSilverio, 2003). Moreover, leadership within the military is not allowed to "hire, fire, or promote their 'employees,' a situation that is virtually unique in the world marketplace for talent" (DiSilverio, 2003, p. 2-3). According to Dichter and True (2015), events (e.g., sexual harassment) and life circumstances (e.g., childbirth, marriage, etc.) that occurred during military service lead servicewomen to separate from the armed service prematurely, "to the potential detriment of both the military and women's lives" (p. 195). The ramifications of the abovementioned factors are highlighted in briefings provided by each of the U.S. military services to DACOWITS. Following are the reports given by the services to the committee concerning female retention:

a) The Air Force reported that female officers were more likely than their male counterparts to attrite between 2 and 10 years of service.

b) The Army reported that female enlisted Soldiers were more likely than their male peers to separate between 1 and 3 years of service; female officers were more likely than their male peers to separate after 4 years of service (i.e., after completing the initial service obligation).

c) The Navy reported that on average, female enlisted Sailors separated more than 2 years earlier than their male peers (after about 6 years of service versus about 8 years of service); female officers separated almost 3 years earlier than their male peers (after nearly 11 years of service versus nearly 14 years of service).

d) The Coast Guard reported that enlisted women's retention rates were consistently lower than those of their male counterparts from 5 years of service on.

e) Although the Marine Corps reported that retention rates were generally similar for men and women, continuation rates among female officers were 4 percentage points lower than those of their male peers at 9 years of service. (DACOWITS, 2017, p. 21)

Quit Decision-Making Models

This section of the literature review explores two quit decision-making models: Mobley's (1977) heuristic model of employee withdrawal decision-making process and Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model of turnover. Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, and Hill (1999) suggested that turnover is the result of a decision enacted by an individual. Examining turnover as an enacted decision highlights the significance of the phenomenon under study. Thus, it is critical to gain a deep understanding of the process as well as the factors that influence a female veteran's choice to leave active duty service. Some recurring factors were noted within the literature that may influence female veterans' decision-making process: Job satisfaction and turnover rates were also examined because they later emerged as significant themes through the qualitative interviewing process.

Quit decision-making models are a major area of interest within the study of employee turnover and retention. Mobley (1977) introduced a heuristic model of quit decision-making which suggests that job dissatisfaction encourages internal thoughts of quitting. He noted that these thoughts of quitting then guide employees on a path of seeking alternative job opportunities. During this period, the employee begins to consider both the positive and negative consequences of leaving his or her current workplace, taking into account the job of finding alternatives. The employee is likely to

willfully end his or her current employment, given that the employee determines that an adequate alternative can or will be obtained (Mobley, 1977).

Mobley's (1977) decision-making model describes individual choice as a process in which decision-making occurs as a linear causal chain of events. The causal chain is as follows: (a) evaluation of existing job, (b) experienced job satisfaction/dissatisfaction, (c) thinking of quitting, (d) evaluation of expected utility of search and cost of quitting, (e) intention to search for alternatives, (f) search for alternatives, (g) evaluation of alternatives, (h) comparison of alternatives versus present job, (i) intention to quit/stay, and (j) quit/stay. As the employee transitions through this causal chain of decision-making, he or she evaluates the risks and rewards of withdrawing in comparison to alternative employment prospects at hand (March & Simon, 1958, Price & Mueller, 1986). Additionally, employee withdrawal may occur as a result of job dissatisfaction, which entices thoughts of quitting (Mobley, 1977). Researchers have suggested that thoughts of quitting may not manifest within employees who are content with their current employment; therefore, the intention to seek out alternative employment or willfully withdraw employment would subside (Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978). While Mobley's (1977) causal chain model offers a logical framework for an employee's quit decision-making process, the model does not capture every possible turnover event. Quit decision-making does not always follow a sequential course of action; consequently, employees may sidestep or circumvent steps within Mobley's model (Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Morrell, Loan-Clarke, Arnold, & Wilkinson, 2008).

Lee and Mitchell (1994) offered an alternative decision-making model to the linear approach of the causal chain decision-making process. The researchers termed

30

their model the "unfolding model of turnover," which was created to describe the decision-making process individuals undergo when they wittingly choose to withdraw their employment with their employer. The unfolding model is a retrospective construct that consists of four mutually exclusive decision paths that describe the process of employees voluntarily quitting (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). Hence, the intent of the model is to conceptualize quitting as a decision-making process, and in doing so, identify variables employees are likely to follow within the four distinct decision pathways (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

The unfolding model uses three main features to explain the quit decision-making process. First, image theory/violation is a critical component of the unfolding decision-making model. According to Lee et al. (1999), image violations occur when an employee's goals, values, and strategies for goal attainment do not align with those of their organization. Moreover, due to the divergence between the employees' beliefs and those of their organization, the employees' perceived lack of employment suitability results in them ending their employment or initiates their search process for alternative employment. Characteristic of the unfolding model of voluntary turnover, image violations emerge from a shock event or experience (Lee & Mitchell, 1994).

Second, the unfolding model introduces two unique constructs as a means to explain the quit decision-making process. More pointedly, the constructs "shock" and "scripts" are featured in the model. A shock is a jarring event that prompts employees to consider quitting (Lee, Mitchell, Wise, & Fireman, 1996; Morrell et al., 2008), which in earlier work is likened to "a disturbance in time-series analysis," where the act of interpretation is "part of an ongoing context" (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, pp. 60-61). Shocks

can materialize as a "positive, neutral, or negative; expected or unexpected; and internal or external" (Lee et al., 1999, p. 451) event or experience. Examples include life changing events (e.g., marriage, a new child, the death of a love one, etc.), an unexpected job opportunity, or the relocation of a position. Within the literature, shock was found to have a significant impact on quitting decisions (Lee et al., 1996, 1999; Morrell et al., 2008). Employees compare shocks and their surrounding circumstances to their own personal viewpoints and moral principles (Lee et al., 1996), and if the two are not aligned, thoughts of quitting occur. The instance in which an event rises to the level of a shock depends upon an employee's personal viewpoints and moral principles (Lee et al., 1996). Typically, a shock event prompts an employee to carry out a psychological analysis to bear judgment on his or her decision to withdraw employment or remain in his or her position (Cheung, 2004).

Script-driven decisions are another important component of the unfolding model. Scripts are described as a "preexisting plan of action" (Lee et al., 1999, p. 451) or "routinized behavior" (Lee & Mitchell, 1994, p. 71). When an employee experiences a perceived shock, the event triggers him or her to conduct an internal inquiry for any recollection of a preexisting action plan (Holtom & Inderrieden, 2006). In view of the previously mentioned research, one would posit that scripts presumably manifest from past experiences or conditions similar to the characteristics of the current event. If an employee's cognitive search reveals that terminating his or her position is the best course of action for that particular event, the employee's quit decision can be expedited with minimal consideration (Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Inderrieden, 2005; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). If the employee has no preexisting scripts to rely upon, the employee will then

conduct a comparative analysis of the shock event with images associated with the position or organization (Lee et al., 1996). However, when the shock event fails to coincide with the images, personal viewpoints, or moral principles of the employee, an image violation can occur (Harman, Lee, Mitchell, Felps, & Owens, 2007), thus resulting in a quit decision. When image violations occur, employees often explore and weigh alternatives against their current employment (Lee et al., 1999). These alternatives materialize as external job seeking, choosing to withdraw from the workforce, going back to school, or leaving their particular career field.

Third, the unfolding model of voluntary employee turnover highlights four distinct pathways employees use when deciding to leave their organizations, with the fourth pathway having two subsets. In Pathway 1, a shock event prompts the employee to seek out a preexisting action plan or script. Quit decisions are expected in this pathway because the employee does not search for alternatives; instead, the employee leaves in haste, regardless of the existence of image violations (Lee & Maurer, 1997; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). The decision to quit is automatically enacted when the shock event occurs, thus the employee spends minimal time deliberating their choice (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

In Pathway 2, employees perceive image violations that are prompted by the occurrence of a shock event. The shock event is usually an unfavorable, negative organizational experience or situation (Lee & Maurer, 1997; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). The shock event prompts employees to assess their current position and the extent to which their job parallels their own personal viewpoints and moral principles and preexisting images of themselves and their work (Mitchell & Lee,

2001). The employees may reevaluate their commitment and buy-in with their employer.

Employees on Pathway 2 typically experience a jarring negative event; therefore, they

may express dissatisfaction with their job and employer (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

Moreover, quit decisions in this path are swift and do not include a probe of possible job

alternatives prior to initiating the quit decision (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

In Pathway 3, an image violation triggers employees to weigh their current job

with possible alternatives. This image violation is initiated by an unexpected job offer

that was not prompted by the employee (Lee & Maurer, 1997; Lee & Mitchell, 1994;

Mitchell & Lee, 2001). The unexpected job offer in this pathway is the shock event.

Moreover, the employees may have been content in their current position; however, they

find themselves entertaining thoughts of quitting when another job opportunity presents

itself as a more lucrative option for them (Mitchell & Lee, 2001).

In Pathway 4, the unfolding model is comprised of two alternatives: Pathways 4a

and 4b. Both of these alternatives focus on overall job dissatisfaction as opposed to a

specific shock event, which is in opposition to the previous pathways (Mitchell & Lee,

2001). In Pathways 4a and 4b, employees do not experience a shock; instead, image

violations are experienced more gradually. This can result in a quit decision absent of the

employee's efforts to seek out or weigh alternative job offers.

On the other hand, Pathway 4b contends that dissatisfaction can prompt

employees to quit after searching for job alternatives or being provided with an offer

(Mitchell & Lee, 2001). In this pathway, the employee is unhappy and often makes the

decision to quit suddenly or starts searching for potential job alternatives (Lee & Maurer,

1997; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). While the unfolding model may be

appealing to researchers and has received some empirical support, numerous elements of the model may need reconsideration if multiple turnover decisions are to be identified (Maertz & Campion, 2004).

First, Lee et al.'s (1996) study, which examined 44 female nurses who had voluntarily quit their nursing jobs, concluded that many of the women represented Pathway 1, script-driven "quits." However, the authors' classification of their research participants did not take into account that the women may have planned to quit their organizations at a specific time in the future, for instance, when a spouse started a job in another state (Lee et al., 1996). This type of thought process may involve controlled as opposed to automatic decision processing because such thoughts do not rely on shocks matching a recalled behavioral script (Maertz & Campion, 2004). This formulation implies that Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model may be comprised of two separate processes for Pathway 1 quits: (a) "quitting planned in advance for a definite time in the future," and (b) "quitting based on a conditional plan that may be activated by an uncertain future event" (Maertz & Campion, 2004, p. 568).

Second, Lee and Mitchell (1994) posited that negative affect does not apply to Pathways 1 and 2, yet subsequent iterations of the unfolding model suggest that negative affect may impact Pathway 2 decisions (Lee et al., 1999; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Researchers within the literature have argued that Pathway 1 decisions may encompass an effective response when a negative shock occurs, and in Pathway 3 decisions, a negative affect may also occur when employees compare their current employment with possible alternatives (Maertz & Campion, 2004). Nonetheless, a negative affect is not required for an employee to surmise that a more lucrative employment prospect is

available (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994; Steel, 2002). Given that current research has established some empirical connections with affect-loaded variables and turnover (Griffeth et al., 2000), decision models should probably consider how affect can impact decision-making and its influence on different types of decisions (Maertz & Campion, 2004).

Third, Lee and Mitchell's (1994) research makes reference to employees who impulsively quit; however, such behavior is not incorporated within the decision-making pathways of their model. Likewise, Mobley (1977) suggested that impulsive quitting may occur during the decision-making process but failed to expound on how impulsive quitting fits into the model. Given that some employees may engage in impulsive quitting, "future modeling efforts should allow a level of 'no planning' (versus definite and conditional planning) for classifying decisions" (Maertz & Campion, 2004, p. 568).

As a final point, Lee and Mitchell (1994) defined shock as jarring external events and later expanded the term to include internal events (Lee et al., 1996). If applying the authors' definition of a shock in the broadest scope, it would be rational to conclude that all decisions derive from some event (e.g., personal experience, memory, or emotion) that prompts turnover deliberations (Maertz & Campion, 2004). However, in Pathways 4a and 4b which contain no shock, employees' job satisfaction is assumed to decline gradually, but Lee and colleagues made no argument for such gradual occurrences, nor did they address why no shock would be linked with gradually increasing thoughts of quitting. Indeed, several shock events might transpire over an extended period of time, manifesting into deliberations about quitting (Maertz & Campion, 2004). In addition, Lee et al. (1999) identified shocks, scripts, and job offers using the same classifying

question; therefore, these variables were not measured in isolation— overall, "without better clarification about why a shock would or would not occur and better measurement of shocks, 'shock versus no shock' should probably not be used as a definitive process parameter" (Maertz & Campion, 2004, p. 568).

Indeed, while decision-making models within the literature help explain the quit decision-making process, the aforementioned models have embedded discrepancies that question whether they fully capture every possible quit decision (Maertz & Campion, 2004). Moreover, the quit decision-making models in the literature are broadly scoped, accounting for all employees experiencing the quit decision-making process. It can be argued that employees who are in different industries with different demographic backgrounds and who face different challenges in their work environment, may rely on a more narrowed decision-making framework when contemplating quitting.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory originated from the work of two sociologists, Barney G. Glaser and the late Anselm L. Strauss, and is described as a method used to generate a theory from data (L. M. Allen, 2010; Cooney, 2010; Dunne, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hall, Griffiths, & McKenna, 2013; Hunter, Murphy, Grealish, Casey, & Keady, 2011; Kolb, 2012; Tan, 2010; Zarif, 2012). Creswell (2015) advocated that grounded theory research is a process theory that describes a process of events, activities, behaviors, and experiences that occur over time. He further noted that grounded theorists employ structured data collection techniques to define categories, find linkages among categories, and construct a theory that explains the process.

There are three predominant designs associated with grounded theory research: the systematic design pioneered by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), the constructivist design advocated by Charmaz (2014), and the emerging design supported by Glaser (1992). The systematic design is prescribed much more than the initial conceptualization of grounded theory (Creswell, 2015). The systematic design is related to the comprehensive systematic procedures defined by Strauss and Corbin in 1990 and expanded on in their second and third editions on methods and procedures for developing grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constructivist design takes a more philosophical approach. Constructivist grounded theory focuses on the meanings ascribed by participants and does not minimize the role of the researcher in a study (Creswell, 2015). Moreover, the design is more concerned with the views, values, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals rather than factfinding and explaining behaviors (Charmaz, 2014). The emerging design espoused by Glaser (1992) is the process whereby the investigator gathers data, analyzes the data immediately, and then determines which data to gather next based on the initial data analysis. The emerging design is the less prescribed grounded theory design and consists of several significant ideas:

1. Grounded theory exists at the most abstract conceptual level rather than the least abstract level as found in visual data presentations, such as a coding paradigm.

2. A theory is grounded in the data and is not forced into categories.

3. A good grounded theory must meet four central criteria: fit, work, relevance, and modifiability. By carefully inducing the theory from a substantive area, it

will fit the realities in the eyes of participants, practitioners, and researchers. If

a grounded theory works, it will explain the variations in the behavior of

participants. If it works, it has relevance. The theory should not be "written in

stone" (Glaser, 1992, p. 15) and should be modified when new data emerges.

(Creswell, 2015, p. 432)

Theoretical Disputes Within Grounded Theory

Over time, grounded theory has developed and there has been some debate about

the various grounded theory (emerging, systematic, and constructivist) theoretical

perspectives (L. M. Allen, 2010; Cooney, 2010; Dunne, 2011; Hall et al., 2013; Hunter et

al., 2011; Tan, 2010; Zarif, 2012). The systematic approach, while accepted by

contemporary researchers, has received criticism from Glaser (1992) in which he

expressed a need to "set researchers using grounded theory on a correct path" (p. 3).

Glaser's contention focused on how the systematic approach of Strauss used

predetermined categories and frameworks that do not permit theory to materialize during

the research process. He also challenged what he saw as a focus on merely describing

behaviors as opposed to purposefully conceptualizing patterns or linkages in the data.

Additionally, methodological arguments followed between Glaser and Charmaz as Glaser

felt constructivist was not an authentic grounded theory (Hunter et al., 2011).

Charmaz (2014) developed her own approach to grounded theory, the

constructivist method. She felt that both Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and

Corbin's (1990, 1998) approaches were too systematic in their applications. In

Charmaz's (2014) view, grounded theorists should expand the research philosophically

beyond a quantitative orientation, utilize flexible strategies, highlight the meaning that

participants attribute to situations, and acknowledge the researcher's role and the individuals under study (Creswell, 2014).

Literature Review Summary

A review of the salient history of female servicemembers, turnover, military retention issues, quit decision-making models, and research methods literature created problem awareness (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; 2014). Various databases were explored (e.g., Google Scholar, ProQuest, and ERIC) using keywords like turnover, military, retention, decision-making, and quitting in order to locate seminal and current literature for the review. Based on the literature review, a gap in servicewomen's retention knowledge exists in regard to their quit decision-making process and the factors that compel them to voluntarily withdraw from active duty service. The state of quit decision-making understanding presents as convoluted with broadly defined models that encompass all quit decision makers. Moreover, decision-making research is limited in military quit decision-making models and in female servicemembers' quit decision-making processes. While there is a minimal amount of literature that explains employee turnover variances (Griffeth et al., 2000; Heilmann, Holt, & Rilovick, 2008), the expansion of more qualitative inquiry is scarce and grounded theory investigations concerning female servicemembers' voluntary turnover is virtually nonexistent. Unfortunately, female servicemembers continue to leave their military careers behind. The literature does not offer any acceptable theory that addresses this behavior. Thus, the quit decision-making process of female servicemembers lacks understanding. The following chapter presents a qualitative grounded theory method and the research design.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore the decision-making process of female U.S. military veterans who chose to leave active duty service and were civilian federal employees with the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) in 2019. The researcher believes that a well-rounded cognitive understanding of this phenomenon would offer military leaders a more informed perspective into female decision-making and the factors impacting their choice. In order to achieve an understanding of great depth and breadth of this phenomenon, the study addressed three research questions:

1. What was the conscious decision-making process female servicemembers followed when deliberating their decision to leave active duty service?

2. What are the noteworthy experiences and factors that led female servicemembers to leave active duty service?

3. In what ways did these experiences and factors contribute to female servicemembers' decision to leave active duty service?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussions focused on the following areas: the rationale for research approach: the rationale for research approach including (a) the rationale for the qualitative research design and (b) for the grounded theory methodology; (c) research site; (d) the population; (e) the participant selection procedures; (f) sampling procedure including; (g) theoretical sampling; (h) data analysis; (i) informed consent; (j) participant's bill of rights; (k) confidentiality; and (l) validity, rigor, and reliability. The chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for the Qualitative Research Design

At its core, qualitative research allows for a substantive understanding about a particular subject, in all its real-world complexity, and promotes deeper understanding of a social phenomenon experienced by research participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). The intent of qualitative research is to allow researchers to examine problems using an interpretive naturalistic approach in order to achieve a holistic rather than a reductionist understanding of the way individuals or groups interpret phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Qualitative methodology places an emphasis on description, exploration, and discovery where the intent is to make sense of a phenomenon in a social environment or experience from the viewpoint of research participants (Creswell, 2014, 2015). The objectives of qualitative methodology stand in stark contrast to those of quantitative research, which is typically applied to investigate relationships to describe current conditions and examine cause-effect phenomena (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015).

It is the researcher's contention that mere quantitative methods would not invoke the rich data necessary to answer this study's research questions. In the researcher's view, the fundamental assumptions and key characteristics that differentiate qualitative from quantitative methods are ideal for this study. These features include (a) an interpretive naturalistic approach to understand phenomena through the perceptions of people, (b) an opportunity for the researcher to become immersed in the environment of others to develop a contextual understanding, (c) an interactive process between researcher and participants, (d) an interpretive stance, and (e) design flexibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Thus, qualitative methodology is best suited to gain an

understanding of female veterans' experiences and to describe their decision-making process for leaving active duty military service.

Rationale for Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory is a systematic, qualitative method used to generate or discover a theory that explains, at a broad conceptual level, a process or action that is derived from an individual or social group's lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). The main goal of grounded theory research is to create a theory or explanation for a process or action when existing theories may not address a particular phenomenon or research participants (Creswell, 2014). Grounded theory develops research findings from data collected from study participants who have experienced the process or action. Thus, grounded theory allows researchers to see data from a fresh perspective and to explore ideas concerning the data through early analytic writing (Charmaz, 2014).

Grounded theory, as an inductive qualitative methodology, allows the researcher to describe and uncover the principle concern of individuals or social groups and the behaviors used to resolve their main concern (Artinian, Giske, & Cone, 2009). For the purpose of this study, female military veterans were interviewed in order to identify the decision-making process and factors that influenced their choice in leaving active duty military service. Grounded theory allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the overarching concern, or possibly the totality of concerns, experienced by the female veterans and to develop a theory that explains their behavior (Artinian et al., 2009).

From an analysis of the qualitative interviews, the researcher uncovered the experiences and factors that led female veterans to resign from active duty and explored

43

how those experiences influenced their decision-making process. The use of grounded

theory methodology equipped the researcher with a process to move this qualitative study

beyond a description of the phenomena under investigation to an abstract, conceptual

understanding of the studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014).

The Research Site

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) is a federal agency headquartered at the

historic Pentagon building located in Arlington, Virginia. The agency's mission

statement is to "provide the military forces needed to deter war and ensure our nation's

security" (DOD, 2019, para. 1). To accomplish such a significant task, the DOD has

become the United States' largest workforce employer with over 2.8 million employees

(DOD, 2019). Moreover, the DOD, in relation to other large U.S. employers, has a

sizable female workforce with approximately 170,000 enlisted and 40,000 female

officers, as well as 245,355 civilian female workers (Defense Manpower Data Center,

2018). In recent years, the DOD, in conjunction with advisory committees such as the

Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS, 2017), have

worked together to improve female retention throughout the Armed Services.

The DOD offers various statistical metrics concerning its female workforce; for

example, females make up about 32% of the DOD civilian workforce (Defense

Manpower Data Center, 2018). Additionally, the agency provides the following data in

regard to its female veteran population: The DOD and Veterans Administration (VA)

hired a combined 71% of all veterans and 75.6% of women veterans across the Executive

Branch in fiscal year 2013; in fiscal year 2010 to 2013, the DOD increased its hiring

trend of women veterans from 21.1% to 25.9%; the onboard percentage of women

veterans increased from 13.4% to 145.4% between fiscal years 2010 to 2013; and for fiscal year 2013, women veterans comprised 23.7% of all newly hired across the DOD and Executive Branch agencies (Council on Veterans Employment: Women Veterans Initiative, 2015).

The main reason for sampling female participants who are employed with the DOD is accessibility. A sizable portion of DOD civilian female employees are military veterans, which was a perfect fit for this study because it dealt with the female veteran population. Accessibility here does not relate to the ease with which the researcher can procure participants; rather, it refers to the size of the DOD's female workforce and the idea that female veterans are more likely to work for the federal government (Council on Veterans Employment: Women Veterans Initiative, 2015). Thus, the site from which participants were sampled increased the potential of finding subjects who have experienced the phenomenon under study and who met selection criteria. Indeed, this study intended to describe the decision-making process of female veterans who chose to leave active duty military service; therefore, selecting a site with a moderate percentage of female veterans was critical. This research project's site led to a more homogeneous population than might be typical of any other large organization that employs female veterans.

The Research Population

This study's research subjects consisted of a purposive, nonprobability sample of female military veterans currently employed with the DOD. Moreover, the primary investigator intended to secure at least 15 qualified participants to interview. Participant selection was based on the subject's experience with the phenomena under investigation

and was central to grounded theory methodology (Streubert & Carpenter, 2003). The criteria for participations in this study were as follows: the participant must (a) be a female and current DOD employee; (b) be a U.S. military veteran; (c) have a character of discharge under other than dishonorable conditions (e.g., honorable, under honorable conditions, general); and (d) have voluntarily left active duty military service. Therefore, female U.S. military reservists and female DOD contractors were not included in this study. Female veterans of the Department of Homeland Security (excluding Coast Guard veterans) were also omitted from the study participant list, as this study focused on the experiences and decision-making processes of prior active duty U.S. military female veterans.

Participant Selection Procedures

For the purpose of this research inquiry, participants were recruited using snowball sampling methods during a 45-day recruitment timeframe. The investigator briefly summarized the purpose and aim of the research to determine if his fellow coworkers would be interested in participating in the study. If coworkers within the investigator's agency refused to participate, the investigator expanded the search to coworkers in sister agencies within the DOD who were familiar with study. To recruit additional research participants, the investigator asked the selected participants to connect him with other potential subjects who may have been interested in the study. After completing each interview, the investigator asked the interviewees if they knew other female veterans who met the research criteria. If so, the investigator asked the interviewee for the reference's contact information (e.g., e-mail or phone number) and if they would pass along his contact information to the reference. The investigator

contacted the female veterans and requested their consent to participate in the study.
Once the veterans agreed to participate in this study, the investigator arranged the date
and time for the participants to be interviewed.

Sampling Procedure

Sample size cannot be determined at the onset of grounded theory studies because
it is not possible for a researcher to know when data saturation will be attained, what
concern will emerge as problematic, or how the concern will be addressed (Artinian et
al., 2009). Moreover, sampling serves as a preliminary starting point in grounded theory
research in which theoretical sampling methods guide the researcher toward additional
sources of data to promote homogeneity of the study sample (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In
grounded theory, the researcher cannot presume to know all the thematic categories in
advance. Therefore, the researcher must start with an initial sample of participants and
allow data analysis in conjunction with constant comparative analysis of the data to direct
future sampling procedures. Ultimately, sample size was determined by the data
generated (i.e., theoretical sampling) and approved by the dissertation committee.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling calls for initial participant selection to be centered on the
subject's contribution to the development of the theory. The process initially begins with
a homogeneous sample of individuals who share similar experiences or traits, and as
categories emerge through the data collection process, the investigator focuses on a
heterogeneous sample to examine what sample conditions the categories validate
(Charmaz, 2014). Thus, an interview process of data collection would feature an initial
selection of research subjects predicated on the subject or problem area without a

theoretical framework. In this particular study, the respondents were "prequalified"

through purposive and snowball sampling techniques; therefore, coding and analysis

commenced immediately during the data collection process, and further selections for

sampling were driven by the emerging data. More pointedly, Glaser and Strauss (1967)

suggested,

> Beyond the decisions concerning initial collection of data, further collection
>
> cannot be planned in advance of the emerging theory (as is done so carefully in
>
> research designed for verification and description). The emerging theory points to
>
> the next steps—the sociologist does not know them until he is guided by
>
> emerging gaps in his theory and by research questions suggested by previous
>
> answers. (p. 47)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasized the differences in theoretical sampling and

statistical sampling in relation to their purposes. The authors noted that the purpose of

theoretical sampling is to discover categories and their properties and to make inferences

about their abilities to develop theory, whereas the purpose of statistical sampling is to

obtain accurate evidence of distributions and to make verifications. In theoretical

sampling, there is an assumption of persistence that theories developed for one group

"will probably hold for other groups under the same conditions" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967,

p. 63).

Data Collection

In quantitative studies, data collection is typically done by way of survey

questionnaires, standardized tests, or checklists to measure variables and employ

statistical methods to instill objectivity into a study. On the other hand, qualitative

studies collect data based on the words (e.g., interviews) of participants to capture their point of view (Creswell, 2014). To gain an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process of female veterans, this study used semistructured interviewing to capture the experiences shared by the research participants.

Semistructured interviews help to facilitate a more focused exploration of the phenomena under study. According to Creswell (2014), the semistructured interviewing process enables the researcher to ask open-ended questions so that the participants can effectively tell their story uninhibited by any bias held by the researcher or past research findings. Moreover, unrestricted responses allow participants to create the options for responding and give researchers the opportunity to probe for additional information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015; Creswell, 2014). Thus, interviewing is an ideal source for data collection because of its potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Therefore, the interview process allowed female veteran participants to descriptively communicate their experiences from their own perspectives.

The researcher contacted participants who provided their signed informed consent document prior to their scheduled interview. A predetermined date and time were established to conduct participant interviews. The researcher conducted interviews Monday through Friday from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. (HST) and all-day Saturday and Sunday at the participant's convenience. The aim of this interview timeframe was to ensure that all interviews were completed within 60 days and to give participants ample time to be available for their interview. GoToMeeting, a web-hosted service for online meeting, desktop sharing, and video conferencing, was the platform the researcher used to conduct interviews. Once the researcher and participant agreed upon a designated interview date,

the researcher contacted the participant via a GoToMeeting interview request, which had the link and access code for the participant to enter the meeting forum. Interviews were scheduled for 2-hour sessions with a 30-minute buffer if an interview ran over the allotted time. GoToMeeting allowed research subjects to participate in the interview process from any remote location, provided that they had access to a computer or mobile device.

In preparation for each scheduled interview, the researcher logged into the GoToMeeting website and conducted a system check 15 minutes prior to the scheduled interview start time. Additionally, contingency actions were carried out in the event that a participant failed to attend his or her designated interview start time. For instance, if a participant had not joined the scheduled interview after 15 minutes, the researcher e-mailed the recipient to verify that she was still willing to take part in the study. If after 30 minutes the participant had not joined the meeting and had not notified the researcher of her whereabouts, the researcher called the participant and sent a second follow-up e-mail to ascertain whether the participant was committed to participating in the study and if she would like to reschedule her interview.

If the participant was on time for her scheduled interview, the researcher commenced the interview protocol by kindly greeting the participant and thanking her for her military service as well as her contribution to the study. In addition, the participant was reminded of her consent to audio recording during the interview, and at the end of 6 months, the recording was deleted from the researcher's storage archives.

The interview continued by asking the participant to provide responses to three closed-ended questions concerning their military service. More pointedly, the following questions were asked:

a) Did you enlist in the military or were you a commissioned officer? *This question will be used to identify dissimilarities in female veteran's career path that may have influenced their decision-making process (i.e., the military career is experienced differently between enlisted and officer members; which distinction is not a part of this study).*

b) Was any of this active duty service part of a mobilization or activation while serving as a member of the National Guard or Reserve component? *This question will be used to identify participants' military career experienced as active Guard or Reserve servicemember versus a full-time, active duty servicemember.*

c) Were you discharged or released from the military under conditions other than dishonorable? If so, was your exit from the military voluntary? *This question will be used to ensure the subject meets the definition of a veteran. Moreover, the question verified whether the subject was forced to resign or willingly left active duty service.*

These questions acted as ice breakers in an effort to get the participants comfortable by answering basic questions about themselves. Moreover, the last question served as a participant screen-out measure to ensure the subject met the eligibility requirements. The criteria for participation in the study were as follows: the participant must (a) be a female and current DOD employee; (b) be a U.S. military veteran; (c) have a character of discharge under other than dishonorable conditions (e.g., honorable, under honorable conditions, general); and (d) have voluntarily left active duty military service.

Once the researcher verified that the subject could participate in the study, the researcher proceeded through the interview protocol to facilitate the interview process. The interview protocol was segmented into three major sections: preintroductory questions, semistructured interview questions, and conclusion. During the introduction, the researcher greeted the participant and provided a brief overview of the interview process. Additionally, the purpose of the study as well as the ground rules during the interview were discussed to ensure that the subject understood why she was participating in the study and that she was clearheaded on her rights as a participant. Once the introduction was complete, the researcher began to ask the semistructured interview questions. The researcher asked each participant four interview questions while ensuring that each participant was given ample time to reflect and provide a meaningful response. Throughout the interview questioning, the researcher probed the participant's responses for clarity and to gain a better understanding of her perspective (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, the researcher utilized the active listening technique and memo writing during the interview to ensure that the participant's descriptive accounts were being captured (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). At the end of the interview questions, the researcher debriefed the participant and concluded the interview.

At the end of each interview, the researcher downloaded the meeting on his home office computer and saved it as a password-protected file. The researcher submitted the file to TranscribeMe, a web-based transcription service. The researcher requested a turnaround time of 48 hours from TranscribeMe to provide the interview document so that data analysis (i.e., coding) could begin immediately thereafter. An alphanumeric coding system was assigned to each participant and was annotated in lieu of the

participant's name on the transcribed document and any subsequent documents. For

example, VET001 represented the first participant who was interviewed; VET002

represented the second participant interviewed, and so forth. The researcher reviewed

each transcript for accuracy and clarity as well as to ensure that the transcript mirrored

the initial audio recording. Once the researcher confirmed the accuracy of the transcript,

data analysis commenced.

Interview Protocol Refinement Process

In all disciplines of research, the primary investigator is required to ensure that his

or her data collection instrument can effectively gather information from respondents

who will answer the stated research questions (Dikko, 2016). Preliminary testing of a

study's data collection instrument increases the validity of the study and helps to ensure

that the instrument will work as intended in a real-world application. Ideally, preliminary

testing should replicate the actual interview process as well as the environment in which

the interview will be conducted (Kim, 2010). Thus, the following paragraphs provide a

description of this study's interview refinement process and its findings. Additionally,

given that this study's research population was female veterans, the refinement process

sought to identify and remove any gender-sensitive language or terminology embedded

within the instrument.

The preliminary test was conducted at the U.S. Pacific Fleet Human Resources

Office (USPACFLT HRO) located at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Oahu, Hawaii.

The participants were prior active duty military veterans who were currently employed

with the USPACFLT, a command within the DOD. The three participants were selected

because of their honorable military service, familiarity with the phenomenon under

investigation, and most importantly, their female gender. The interviews were conducted in a private conference room at the HRO, lasting between 1 and 2 hours per interview. The refinement process began with the researcher greeting the participant, explaining the research objectives, obtaining the participant's informed consent, and providing the participant with the CBU Bill of Rights. The researcher assured each participant that the information she provided was only for the primary investigator to use for refining the interview protocol, and none of her personal, identifiable information would be requested or divulged. Once the investigator completed the introduction segment, the researcher obtained feedback from each participant on each section of the initial interview protocol.

The preliminary testing was very productive as some unanticipated but useful findings emerged from the respondents' feedback. The researcher used the feedback to refine the data collection instrument and to smooth the flow of conversation, improve its clarity, and flush out any perceived biases embedded in the instrument. One major critique shared among each respondent was the challenge to answer the first expansive open-ended question. The primary investigator initially thought that the first interview question should be expansive in its design to allow respondents to discuss their decision-making process without inhibitions, thus leading to the discovery of important data (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). However, the respondents found it difficult to articulate their decision-making process, which resulted in brief, vague answers. For example, when the participants were asked, "What was the conscious decision-making process you followed while deliberating your decision to leave active duty service?" participants responded to the question saying, "I just thought about my family and the benefits of the military," or "I thought about providing for my kids," or "I was thinking about losing my stable

income. I also thought about leaving my friends." On the whole, participants' initial responses to the question were between one and two sentences long. The researcher believed that the responses may have been due to the length of time that had passed since the respondents contemplated their quit decision-making process. On average, each participant was removed from active duty service over six years.

Nevertheless, the investigator observed that the participants had more to communicate based on their facial expressions and body language when asked the question. Thus, additional probing questions were implemented after the first open-ended question. The question was retested on the same participants with the added follow-up probing questions. The new line of questioning was reconstructed as follows:

Interview Question:

1. What was the conscious decision-making process you followed while deliberating your decision to leave active duty service?

When required, the additional probing questions were asked:

    a. Did you use a series of actions or steps to formulate your decision?

    b. Did your decision-making process rely on the input and thoughts of another individual? Who was this person and what thoughts did they offer to inform your decision?

    c. Was there a sequence of specific thoughts that you immediately began to consider? What were the thoughts that came to you?

    d. Did you compare and contrast your thoughts to help form your decision?

    e. Did one particular thought out weight all others or did the collective form your decision?

The investigator also observed that the participants were not thinking broadly when asked to explore the factors or experiences that impacted their decision-making process. The participants would only discuss one single factor if not probed further. In addition, the investigator often had to prompt the participants by restating the factors mentioned by them earlier in order to evaluate and relate their experiences with those factors. For example, when asked, "What are the noteworthy experiences and factors that led you to leave active duty service?" most participants would only focus on one particular factor, which happened to be family security. However, when the investigator brought up other options such as impediments to caregiving, quality of work, quality of life, leadership support, and so forth, the participants would begin to reflect on how these factors influenced their decision. Based on this observation, examples of factors were implemented into the initial interview question to stimulate participants' thoughts and to prompt a more descriptive dialog. The question was reconstructed and retested on the participants. Following is an illustration of the restructured interview question.

2. What are the noteworthy experiences and factors (e.g., iimpediments to caregiving, quality of work, quality of life, or leadership support) that led you to leave active duty service?

Lastly, participants were asked to provide feedback on the language and terminology used in the interview protocol to assess if any biases were embedded within the data collection instrument. At the end of each preliminary test, participants were given the interview protocol (with the newly refined questions) to read and were asked to state their concerns, if any. The investigator specifically requested that the participants seek out any gender biased language that was offensive or that could be perceived as

offensive to the women who chose to participate in this research project. Each

participant read the interview protocol, spending on average one hour to analyze the

document. After examining the interview protocol, all participants concluded that they

did not find any biased or gender-sensitive language within the data collection

instrument. More pointedly, one participant said, "This data collection instrument is

great and shouldn't offend any female veterans." Based on the feedback from the women

who participated in refining this study's data collection instrument, the interview protocol

served as a useful tool to capture accurate and reliable information, increasing the validity

of this research project (Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

In opposition to other forms of qualitative data analysis (i.e., narrative or

phenomenology), which aims to provide descriptive and interpretive findings, grounded

theory data analysis focuses on constructing theory; data analysis is more involved and

seeks to achieve an explanatory power that is not essential in the other qualitative

methods (Kostere & Percy, 2006). The goal is to transform raw data from the study's

participants into meaningful findings. During this process, the researcher rejects

unsupported theoretical notions and conceptions to allow the emergence of theory

(Creswell, 2015). The following sections cover the main components of data analysis

that this study employed, including constant comparative analysis, coding, and theory

development.

Constant Comparative Analysis

In grounded theory research, the controlling methodology to analyze data is

termed constant comparative analysis. This form of data analysis is a process by which

the researcher compares different segments of data against one another to find similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Moreover, constant comparative analysis calls for the researcher to begin the data analysis process soon after the initial participant interview. Following all subsequent interviews, data responses are gathered then analyzed independently and compared with the other interview data to bring forth emergent themes derived from the data. Furthermore, incidents are then compared using line-by-line analysis to understand the participant's principal or summative concerns. Finally, theoretical sampling is utilized to gather and compare additional data as hypotheses began to emerge.

Coding Data

Coding is the process of segmenting data, describing their meaning, and then categorizing the information (Charmaz, 2014). A grounded theorist develops qualitative codes by describing what the researcher sees in the data, which is in opposition to quantitative researchers who utilize predetermined codes or categories to describe the data (Charmaz, 2014). Hence, codes are emergent in grounded theory research. Moreover, researchers develop codes as they study and interact with their data. There are three approaches of coding in grounded theory research: open, axial, and selective. The three coding approaches provide a process to develop initial categories of information (open coding), interconnect the categories (axial coding), create theory from the interrelationship of the categories (selective coding), and end with hypotheses concerning the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2014).

Open coding. Open coding is the process of taking raw data and segmenting them, and then labeling emerging concepts from the data to interpret their meaning

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory utilizes the concept-indicator model, which "directs the *conceptual* coding of a set of *empirical* indicators" (Strauss, 1987, p. 25). In order to develop concepts, open coding uses indicators such as statements, phrases, words, or participant observations. Indicators are cycled through constant comparative analysis as the researcher seeks to find new insights until theoretical saturation is reached. Moreover, the researcher attempts to identify terms communicated by the research participants that can be minutely analyzed (Strauss, 1987) so that they can progress towards the coding of concepts that are more general. Accordingly, the greater the detail a researcher puts forth during the open coding process, the less the likelihood that categories will be overlooked and the greater the likelihood of uncovering appropriate categories and achieving saturation (Strauss, 1987). By and large, the open coding process helps to develop subsets of categories from raw data that describe the process or action under examination.

A key aspect of open coding is memo writing conducted by the researcher. The key to creating new concepts is asking generative questions that guide researchers to think in abstract ways (LaRossa, 2005). For researchers to make this cognitive transition, they should regularly step away from the coding process to write memos, which will guide the researcher toward theoretical enlightenment and theory generation (Strauss, 1987). Memo writing is critical throughout the coding process because it bridges the gap between the raw data and theory formation. The process of memo writing occurs throughout the entire study as the researcher annotates ideas while data are gathered and examined. In these memos, the ideas attempt to convey the process that is perceived by the researcher in order to diagram the flow of the process under study (Charmaz, 2014).

Axial coding. Charmaz (2014) explained that axial coding is a process that "treats a category as an axis around which the analyst delineates relationships and specifies the dimensions of this category" (p. 341). She suggested that one of the aims of the axial coding process is to allow researchers to reconstruct data back together into a coherent whole because of the segmentation of the data as a result of line-by-line coding. Moreover, data do not emerge from the axial coding process, rather axial coding is a method applied to the data to find interactions (Charmaz, 2014). Data collection runs concurrently during the open coding and axial coding processes. Axial coding is "not linear but concurrent, iterative and integrative, with data collection, analysis and conceptual theorizing occurring in parallel and from the outset of the research process" (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007, p. 335). Therefore, axial coding explicitly seeks to examine relationships between variables or categories (LaRossa, 2005, p. 848). This explicit examination of the data involved finding connections among the categories, dimensions, and properties that arose from the open coding process.

Selective coding. Once the core categories are identified by the axial coding process, the researcher can begin the selective coding process, a more focused and refined coding procedure. Selective coding is the process in which the researcher codes data systematically and concertedly to identify core categories. The core categories drive further theoretical sampling and data collection as the categories emerge as the focal point to the researcher's analysis (Strauss, 1987). As the investigator advances to this stage of data analysis, selective coding becomes the primary method of examination to achieve theory generation.

At each phase of data analysis, this study utilized NVivo Qualitative Research Software by QSR International, a computer-based software developed to support qualitative data analysis. NVivo (2019) gives the researcher a forum to organize, store and retrieve data to work more efficiently, save time, and rigorously back up findings with evidence. Using data analysis software affords researchers with a single point of access to their data, thus providing easier accessibility to research material and the manageability of coded categories or themes (Bergin, 2011). While computer software can be beneficial to qualitative research, investigators should not be solely dependent upon computer software for data analysis. Gibbs (2018) suggested that the researcher, rather than the computer, be the means of explaining the data. The researcher must be cognizant of the attraction of becoming solely dependent on the mechanical aspects of data analysis (Bergin, 2011). Therefore, in conjunction with the NVivo software, the researcher solicited the counsel of the dissertation committee members to help guide the coding process and theory generation.

Generating Theory

Hage (1972) described theory as a comprehensively structured set of categories interconnected through statements of relationship to form a framework that explains some phenomenon. Concepts in isolation do not generate theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). With the aim of creating theory, the researcher must look for similarities and patterns within the data, combining lower-level concepts into higher-level categories to develop themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Concepts that elevate into categories are abstract (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), as they are a reflection of participants' lived experiences summarized into theoretical terms. When all categories are identified, the

researcher must conceptualize how the totality of the categories can be integrated to accurately describe the experiences of participants.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher manually worked the data, moving through the categorization to the integration process. Integration is the culminating process in theory generation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). At this stage, the researcher pinpoints the principal category that represents the overarching theme of the research project. The core category emerges ahead of all other categories, summarizing the main ideas articulated in the research project (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The power behind the core category is its ability to explain succinctly the aim of a research project. To integrate all categories into a comprehensive theoretical explanation, this study developed process diagrams to highlight the interconnections of all categories to a principal category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data Analysis Process

A multistep data analysis technique developed by Eaves (2001) was used to analyze data derived from participant interviews. Eaves's (2001) multistep data analysis technique is a synthesis process based on the works of the seminal grounded theorists, Charmaz (1983), Chesler (1987), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). She developed the synthesis technique because of the inconsistencies in the literature regarding grounded theory data analysis. For example, Eaves (2001) suggested that although Charmaz's (1983) data analysis literature presents a logical and understandable process, an attempt to replicate her analysis technique highlighted Charmaz's lack of discussion on the smaller steps between the major phases of coding. Conversely, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) data analysis literature offers a more

complicated process that requires a researcher to follow many small steps (Eaves, 2001).

In light of the above inconsistencies, Eaves (2001) created the synthesis technique, which

utilizes analytical steps from the abovementioned seminal grounded theorists to increase

understanding and improve the logical flow of grounded theory data analysis. Eaves

(2001) noted that it is ideal for novice researchers to have "enough structure and guidance

in regard to analytical steps (technique) to arrive accurately at the next level of data

emergence" (p. 659). Hence, in the absence of a comprehensive analytical process, there

is a greater likelihood that novice researchers will succumb to the pitfalls and

methodological mistakes associated with grounded theory data analysis (Wilson &

Hutchinson, 1996). A description of each step in the synthesis technique follows in the

next paragraphs.

First, line-by-line in-vivo coding was done on each transcript created from

participants' interview responses. The line-by-line in-vivo coding process required the

investigator to identify key words or phrases from the informants' own voice (Chesler,

1987) that helped explain their quit decision-making process. The primary investigator

read each participant's transcript thoroughly for clarity and understanding. Additionally,

the identified key words or phrases were underlined and annotated in the margins of each

transcript. Secondly, a list of all in-vivo codes from each transcript was assembled so

that shorter code phrases could be created that captured the participant's chief

understanding of the phenomena being investigated (Chesler, 1987). Codes are short

labels created by the investigator that describe the data. Moreover, codes compile,

synthesize, organize, and analyze data (Charmaz, 2014). NVivo by QSR International, a

qualitative analyses software was used to code and organize the data. Third, code phrases

were reduced by combining similar code phrases. Fourth, the groupings of similar code phrases were combined together to form clusters. Once clusters were amassed, they were reduced into meta-clusters with labels. Fifth, the labels created from the meta-clusters became concepts.

Sixth, similar concepts were combined to create categories. Categories are classifications of concepts that emerge when codes are compared among each other. Categories, then, are more abstract terms that represent the key themes that groups of concepts describe (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Grounded in the sixth step was Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparison analysis method, which compares codes and categories to seek out relationships and connections between the emergent codes and categories. Seventh, subcategories were identified. Subcategories are characteristics, properties, and dimensions of main categories (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Eighth, linkages were made among categories to develop a conceptual order of the data. This step was accomplished by using the constant comparison method in which the investigator asked questions (in memos) about relationships between the data.

Ninth, core categories were identified. Tenth, the core category was used to underscore the basic social process (BSP) and the basic social psychological process (BSPP). According to Glaser (2005), a BSP occurs around a core category. He noted that while a core category will always exist in grounded theory research, a BSP may not always manifest in research. Moreover, a BSP is a type of core category, therefore all "BSPs are core variables (categories), but not all core variables are BSPs" (Glaser, 2005, para. 4). The main distinction between the two is that BSPs "process out," meaning they have multiple emergent stages, whereas other core categories may not have stages

(Glaser, 2005). The BSPP is a commonly shared problem among research participants that they may not have articulated, but it is identified by the investigator during data analysis (Glaser, 2005). Eleventh, core categories were used to develop minitheories. Finally, explanatory frameworks were created to illustrate a quit decision-making model of female veterans. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of Eaves's (2001) synthesis technique to data analysis.
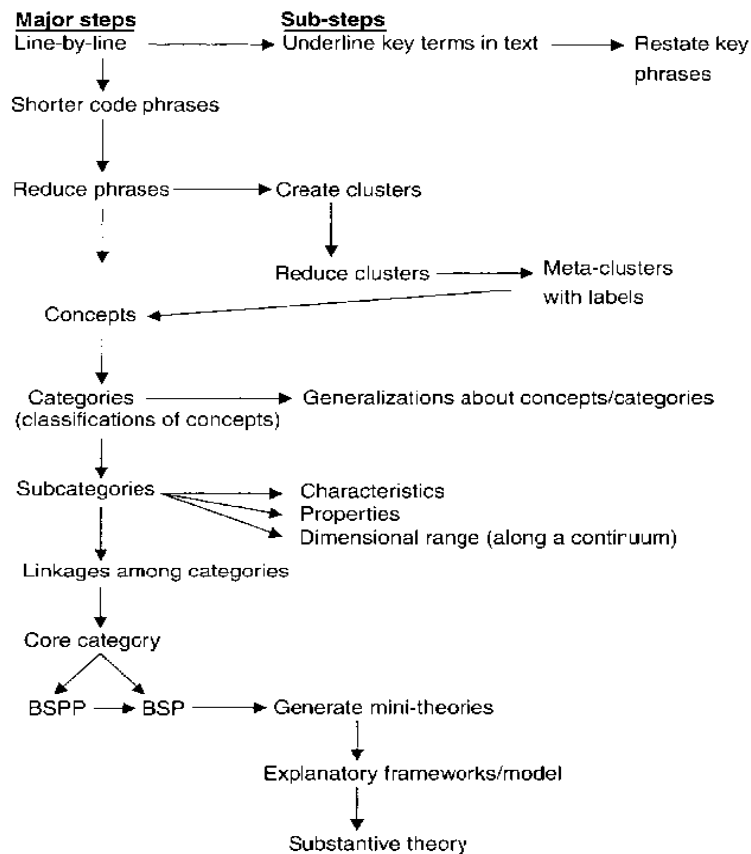
Figure 1. Synthesis approach to GT analysis based on the works of Charmaz (1983), Chesler (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990). Copyright 1997 by Yvonne Donna Eaves. Used with Dr. Eaves's permission (personal communication, 2020).

Memos

Memo writing is an essential process in grounded theory because it is the intermediate step between data collection and research writing (Charmaz, 2014).

Moreover, memo writing allows investigators to pause and examine their thoughts about their interpretation of data and their analysis. Writing memos helps investigators increase the level of abstraction of their codes and categories as well as ensure that the investigator stays proactively involved in the data analysis process (Charmaz, 2014). Throughout every step of this study's data analysis process, analytical memo was written to achieve the following: (a) interpret in-vivo material, (b) examine the relationships among code categories, (c) explain major code categories, (d) explore methodological issues, and (e) generate theory.

Informed Consent

The informed consent is the process by which human subjects agree to participate in a research project (CBU Institutional Review Board [IRB] Handbook, 2019). The informed consent process helps to establish trust between the investigator and his or her research participants. In order to participate in this study, all participants had to provide their digital signature certifying their agreement to take part in this study. Furthermore, all participants were educated on the following regarding their participation:

a) The purposes of the research;

b) The expected duration of the participants' participation;

c) A description of the procedures;

d) Any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts;

e) Any benefits to the participant or to others that may reasonably be expected from the research;

f) Confidentiality of records;

g) Explanation of whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research participants' rights; and

h) Participation as voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled. (CBU IRB Handbook, 2019, pp. 26-27).

In addition, the informed consent allowed the researcher to audiotape participant interviews. The ability to audiotape interview responses is critical to data analysis and to fully understand participants' experiences (Creswell, 2015). Additionally, the informed consent overtly explained participants' rights to discontinue their participation in the interview process at any time or answer questions that they deemed inappropriate. If a participant chose to end her interview prematurely, the researcher took immediate action to end the meeting, subsequently removing any information provided by the subject from the research project.

Participants' Bill of Rights

The bill of rights refers to a comprehensive list of rights and entitlements bestowed upon all participants who take part in a research project. Overall, the personal safety for every research subject is essential to the quest for knowledge. Thus, the participant is the most important person in any research. Given the previously mentioned, all persons asked to participate as a subject in this study, before deciding whether or not to participate, had the right to:

1. Be informed about the nature and purpose of the research.

2. Be given an explanation of the procedures used in the research and, if appropriate, any drug or medical device utilized.

3. Be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks reasonably expected from or during the research.

4. Be given an explanation of any benefits to subjects potentially resulting from research, if applicable.

5. Be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs, or devices that might be advantageous to subjects, and the potential related risks and benefits.

6. Be informed about medical or psychological treatment, if any, available to the subject if complications arise during or after the research.

7. Be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the research purposes and procedures.

8. Be told that consent to participate in the research may be withdrawn at any time and subjects may discontinue participation in the research without prejudice.

9. Be given a copy of any signed and dated written consent form related to the research.

10. Be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not consent to participate in the research without any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion or undue influence on the decision. (CBU IRB Handbook, 2019, p. 33)

The CBU Bill of Rights was e-mailed to research participants the day of their interview. Prior to the start of all interviews, the researcher verified that the participants received a copy of the CBU Bill of Rights and digitally signed their informed consent agreement. A signature indicated that the participant acknowledged her understanding of

her rights and that she willfully agreed to participate in the study. The researcher maintained the digitally signed document on his home office computer, which was only accessible to the researcher.

Confidentiality

In research that utilizes personal, identifiable information of research participants, it is incumbent upon the principle investigator to protect all of the data gathered during the project (Shank, 2011). Throughout the duration of this study, any communication with research participants was safeguarded to ensure that their privacy remained intact and to prompt trustworthiness. Moreover, all personal identifiable information of participants was only made privy to the principle investigator. A unique identification system, which consisted of an alphanumeric code, was assigned to each participant for tracking and privacy security purposes. Specifically, the code "VET001" was given to the first participant, and "VET002" was given to the following participant. This alphanumeric coding continued for all remaining study participants. Any information that could disclose the personal identifiable information of participants was regarded as confidential. To this end, any personal identifiable information obtained from this study was not divulged to the public. Audio recordings and transcriptions of participant interviews were stored in a computer file that was password protected. The file was located on the principle investigator's personal home office computer, which was also password protected and under lock and key, accessible only to the researcher.

In any research project, ethical issues concerning the protection of research participants is a significant concern (Marshall & Rossman, 2015). A social science researcher is obligated to ensure that participants are both informed and protected from

harm. Moreover, researchers must be cognizant throughout their study that the

confidentiality of a participant's information is maintained appropriately, an essential

ethical consideration for any research inquiry (Creswell, 2014). For this reason, the

cross-referencing of participant names with alphanumeric codes, in conjunction with the

informed consent and bill of rights documents, aided in ensuring that the principle

investigator kept the personal, identifiable information of participants confidential.

Validity, Rigor, and Reliability

Qualitative research is often critiqued for falling short in preserving validity,

rigor, and reliability in scientific research because of its subjective nature and the

immense involvement of the investigator throughout the process (Charmaz, 2014;

Creswell, 2014). With this perception in mind, the researcher implemented a number of

strategies to increase the validity, rigor, and reliability of this study. For example,

reflexivity provided a means of measuring this study's rigor and reliability. Reflexivity is

the process by which a researcher considers his or her thoughts, feelings, and connections

to the study in ways that bring him or her into the research process (Charmaz, 2014).

Reflexivity requires the researcher to annotate his or her personal thoughts or analyses of

the emergent data that may influence the inquiry. Throughout this study, the primary

investigator made regular memo entries during all phases of the research process. In

these memos, the researcher recorded methodological decisions and the justification for

them, the organization of the study, and how his beliefs, values, and position may have

influenced the project. This process added objectivity to this study's data analysis and

strengthened the findings of the study (Charmaz, 2014).

According to Glaser (1978), the measure in which to assess the quality of grounded theory research is "fit, work, relevance, and modifiability" (p. 4-5). He asserted that when a grounded theory study fits, works, is relevant, and is modifiable, it will yield a product that is credible. Lomborg and Kirkevold (2003) asserted that *fit* suggests that emergent categories should derive from data and not from a preestablished theoretical perspective. The authors added that through this process, grounded theory research would fit empirical situations. *Work* suggests that theories emerging from the data ought to provide predictions, justifications, and analyses on the research inquiry (Lomborg & Kirkevold, 2003). In regard to *relevance,* Lomborg and Kirkevold (2003) pointed out that this measure implies that theories developed from the data should narrowly focus on core concerns and processes and should be pertinent to the research area under study. Lastly, *modifiability* suggests that a research project should undergo changes with the emergence of new information, thus adding quality to the study (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Similarly, Hammersley (1987) believed that qualitative research may be upheld as valid if "it represents accurately those features of the phenomena, that is intended to describe, explain or theorize" (p. 67). To ensure the validity of this study, the researcher used constant comparative analysis techniques to systematically identify and describe the decision-making process that led servicewomen to voluntarily leave the U.S. Armed Services.

Charmaz (2014) proposed additional criteria for measuring validity, rigor, and reliability of a grounded theory study: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. She suggested that, with respect to credibility, the research should achieve intimate familiarity with the phenomena under study. The findings of the inquiry should provide

enough evidence for outside readers to form an independent assessment of the study, thereby agreeing with the findings (Charmaz, 2014).

In terms of originality, emergent categories should be unique and offer new insights into the phenomena of interest (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) noted that the research should offer a new perspective to understand the data as well as provide social and/or theoretical significance. Moreover, the emerging theory should also "challenge, extend, or refine current ideas, concepts, and practices" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337). The purpose of this study was to investigate the noteworthy experiences that led servicewomen to leave active duty and the decision-making process that occurred in conjunction with their withdrawal. The results of this research could lead to social and organizational evaluation, possibly improving servicewomen's retention.

According to Charmaz (2014), resonance suggests that the emergent categories found in the data fully portray the fullness of the phenomena under study and should make sense to other servicewomen who have experienced the quit-decision experience. The study identified connections between organizations and individual experiences when the emergent data offer such a linkage (Charmaz, 2014). This study attempted to offer new insights into female servicemembers' job satisfaction, experiences, and events that influenced their quit decision and the decision-making processes of female servicemembers that led to them leaving active duty military service.

In regard to usefulness, the research provided clarity and a meaningful description of the study's findings that a layperson could understand and apply to future investigations (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, Charmaz (2014) suggested that usefulness implies that the research project should inspire further investigations in other related

areas. Furthermore, the research should contribute to the existing body of knowledge

(Charmaz, 2014). More pointedly, the researcher must ask him or herself one essential

question, "How does [the research project] contribute to making a better world?"

(Charmaz, 2014, p. 338). This study strives to offer a meaningful description of the

phenomena under study to outside readers and the leadership of the U.S. Armed Services.

The results of this study and the emergent categories and theories that evolved aimed to

describe the experiences of female servicemembers who made the decision to leave

active duty military service. This study is one of the few of its kind to examine the

experiences of quit decision-making of female veterans employed by the DOD.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the fundamental concept of rigor in

qualitative inquiries. Establishing a high level of rigor in a qualitative investigation

encourages confidence and trust by outside readers of the quality of the study's findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described rigor as credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability. This study sought to accurately describe the phenomenon under

investigation and the experience of those who actually experienced the phenomenon.

Developing a trusting relationship with participants is an essential process in order to

fully capture a thorough account of the participants' experiences. This process can be

quite challenging for many qualitative researchers as their primary source of data

normally stems from the interview process. However, for this study, establishing trust

and rapport was less of a concern because of the working relationships already

established between the primary investigator and research participants. Furthermore, the

fact that the primary investigator is himself a veteran of the U.S. Navy may have

imparted credibility to the findings because the researcher had a vested interest in improving the U.S. military's mission readiness.

While qualitative studies may not always meet the criteria of generalizable, it was the intent of this study that its methods be transferable and replicable in similar areas of investigation. This study explored the quit decision-making process of female veterans who voluntarily left active duty military service and the factors that influenced their choice. For this reason, this inquiry applied the aforementioned strategies to instill validity, rigor, and reliability in the study and afford replication through an in-depth explanation of the methodology and data analysis process.

As a means to impart dependability into this project, a comprehensive memo journal was maintained by the primary investigator. The journal included coding decisions and the justifications for coding transcripts in a particular manner. Additionally, annotated in the journal was a detailed description of participant selection. Moreover, the journal clearly outlined how data were reduced, transformed, and coded for analysis purposes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Overall, the methods of this study offered a clear description of the phenomena under investigation so future researchers may replicate the research design and enhance the original research findings.

Methodology Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology that this study utilized. A qualitative grounded theory method of inquiry was the primary approach to analyze and develop a theoretical framework concerning the decision-making process of female veterans who chose to leave active duty service. The participants were female U.S. military veterans who were current employees with the DOD. Data collected were accomplished through

semistructured, in-depth interviews in which the researcher collected participant responses to open-ended questions. Interviews were held using the web-based platform, GoToMeeting, which offers a user-friendly platform to conduct audio-recorded interviews. Moreover, the researcher performed memo writing throughout the study, and specifically during the interview process, to capture the true essence of female veterans' decision-making process. Data analysis utilized NVivo software to organize codes and to help visualize themes and categories. In addition, appropriate measures such as the alphanumeric coding of participants' personally identifiable information (PII) and maintaining the research data in a secure location were taken to protect the PII of all participants in this research project. Lastly, to ensure confidentiality, measures were taken to appropriately and effectively to protect the identity of all participants and all information collected throughout the study. A strict research process was followed to ensure the integrity, reliability, and validity of the study. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive review of the findings of this qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the decision-making process of female veterans who chose to end their active duty career in the armed services and who are current federal employees with the Department of Defense (DOD). Moreover, this study sought to identify the decision-making process servicewomen followed when deliberating their quit decision, to identify the memorable factors and events that led servicewomen to discontinue their active duty service, and to describe the ways in which these factors and experiences contributed to female veterans' quit decision. Exploration of the research subjects' quit decisions revealed that their decision to leave active duty service formulated in a three-stage process. Overall, the servicewomen experienced a common decision-making process, which ultimately led to their withdrawal from active duty service. However, this process was individually constructed around the factors and experiences endured by each participant during her time in the military.

This chapter is organized according to the shared meaning revealed through the data analysis of participants' descriptions of their decision-making process. The first section describes the demographic characteristics of the sample. The second section of this chapter describes the basic social psychological problem (BSPP), opportunity cost. The third section presents the basic social process (BSP) of servicewomen's quit decision process. The BSP is comprised of four related stages with embedded attributes and was identified as the core category integrating the data. Throughout this chapter, data are presented to highlight the stages and attributes of the BSP.

Demographic Characteristics

The sample encompassed 15 participants who all experienced the process of ending their active duty careers in the armed services. All participants met the criteria to participate in the study, which is as follows; the participant must (a) be a female and current DOD employee; (b) be a U.S. military veteran; (c) have a character of discharge under other than dishonorable conditions (e.g., honorable, under honorable conditions, general); and (d) have voluntarily left active duty military service. Three formal demographic questions were initially developed and embedded in the interview protocol for data collection purposes; however, additional information was learned by the researcher during the interview sessions. Therefore, participants' demographic data consisted of the participants' years of military service, branch of service, military pay grade, duty status while in the military, and type of discharge from the military.

Years of Military Service

The 15 females who participated in this study served between 4 and 16 years in the military. The central tendency of the sample's years of military service is as follows: a mean of 6.6 years of service, a median of 6 years of service, a mode of 5 years of service (5 years appeared four times), and a range of 12 years of service.

Branch of Military Service

Of the 15 participants, two served in the U.S. Marine Corps, four served in the U.S. Army, eight served in the U.S. Navy, and one served in the U.S. Air Force (see Figure 2).
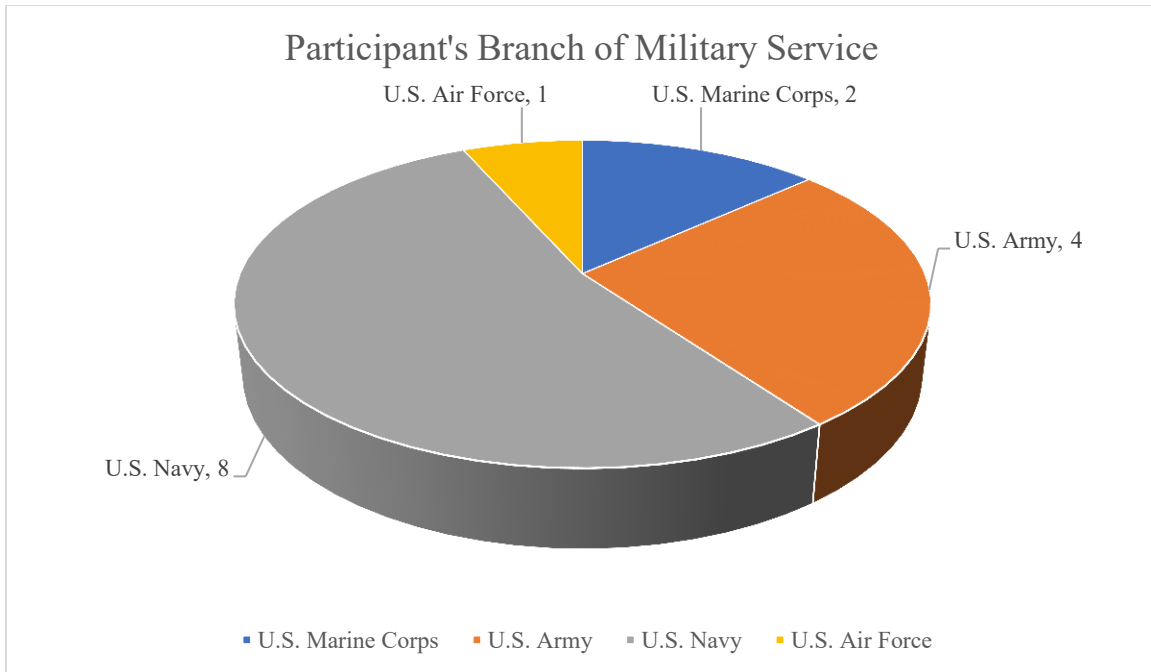
Figure 2. Participant's military branches in which they served on active duty.

Military Pay Grade

All of the women who participated in this study were noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Each of the participants enlisted into their respective military branches of service for an initial period of 4 years. At the end of their first enlistment, participants elected one of three choices: (a) leave at the end of their initial enlistment period, (b) extend their initial enlistment period an additional 1 or 2 years, or (c) reenlist in the military, but subsequently elect to end their service in under 20 years.

While all of the participants in this study were NCOs, none of the women reached senior NCO (i.e., E-7 through E-9) pay grades. Two of the 15, or 13% of the sample, exited the military at the E-3 pay grade. Seven of the 15, or 47% of the sample, exited the military at the E-4 pay grade. Five of 15, or 33% of the sample, exited the military at the E-5 pay grade. One of the 15, or 7% of the sample, exited the military at the E-6 pay grade (see Figure 3).
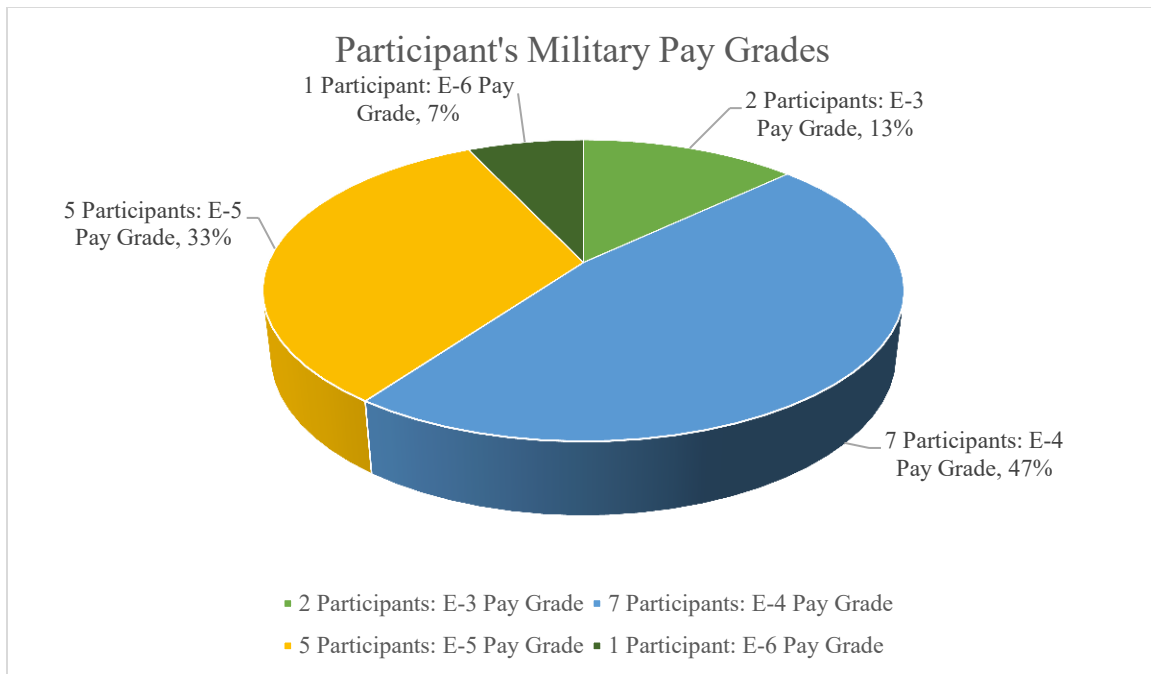
Figure 3. Participant's active-duty pay grades.

Military Duty Status

All 15 of the participants were full-time active-duty service members. However, three of the 15 veterans initially began their military careers in the active reserves. The three participants initially enlisted in the active-reserves for 4 years, but within the first year of their enlistment converted over to full-time active-duty service.

Type of Discharge

All participants in this study received an honorable discharge from their respective branches of military service. Thus, in receiving an honorable discharge, all participants in this study earned the title of *veteran*.

Basic Social Psychological Problem: Opportunity Cost

Generally, every decision involves cost or trade-offs. A fundamental concept used to analyze decision-making is the notion of opportunity cost. Simply stated, opportunity cost is "the best alternative that we forgo, or give up, when we make a choice

or a decision" (Case, Fair, & Oster, 2012, p. 2). The BSPP that emerged from the data was participants' struggle to assess the opportunity cost while deliberating their quit decision. Weighing the opportunity cost occurred throughout the quit decision-making process and posed a dilemma for the servicewomen, largely because no formal opportunity cost analysis was utilized during their deliberation. Indeed, all participants in this study expressed some form of doubt or uncertainty in hindsight of their quit decision. A primary example of this occurrence was identified in a participant's reflection on getting out of the military after 16 years of service. The veteran did not use a formal (i.e., scientific or mathematical) method to analyze her expected opportunity cost to help inform her quit decision; she instead relied upon her own individual analysis.

> It was a hard decision to make, whether to get out after being in for 16 years. And if I could have stayed in and not had the pressure of going downrange or being able to take my family with me, I would have stayed in. Now that I've been out for 8 years or so, I look back and I say, "I could be retired right now. I could have a retirement check coming in every month instead of having to get up to go to work every day because all I had to do was four more years." So sometimes I do regret that I got out. . . if there is a way that I could go back and do 4 years now . . . I would go back and give 4 years so that I could fully retire. (VET015)

Basic Social Process: Servicewomen Quit Decision Process

Common among each participant in this study was their practice to self-analyze their decision to leave or stay in the military, absent of any other resource to aid their decision-making process. While each veteran's decision-making process was unique, they all shared a common process to inform their quit decision. In an attempt to cope

80

with opportunity cost, the servicewomen used a BSP labeled as Servicewomen Quit Decision Process (see Figure 4). This BSP is linear in nature and encompasses three stages: (a) motivational interests, (b) influential factors and experiences, and (c) psychological impacts. Moreover, each stage includes individual categories and subcategories derived from emergent data. However, the overall process exemplifies female service member's quit decision-making process and the factors that influenced their decision to leave active duty service.

Motivational Interest

The first stage of female veterans' quit decision-making process was the identification of their motivational interests. For the purpose of this study, motivational interests were defined as internal and external considerations that stimulate servicewomen's quit decision-making process. During this stage, participants independently analyzed their motivational interests in connection with their decision to withdraw from active duty service. Examination of the data revealed that servicewomen formulated their conscientious decision-making process based on a specific set of motivational interests. These interests were categorized as self-interest, family-interest, spousal-interest, and workplace conflicts of interest. Additionally, each motivational interest embodies distinct characteristics, properties, and dimensions that described the process servicewomen followed while deliberating their quit decision. What follows is a description of the data the emerged from participants' account of their motivational interest.

Basic Social Psychological Problem	**Basic Social Process**	**Stages**	**Categories**

Stage 1
Motivational Interests

- Self-Interest
- Family-Interest
- Spousal-Interest
- Workplace Conflicts of Interest

Opportunity Cost → **Servicewomen Quit Decision Process**

Stage 2
Influential Factors and Experiences

- Achievement of Personal Goals
- Impediments to Childcare
- Change in Family Dynamics
- Leadership Support
- Quality of Work

Red Arrows: Factors and experiences that conflicted with female veteran's motivational interest.

Blue Arrows: Motivational interest most associated with psychological harms endured by female service members.

Stage 3
Psychological Impacts

- Disruptions in Family Structure
- Hostile Workplace
- Limited Career Opportunities

Figure 4. A model of female service members quit decision-making process.

Self-interest. The category of self-interest refers to participants' considerations of the personal gains and advantages to themselves during the decision process. Several of the participants followed a process that guided their quit decision that aligned with their self-interest. The subcategories that emerged from participant's self-interest were education, deployment rotation, and career opportunities.

Education. Some female veterans' conscientious decision-making process was driven by their pursuit of high education. In particular, one participant described how having the means to finance the remainder of her education guided her decision-making process:

> So, I had already completed my bachelor's degree at that point, and I was already working on my master's degree. And knowing that I'd have the funding to cover it, there wasn't a real need to stay in the military. (VET001)

Another female servicemember described how the military was getting in the way of her educational goals:

> I was going to school while in the military, and I was a little over halfway through finishing my bachelor's, and it just became more difficult to complete while out to sea and getting the classes that I needed. . . . I was just frustrated. I felt like, "I'm working so hard and not achieving much." So, my thought process was that. I wanted to get out, finish my degree quicker to be a full-time student, and then come back in the service as an officer. (VET008)

Deployment rotation. One servicewoman expressed how going out on deployment would infringe on her self-interest to spend more time with her children:

I was already ending my term, so I had a choice to re-enlist or not re-enlist. And

one of my main reasons was that my children were older, and I hadn't deployed in

a very long time. And when I did deploy, I didn't have children, so I knew by this

time, my time was going to be up to deploy again, and I didn't want to leave my

children. I wasn't ready to go to Afghanistan next and leave my children behind.

(VET011)

Career opportunities. Stagnant career mobility and being offered alternative

career opportunities in the civilian sector enticed some female servicemembers' self-

interest of career progression. One participant noted, "The advancement just within my

rate, within my job, was very limited at the time." Moreover, another participant

described her experience with limited advancement opportunities in the military and

having alternative job prospects:

I was a photographer's mate and there was no chance of me staying in as a

photographer's mate. My squadron was being phased out, and I would've had to

cross-rate, and I'd been a photographer's mate for 5 years and had a civilian aerial

photography job offered to me. I was willing to go anywhere and to stay in as a

photographer's mate, but, as I just said, I could not get a billet. (VET014)

Family interest. Family interest is participants' considerations for individuals

within their social group with established relationships. These individuals primarily

consist of spouses, children, parents, and friends. The data revealed that all participants'

conscientious decision-making process took into account family interest while

deliberating whether to leave or stay in the military. The emergent subcategories

concerning family interest were childcare cost, separation from children, and children's behavioral shift.

Childcare cost. The cost of childcare played a significant role in the construct of participants' conscientious decision-making process. More pointedly, the plight of childcare cost was described by one participant's account of her deliberation process:

> So, I did some research on . . . how I would afford leaving my middle-school-aged son, at that time, behind and just trying to weigh what the benefit for me would be at that point. So, there was a lot of just kind of weighing the options and just trying to analyze . . . how it would all be feasible to do it comfortably and without creating too much disruption in my family life. (VET003)

Separation from children. Some participants described how the extended time away from their children guided their thought process while weighing their quit decision. One participant communicated how the time away from her newborn child, chiefly due to her military obligation, impeded her willingness to continue active duty service. She stated, "For me, it was when I had my son. I didn't really want to be in the military anymore because I didn't really spend enough time with him . . . I was always gone." Another participant described how leaving her children with other people became overbearing:

> So, I did think about all the times that I had to leave them with other people so that I could fulfill my military obligations, whether it was family or friends. And I just didn't want to do that anymore. (VET001)

Children's behavioral shift. One participant explained how there were overt behavioral changes in her children. She suggested that the continuous process of having to reestablish parental roles framed her decision-making process:

> Just seeing the effect, it had on them when I left. When I left, they were one way; when I came back, they were different. Having to rebuild, retrain them all, rebuild our relationships and reestablish rules, the way that I wanted things to be done, that just became overwhelming and I just didn't want to put them through that. (VET008)

Spousal interest. Spousal interest refers to participants' considerations for matters concerning their intimate companion. Many participants identified spousal interest as a significant attribute used to shape their quit decision-making process. The subcategories associated with spousal interest were outside the continental United States (OCONUS) move, deploying spouse, and divorcing spouse while pregnant.

OCONUS move. Military moves overseas are challenging even for the most seasoned military family. Preparing for an OCONUS move brings new concerns, especially when your spouse is also active duty. One participant detailed how moving OCONUS to Germany with an active duty spouse set the foundation for her quit decision:

> The biggest hurdle that I had to cross at that point was moving because my husband was active duty Army, and he got orders to Germany. So, when I was exploring the options in Germany, and in regard to the location that he was at, that played a big factor. . . . So, it was a movement overseas with an active duty military member in another service, was a driving force. (VET005)

Deploying spouse. A number of participants described how the probability of their spouse deploying and, in particular, deploying during wartime directed their thought process. One participant stated, "Knowing that he was probably going to deploy during that time frame drove my quit decision-making process." Moreover, another participant described her experience as follows:

> My [active duty] fiancé was gone on deployment and I was active duty. And when we went to war . . . that was really hard on me. So, having gone through that and then weighing out the pros and cons, like the benefits of things in the military, the benefits of getting out, having one still active duty and the other one at home . . . there were more cons to staying in than getting out. (VET002)

Divorcing spouse while pregnant. One participant explained how going through a divorce laid the path for her quit decision. She described her experience of divorcing her husband in the midst of him leaving for Japan and finding out she was pregnant:

> So, I had met my now ex-husband when we were stationed in California together. And he got orders to Japan, I was up for re-enlistment and right before I was going to re-enlist, we found out I was pregnant. So that was the choice, instead of re-enlisting, I made the decision to get out. Because it's one thing to be separated as a couple but when you bring a baby into it, the wiser choice was for me to get out because he was higher ranking than me. So, for me to get out and then me and the baby went to Japan after he was born.
>
> It was a really hard decision but familywise, that is what made sense. And I'm very family oriented and I knew me trying to raise a child by myself— because he would still be going to Japan and it would be me wherever I was

getting stationed at, it would be just me and the baby. And I just didn't know how

difficult it would be. So, it was kind of the best decision for us at the time was for

me to get out. (VET009)

Workplace conflicts of interest. Workplace conflicts of interest refers to

participants' considerations for their values and beliefs that are at odds with their work

environment. Many participants acknowledged that workplace conflicts concerning

harassment, lackluster supervision, and an adverse workplace motivated their

conscientious quit decision. The subcategories linked to workplace conflicts of interest

are discrimination, unsupportive leadership, and hostile occupational culture.

Discrimination. Feelings of workplace discrimination coaxed some participants

to construct their decision-making process consistent with their values that bolstered a

nondissimilatory work environment. One participant detailed the perils of gender

discrimination that she encountered in the following:

Well the last few months actually I was going to stay in. I had orders to MCRD

down in Southern California and it was a very important billet that's kind of in the

spotlight, but it was one of those billets that if you go and you were stationed

there it helped for advancement. So, I got the orders, I was set, and then all of a

sudden, the orders were cancelled, and nobody could exactly explain why. I went

to my Master Chief; I went to our yeoman to figure out what the problem was and

all they said was just I wasn't able to go there anymore. And so, after getting the

runaround with that and then finding out that the only place that they would send

me after that because I had made a fuss about it was Cuba.

And with that being my only option of being stationed somewhere with all the other places that you could be stationed across the country or the world in the Navy, I kind of felt like I was being blackballed, like my time was done. And that's why I say I didn't want to fight anymore. . . . And I really think that it was because I was a female because I know before me it was a male because I was friends with him. And he was the one who said, "Hey you'd do phenomenal." So, I had everything lined up. I had the orders in my hand, and they cancelled it. That's unheard of. (VET005)

Unsupportive leadership. One servicewoman described how experiencing inadequate military leadership during a difficult time in her life influenced her willingness to stay in the military:

There were problems with my chain of command when I got a divorce that just kind of—the problem is that my chain of command made to the point where I don't even care . . . it just made me give up just because my chain of command wasn't supporting me. So basically, what had happened was I got a divorce, and I reported it. And they're supposed to take my BH away, and give me a barrack's room, but they found out I was living with family at the time, so they told me, they're like, "Keep the BH. Just don't spend it," or whatever.

And it just so happened the family I was living with was moving. And I was telling them I have nowhere to stay, and they did not want to give me a barrack's room, and I knew at the end of the day, it was going to come and bite me in my behind. And so pretty much, they just weren't helping me out at all, and to that point, I was just like, "Just give up." (VET010)

Hostile occupational culture. One participant explained how working in a male-dominated workforce shaped her quit decision. She described her experience in a workplace where females were treated poorly and where the culture was much like a high school clique environment, which was in contrast to her values:

I just felt like being a female in the military was almost like an uphill battle. And it came to the point where I had to reenlist or get out, I thought, "Oh I'm doing 20 years." I want to serve my country, but after being in that long and seeing just the culture with how women are treated in the military, I kind of just lost my will to fight. It was like, "I'm not going to do this anymore."

Trying to wrap my head around doing almost 12 more years, I just felt like I didn't have it in me to keep fighting for what was right. And I'm the kind of person that like rules, I like structure, and so the military was perfect in that aspect because I knew exactly what was expected of me, I knew exactly what I needed to do. But there's so many people that didn't follow rules and it was very clique-y. If you were not in with the right people even though—I had had no bad marks, never been in trouble, I've always had awards, medals, I got to do a humanitarian act, and mission act in Indonesia. And those things meant the world to me. But to stay in and continue doing those things with trying to fight the battle being a female in the military. I felt defeated. And I felt like I didn't have it in me to make it that much longer. . . . I was defeated at that point. I was like, "Well, " I felt like I was in a male-dominant military. (VET006)

Influential Factors and Experiences

The second stage of female servicemembers' quit decision-making process is termed influential factors and experiences. The data revealed that once participants identified their motivational interests that would guide their thought process, servicewomen took the next step of independently identifying the factors and experiences that conflicted with their motivational interests. These influential factors and experiences emerged as categories with their own associated properties. The categories were labeled as achievement of personal goals, impediments to childcare, change in family dynamics, leadership support, and quality of work. The following paragraphs provide a descriptive account of the factors and experiences that influenced participants' quit decision.

Achievement of personal goals. This category emerged from participants' descriptions of factors that conflicted with their self-interests. In particular, a number of participants detailed their experiences managing the competing interests of completing their educational goals and military service. Additionally, some participants identified dissimilarities among their self-interest for upward career progression and the stagnant career mobility they experienced while serving on active duty. The subcategories that emerged out of this category were school versus military and career stagnation.

School vs. military. For some participants, attempting to manage the rigors of higher education in conjunction with the demanding obligations inherent in military service posed a significant challenge. The participants believed that the overbearing nature of military duty conflicted with their self-interests to complete their college degrees. One participant recounted,

While I was going through the process and going to school, it was difficult to attend weekend classes because of my military obligation, and there wasn't a lot of leeway in that. Even though they knew it was only for, say, a 2-month time period, and I would only miss Saturday drill for half of a day, and I wasn't going to be gone for the entire day, there really wasn't a—there was no exception. It was you either come to class, or you come to drill, and drill is a priority. So as much as they supported going to school, and they advocated for it in my particular unit, there wasn't a lot of support behind it because the thought process was, "You don't have to go on a weekend. You chose to do that." But as I was getting more and more into my educational program, the class options were limited. So, if I had one class requirement, and it was going to K-Bay on a Saturday, that was the requirement because I was going to HPU through the military campus. So again, options being limited, I couldn't just do it during the regular workweek at the downtown HPU campus because I was working full-time. So, benefit-wise, it was better to go through the military campus because with the night-class options and the weekend options, but again, the support was very limited during that drill weekend period. (VET004)

Another participant described her experience attempting to complete her college degree while on deployment:

I was going to school while in the military, and I was a little over halfway through finishing my bachelor's, and it just became more difficult to complete while out to sea and getting the classes that I needed. So, I decided that I wanted to get out. (VET012)

Career stagnation. Some participants described how their career immobility and the lack of positions available for females directly factored into their choice to quit the military. One participant reflected,

> I felt like I've been in for this long because of the job that I chose or was afforded to choose from. I wasn't able to excel like I wanted to, just because of the quotas and the advancement rates, and stuff like that. So, I just felt like—I really felt like there was a cap where I was, and I had already reached it and I wasn't going any further after that. So that's really what made me just want to get out. (VET014)

Another participant recounted her frustration with the lack of upward mobility:

> Well, when I joined the squadron, I was the only female photographer. There were five other photographers in the squadron, but they were male and aircrew. I couldn't be aircrew because I was female. I had to apply on observer status even if I was training the ordnance men how to load munitions on the P-3s. And my command actually tried to get me to be aircrew. It went all the way to Washington, and they denied it . . . I would've stayed in if I could've stayed in as a photographer's mate, journalist, anything along those lines, but there just wasn't anything. (VET011)

Impediments to childcare. Several participants identified issues associated with childcare as the most noteworthy factor that led to their withdrawal from active duty service. This category revealed the conflict between a participant's family interest and her deployment obligation when serving in the military. The emergent subcategories were deployment with children and childcare support.

Deployment with children. Some participants detailed the difficultly of going on deployment as a single parent. In particular, participants described how deploying with older children became overwhelming, in part, because of the prolonged time spent away from their children. One former servicewoman described the following:

> Oh, well, I'm a single parent. So, I mean, it wasn't an issue being in, but obviously, it would be an issue if I was to get deployed. Like I said, I deployed, but they [my children] weren't born. I didn't have any children then. So, deploying with them older, it would have been more of an impact, and who would they be with? I mean, probably family members or something of the sort, but I didn't want to have to leave my children for a long period of time. . . . I didn't want to have to give my children up to anyone. (VET003)

Another participant reflected on her experience:

> I mean, at the age that they were, they were on childcare at one Post. And then if you are a single parent, you have to have a care plan, a family care plan. And so that allows single parents to even be in [the military] because there's different duties that'll take you away at any time as you know. So, with that, I mean, I guess I would just have to enact my family care plan if a deployment came up. And I didn't want to do that because it's still not me. And it's not a husband. It would be auntie, uncle, grandma, grandpa. Not that I didn't trust those people because, of course, you put those that you would trust to give your children over to in the event of leaving, but I just didn't want to leave. I wanted to be physically around. (VET013)

One participant provided insight about single parenting as a military servicemember:

It just seemed like that I always had an issue, being a single parent of four children . . . I had to miss out on work. And it's okay to do that a couple of times but when it's redundant, supervisors, First Sergeants, and the command team, they kind of frown upon that, like, "Well, you need to get that handled. You need to have a family care plan and you need to make sure that it's always in place." And so, after hearing that for so many times, you get tired. Because you're doing the best that you can with what you have and then you just get tired of, "Okay. Why are you always riding me? I'm not a bad soldier. I come to work. . . I would do what I needed to do, and those days that I had childcare. . . I would make sure that I would try to put extra time in so that it didn't appear that I was just slacking off and just a sub-standard soldier. Put the mission first and that was always preached to me. We have a mission that we need to take care of. "The military didn't issue you a family. That's something that you got on your own." So, hearing that didn't feel good, so you do what you've got to do. And so, I was in for 16 years and so, yeah, I could have done 4 more years, but I didn't want to put my family in another situation where I wasn't there to make sure that their well-being wasn't taken of. (VET015)

Childcare support. Certain participants described the issue of not having access to quality information on childcare services as well as the childcare support that is available to military members:

It was more not knowing what kind of support I would get to care for my newborn

son. And with him being our first kid, not knowing what support we really

needed played a huge factor in my decision. Who knows where I was going to go

what support would actually be there? (VET008)

Another participant discussed the difficulties of covering childcare:

It was everything that you mentioned. Really no childcare, I really wasn't aware

what type of childcare there was available for active duty members. I'm aware

now but I wasn't aware back then and we were both on a sea/shore rotation and

were both in a sea going rate and I had to go out to sea, he had to go out to sea so

then who do I trust my child with? I wasn't comfortable with that. (VET009)

Change in family dynamics. Many participants communicated experiencing an

unexpected shift in their family structure, which led to their departure for the military.

This category emerged from the conflict among the military's demanding work

requirements and participant's family interest. Additionally, changes in family dynamics

were also linked to female servicemembers' spousal interest, which conflicted with their

willingness to continue their active duty service. The subcategories connected to changes

in family dynamic were parent caregiver and divorce.

Parent caregiver. Participants who acted as caregivers to a parent revealed that

responsibility to be a noteworthy factor. One servicewoman described how she abruptly

became the solo caretaker for her ill mother while on active duty. The participant's

commitment to her mother's healthcare regiment conflicted with her work obligation,

resulting in her exit from the military:

I suddenly became the caretaker of my mom . . . she ended up becoming sick. It just seemed like there was always a reason of why—when we went on a field mission, if we were there 14 days, out of those 14 days, I would have to miss 2 days to make sure that there were doctor's appointments and medications being taken. Just things like that. There were some things that I could get a power of attorney person to do and there were some things that, being that my mom was also my dependent, there were some things that she just didn't feel comfortable with other people sitting in a hospital room with her. She preferred me to be there. So, because she preferred me to be there, there were tests and dialysis and things like that that she needed to be at on a weekly basis. Then I had to miss out on work. (VET015)

Divorce. Some participants communicated how divorcing their spouse while on active duty factored into their choice to quit the military. One participant noted, "The first 2 years into my service, I never thought about getting out. I liked being in. But once I got divorced it was kind of a life-changing thing for me." Likewise, another participant described her experience as follows:

I was going through a divorce with a military member and that was another factor because my military husband was cheating, and I found out it was with not just one person but multiple people. And in the military, that's very frowned upon. I had gone to his command because one of the ladies that he was cheating with was harassing me, calling me on my cell phone, contacting me online, and I wanted it to stop. His command basically said that if I didn't have video tape evidence or proof that they won't do anything as far as her calling me or contacting me online.

That it wasn't violating any of the military rules for her to be in trouble. And so, I

knew that was a dead end. Yeah. So that was another factor because. . . I just

didn't feel supported. I didn't feel safe. (VET013)

Quality of leadership. A number of participants detailed experiences involving

inadequate support from their leadership. Therefore, this category resulted from the

disparity between the values and qualities that participants favorably regard, such as

supportive leaders and the leadership they encountered while on active duty. The

emergent subcategory was chain of command shortfalls.

Chain of command shortfalls. Participants expounded on their experiences with

subpar leadership while on active duty, which ultimately led to their exit from active

duty. One participant stated, "And there was no support from leadership really unless the

leadership was a female and even then, some females feel like they have something to

prove so they really don't support other females." One participant conveyed her

experience as follows:

After I left the ship, I was in shore duty. So, I was there, working with civilians

and I just felt like they treated the military like we were literally the bottom of the

barrel. They treated us very poorly and I felt like I never—like we never got the

support—well, at least me personally—I never got the support from our senior

military leadership to back us up and just kind of demand respect for those in

uniform by the civilian personnel where I was working. So, I just really felt like I

was making these sacrifices by being in the military and being treated unfairly. I

didn't feel appreciated. So that's really what made me just want to get out.

(VET012)

Another servicewoman recounted her reasoning behind leaving after dealing with unsupportive leadership:

It was pretty much just, I guess, the qualities and actions of my leaders because . . . of their advice when it came to my situation. And I feel like they kind of just maybe didn't want to go through all the, I guess, paperwork that they, I guess, had to do to get me a barrack's room or just to submit paperwork or whatever. I don't know if they just didn't feel like it, but I've seen people get divorced or not even get divorced, get separated, and they gave them a temporary barrack's room. So from seeing that, I pretty much just realizing . . . how bad their leadership is, and experiencing it firsthand, it's just kind of like, "Man, if I'm in this bad situation now, if I stay in and go to another unit or something and then have to deal with the same crap with the same type of leadership." I think that's where it really made me rethink about staying in. (VET001)

Quality of work. Several participants recalled some of their most unfavorable experiences concerning their work environment that subsequently encouraged them to leave the military. This category emerged because of the conflict between participants' value of a pleasant workplace and the harsh work environment of the military. The subcategories that emerged out of this category were coworker infighting and harassment.

Coworker infighting. Some participants' overwhelming experience with backstabbing coworkers led them to leave active duty service. One participant described her experience of taking on a heavy college course load while serving in the military and having fellow colleagues complain to her supervisor that she was getting special treatment because she was going to school:

The office that I worked in, there was a three-shift rotation. And the shift started at 5:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m., and I believe at 2:00 p.m. because of the support that we had to provide to the general officers. And I didn't have a problem doing either the 5 a.m. or the 9 a.m. shifts, but it was difficult to do the afternoon one because I was going to night school. So, my supervisor understood, but there were other service members that weren't as understanding because they weren't in the same situation. So, in order to not create conflict, the supervisor wanted it to be fair across the board and said, "I'll try not to put you on the night shift, but if I have to, you have to do it." And again, I was on such a fast-paced focused track to get my education completed that I took every single semester—the military program, there was five semesters a year. I was in every single one.

And anybody who would have looked at my schedule would have understood what I was trying to do. But there were other service members who complained to my supervisor that, "Oh, she always gets the morning shift," or, "She always gets the mid-morning shift, not the night shift," but not taking into account, again, my whole purpose behind joining the military was to get that education, and that's what I was doing. So, it's not because I didn't want to work at night. So that played a part in me getting out. (VET005)

Harassment. Some participants explained how experiencing harassment while on active duty significantly guided their decision to leave the military. One participant stated, "There was over 300 guys in my squadron. I was 1 of 12 girls. It was tough, those days, being a female. So, you either got too much sexual attention or the men

would say, you don't belong in a man's Navy." Another participant described her experience as follows:

> I also felt singled out. Like if you weren't one of those fast girls—if you know what I mean by that—I was singled out because I didn't want to sleep with all the men, because I didn't want to hang out with people outside of work. I wanted to go to work, and just do my job. So, I felt singled out. I wasn't getting sent to the schools that all the other guys or other girls were being sent to. I believe I got what I think were the shitty collateral duties. (VET009)

Psychological Impacts

The third and final stage of female servicemembers' quit decision-making process was characterized as psychological impacts. Psychological impacts refer to the mental harms realized by participants because of the noteworthy factors that stimulated their quit decision. At this stage, participants evaluated the adverse consequences of the factors based on their understanding of how those factors weighed on them emotionally. Once participants grasped the impact of the factors, participants deemed those experiences as intolerable, resulting in their withdrawal from active duty service. The participants' data revealed several categories that emerged in this stage. The categories were classified as disruptions in family structure, hostile workplace, and limited career opportunities.

Disruptions in family structure. This category materialized from participants' realizations that their family interests were adversely affected because of their military service. Participants described how their continued service in the military would uproot their family's support structure or put them in a position where their childcare would not

be secure. The subcategories that emerged in this category were family roots and unknown support.

Family roots. Participants detailed their mental distress, knowing that remaining in the military would require them to relocate their family to a new location as well as take them away from their established spiritual foundation:

Being here in Hawaii, I had a strong foundation here. After living here for so long, my children were both born here. So, getting out and staying here was an easy choice. Now, remembering a very important thing. I could not reenlist anymore to stay in Hawaii. That was one of the biggest things. I wanted to stay here, and I had already got one extension for here. And so, again, my time was up. I had been in a non-deployable area for a long time. There were no other units around in Hawaii that I would be able to transfer to, and so I was going to have to leave the island which I feared. There are a lot of things in my life, church-wise, belief-wise I was involved in, and I wasn't ready to leave that behind. (VET010)

Unknown support. Participants described the fear they felt with the potential of having to serve on active duty in a foreign country and functioning as a pseudo single parent without guaranteed childcare support:

I knew being in Japan, he was going to be deployed a lot and I would be there without him most of the time . . . but when you're active duty and you don't have the family support if you need childcare or anything like that, that's a scary situation . . . essentially, I would have been a single mom being active duty. And I don't come from a big family or a family that would be able to help with the

child if needed. Because when you go on deployment or anything like that, you would have to find a family member to take care of the child and neither one of us, we didn't have that support either, so I chose to get out. (VET009)

Hostile workplace. This category emerged from participants' recognition of the workplace conflicts of interests they experienced that caused them emotional harm. Participants described that problems with coworkers and senior leadership created an untenable work environment, resulting in their departure from active duty. The subcategories connected with this category were conflicts among coworkers/leadership and workplace harassment.

Conflicts among coworkers/leadership. Some participants described the mental fatigue they suffered from infighting with individuals in their work environment:

Well these types of events started to outweigh the benefit and the pride that I felt when I actually went and did something good. When I was with my mission or I was with my unit out on a mission doing something good I was like, "We're supporting our country." We did some joint operations with Allied forces overseas in Korea. Awesome. Those were the most awesome things I've ever participated in. But it was like the times in between those missions that I got to feel that pride and satisfaction of serving, it was like always having to fight, always having to watch my back, which in the military you're supposed to be looking out for the people to the right and left of you. And they're supposed to be looking out for you. You shouldn't have to be worrying about them. And that's where I kind of just got overwhelming and so, I decided to leave. (VET006)

Participants also described the stress of being perceived unfavorably by senior

leaders because of their family obligations:

So, perception is reality, right. And with saying that, so my perception of it was I

was perceived as a bad solider which is why I got out. I was looked down on

because when it came time for promotions, the hard jobs like being a Drill

Sergeant and wanting to volunteer to go downrange, being an instructor, I could

do but then I have to think about, "Okay. Well, what happens if this and if that?"

I would always have a backup plan. However, when I go to talk to the Sergeant

Major about doing a hard job or things like that, it was always brought back to my

attention, "Well, you do know that you're a single parent and you do know that

you'll be going away from your family for more than the average soldier, so those

are the things that you have to consider." So, having been reminded of that, so I

turned down being a Drill Sergeant, I turned down being a recruiter. I wasn't one

of the ones that volunteered to go down to be deployed for the money. I would

rather stay back in the rear and work that way. But when it comes to promotion,

those are the things that they're looking for, "What did you do above and beyond?

What did you do to make you stand out to be superior over all these other staff

sergeants?" And so, when looking at my ratings, I didn't have any of those hard

jobs. When I deployed, I was with a unit. It wasn't something that I volunteered

to do, and I went with another unit. I wasn't able to be a recruiter and I wasn't

able to be a Drill Sergeant. So, the perception, to me, was a reality because

putting in a place of a leadership role, "Well, we could use you but you ain't

going to be able to do this and you won't be able to do that." And so, some

leadership didn't have a problem with it but some of them did. And I think the ones, this is just me, this is just the way that I looked at it. The First Sergeant or the Sergeant Major that was a male Sergeant Major and they had a wife at home, they never understood my struggle. This is just the way that I'm thinking. But if I had a female Sergeant Major and a female First Sergeant or a female Sergeant First Class, she could empathize and relate with me because either she's been there, or she has a close friend that's a female that's in the same predicament and situation that I'm in. But for me, I just think that male soldiers either had a wife at home that was taking care of their children or a male soldier, senior soldier, senior ranking that didn't have any children just didn't understand the struggles that I had. (VET012)

Limited career opportunities. Some participants identified psychological harms associated with their self-interest, which led to their withdrawal from active duty service. This category revealed participants' discomfort with their advancement prospects while serving in the military. The emergent subcategory was labeled as dismal career outlook.

Dismal career outlook. Participants detailed the mental anguish of balancing their military obligation while achieving their personal goals:

I was really stressed out and overwhelmed trying to figure out how I was going to complete school and keep my coworkers off my back. But the choice became easy for me when I was offered a civilian job as a contractor at Paycom. They understood my educational goals, and they knew my work ethic, so once they offered me the contractor position, it was easy for me to decline further active duty orders. (VET003)

Participants also described their emotional angst of the limited career opportunities available to females in the military:

> I wish there was more opportunities. I don't know how it is now for females but back then I was disappointed in the lack of opportunities for females. It was if you're a male, all the opportunities are presented to you but if you're a female you either have to sleep with someone or just go way above and beyond to try to prove yourself which I feel like that's not necessary at all and so discouraging for women. If they see that you're doing well, they should afford you the same opportunities that they're giving the males. So not having opportunities also made me leave to the civilian side, where I knew had more options to grow. (VET007)

Results Summary

This chapter described the substantive theory for female veterans' quit decision-making process. Opportunity cost was identified as the BSPP of the theory. Servicewomen's quit decision process was the BSP that emerged from the data and around the substantive theory. This BSP is comprised of a three-stage process with each stage containing distinct categories and subcategories that described servicewomens' experiences with exiting the military and the factors that influenced their choice to leave.

Fittingly, descriptions were rich and personal throughout the data collection stage and were overwhelmingly consistent during the development of the categories and subcategories in data analysis. As a result, a model was formulated and presented to illustrate female servicemembers' quit decision-making process. While the results of this study were significant, they were not beyond the scope of the expectations of the

researcher. Chapter 5 summarizes the study findings and provides a study findings

discussion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

A significant finding from this study of female servicemembers' withdrawal deliberation process was the discovery of a core category, servicewomen's quit decision, that subsequently emerged as the basic social process (BSP). From the core category, a model of servicewomen's quit decision was created within the context of voluntarily leaving active duty military service. The intent of the discussion that follows was to offer insight into the explanatory framework of the model. Thus, Chapter 5 briefly summarizes the study findings and presents a discussion of the findings in regard to the salient literature previously discussed. Study limitations are presented, and recommendations for future research are discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes after a brief summary discussion.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to glean understanding through the participants' rich descriptions regarding those influences that compelled female servicemembers to exit the military. To achieve this purpose, data were collected from 15 participants representing various U.S. military branches (e.g., Navy, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps) to answer the follow research questions:

1. What was the conscious decision-making process female servicemembers followed when deliberating their decision to leave active duty service?

2. What are the noteworthy experiences and factors that led female servicemembers to leave active duty service?

3. In what ways did these experiences and factors contribute to female servicemembers' decision to leave active duty service?

These research questions were designed to study servicewomen's conscientious quit decision because military retention has been adversely impacted by female turnover throughout the armed service branches. The information found in this study could help decrease female turnover, which in turn will improve regulations and policies concerning military retention, encourage future research on employee quit decision-making process, and provide an in-depth understanding of what females take into consideration when deciding to quit.

This study provided extended knowledge on the retention and turnover issues associated with female employees and, specifically, female servicemembers, in order to inform military leadership and expand current policies aimed to improve female retention. Indeed, a well-developed theory will stimulate deeper understanding of a phenomenon of interest and ideas to exercise possible control over the phenomenon (Kostere & Percy, 2006). Because information was garnered from the rich description of participants' experiences, this study can educate legislators and practitioners who want to understand the nuances within the deliberating process of females quitting active duty service. Moreover, through the identification of factors and experiences that influence a female's decision-making, programs and procedures can be developed that are better aligned with their motivational interests to improve their retention throughout the military branches.

While past research has put forth theories to explain the process employees experience when withdrawing their employment, they do not investigate specific populations (e.g., servicewomen) and the withdrawal process unique to such groups. When existing theories about a phenomenon are lacking or nonexistent, grounded theory

studies are ideal to help make sense of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, this study used grounded theory methodology to examine female servicemembers' experiences and to describe their process of quitting active duty service.

The grounded theory method was chosen because it allowed the researcher the ability to capture data directly from candid participant discussions of their lived experiences, circumstances, and indirectly via the revealed meanings of the phenomenon under study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constructive grounded theory perspective of Charmaz (2014) directed the researcher's attention to participants' viewpoints and inductive assessments concerning relevant contextual information ideal to address the research questions. Additionally, the systematic design associated with Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) offered flexibility in data collection, identification, and analysis of emergent themes found in the data (L. M. Allen, 2010). Moreover, the design allowed the researcher to glean a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences concerning the phenomenon because of the closeness to the behavior source. The emerging design of Glaser (2005) allowed the researcher to develop a substantive theory based on the basic social psychological problem (BSPP) and the BSP that emerged from the data.

The significance of this study is illustrated by its contribution to theoretical insight through the discovery of new decision-making factors and conflicting voluntary turnover literature regarding the researched population. Also, this study's findings contributed to military retention literature through increased knowledge regarding the quit decision-making process of female servicemembers sourced directly from their personal narratives. Furthermore, the study offered an expanded perspective concerning

the motivational interests that guided the conscientious quit decision-making process of servicewomen.

Due to the void in the literature and the lack of knowledge concerning the prevalent retention problem in the military's female population, the conscientious decision-making process among female servicemembers was selected for study. Unfortunately, studies have yet to completely uncover why the disparity in retention among women and men in the U.S. Armed Forces continues to persist (Asch, Miller, & Weinberger, 2016; Lim, Mariano, Cox, Schulker, & Hanser, 2014). Thus, retention literature remains limited in female servicemember retention theory. With a focus on closing the retention literature gap and gleaning a renewed understanding of the influential factors related to the phenomenon, purposive and theoretical sampling was used to capture narratives directly from the source. Using grounded theory, data collection and data analysis afforded the participants an opportunity to share their experiences through their own rich description of the phenomenon.

Consistent with grounded theory methodology, theoretical sampling, constant comparative analysis, and memo writing aided with data collection and analysis in this study. Participants were contacted via purposive and snowball sampling methods, follow-up communication via e-mail or telephone, and interviewed using the GoToMeeting website. During this process, various grounded theory presentations, books, journals, and dissertations were reviewed to enhance the researcher's knowledge and reinforce correct application of the method.

Interview transcriptions were continuously compared with audio recordings to ensure accuracy of the transcripts. After each interview, transcripts were coded and

memos written, and then they were compared with each other. Open coding identified interpreted concepts and preliminary categories. Axial coding is the process that was applied to the open coded data to identify relationships between categories. Selective coding allowed the theoretical framework development by identifying relationships between categories and filling gaps via the abstract development of categories.

The application of theoretical sampling ultimately allowed the research to achieve theoretical saturation after completing 15 interviews. Theoretical saturation occurred when no new data emerged from subsequent interviews. Indeed, recurring themes became evident as participants communicated their personal experiences. During data analysis, 26 open codes were developed from participants' personal narratives. The combination of the 26 open codes produced 12 axial codes: self-interest, family-interest, spousal-interest, workplace conflicts of interest, achievement of personal goals, impediments to childcare, change in family dynamics, leadership support, quality of work, disruptions in family structure, hostile workplace, and limited career opportunities. Collectively, the 26 open codes and 12 axial codes formed the core categories informing servicewomen's quit decisions, which describes the process of leaving active duty service.

While each participant in this study communicated experiences that were tailored to their individual circumstance, parallels were identified throughout their experiences. The results of this study found that when making the decision to withdraw from active duty, servicewomen underwent a three-stage process. Servicewomen began by identifying and weighing their motivational interests. The dominant motivational interests found were self-interest, family interest, spousal interest, and workplace

conflicts of interest. Next, servicewomen assessed pertinent factors that conflicted with

their motivational interests. These factors were largely negative occurrences identified

by participants during their time on active duty. Lastly, female servicemembers

evaluated the emotional impact brought on by the divergence between their motivational

interests, noteworthy factors, and experiences. At the end of the process, female

servicemembers validated their quit decision, resulting in their voluntary withdrawal

from active duty.

Discussion of the Findings

This study's findings developed a theory that gleaned understanding of the forces

central to the research problem. Specifically, the findings offered insight into the

cognitive steps utilized by servicewomen when deciding to leave the military. As stated

in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, several studies have investigated factors associated with

female servicemembers' quit decisions. However, these studies failed to offer an

understanding into female servicemembers' withdrawal deliberation process. The

following provides a discussion about participants' narrative experiences as well as

previously discussed literature as it relates to the findings of this study.

Theory Through Data Analysis

The theory that emerged from this study was supported by the data analysis. The

constructed theory illustrated the mechanism by which female servicemembers weighed

opportunity cost during the quit decision-making process. Participants described the

hardship of making their quit decision and the lasting regret associated with their choice.

For example, one participant communicated, "After I got out, I was kind of like, 'Damn,

should I really have gone?'" (VET002), and another stated, "I sometimes struggle with

my decision because had I just stuck it out and figured it out, I would probably be retiring

right now along with a lot of my friends. So, there is a little bit of regret" (VET005).

Further, one participant elaborated this point by commenting, "I can say that I miss the

military and at times after getting out, I wish I had another option to where I could have

stayed in. If there was some other way, I probably wouldn't have got out" (VET009).

Similar to the other descriptions, one participant explained, "It was a hard decision to

make, whether to get out after being in for 16 years. . . . I look back and I say, 'I could be

retired right now.' So sometimes I do regret that I got out" (VET016). The data analysis

confirmed that female servicemembers struggled with assessing opportunity cost, a

concept that is supported by their feelings of regret when they chose to set aside their

career and exit the military.

Emergent Factors

Previous literature has identified various factors that influence a female's

decision-making. Specifically, researchers found that (a) quality of work, quality of life,

and quality of leadership (Kapp, 2002; Sminchişe, 2016); (b) sexual harassment

experiences (Lancaster et al., 2013; Majkowski et al., 2015); and (c) impediments to

caregiving, unit support, and career progression (DACOWITS, 2017; Dichter & True,

2015; Moore, 2002; Vasterling et al., 2015) all play an influential role in female

servicemembers' conscientious quit decision-making process. These studies are

consistent with the findings of this study. All participants communicated that at least one

of the aforementioned factors conflicted with their motivational interest and guided their

quit decision. Surprisingly, however, a new factor labeled *change in family dynamics*

was found to conflict with female servicemembers' motivational interest. Changes in

family dynamics emerged from participants' experiences with divorce while on active duty. This emergent factor is likened to interpersonal factors identified in Dichter and True's (2015) study on females' dissatisfaction and exit from the military. Dichter and True found that negative and traumatic events significantly influenced a female's decision to leave the military. Indeed, participants who experienced divorce in the military viewed it as a negative and traumatic event that contributed to their exit from active duty.

Military vs. Family-Interest

Previous research has established that quality of life (e.g., family support and personal support) has significantly contributed to female servicemembers' retention decisions (DACOWITS, 2017; Kapp., 2002; Kelley et al., 2001; Moore, 2002; Sminchişe, 2016). In comparison, this study revealed that participants acknowledged a deep personal commitment to their family roles and responsibilities. This finding is on par with Kelley et al.'s (2001) study, which found that one third of their female participants viewed it difficult to balance their military profession with family responsibilities, which was the reason for their planned exit from active duty.

Family interest resonated with participants as their most dominant motivational interest in this current study. Participants reported that they were unable to fulfill their family duties up to their personal standards. Participants felt that their continued military service would require much of them at a detriment to their family obligations. Despite the conflict, participants communicated their enjoyment and commitment to the military, but when faced with the decision of military over family, the latter outweighed the former. For example, one participant commented, "I could have [done] 4 more years but

I didn't want to put my family in another situation where I wasn't there to make sure that their well-being was taken care of" (VET004). Another participant stated,

> I wanted to [reenlist] to become an officer but because I knew that my child would have to sacrifice a lot because once you're in the military, it is needs of the military, and that's what will always come first. So, I decided just not to pursue it anymore because of that. (VET007)

A possible explanation for these findings may stem from participants' individual perceptions of the divergence between their family interest and their obligation and commitment to the military. Therefore, participants' quit decision derived more from their family values and beliefs as well as their individual perception of themselves as parents (e.g., seen as a good parent opposed to a bad parent) if they continued serving in the military.

Contrary to previous research, this study did not support findings in the literature that suggested that work overload and advancement expectations do not significantly influence servicemembers' quit decisions (Heilmann et al., 2009). Work overload materialized in this current study as participants described their frustrations with poor military leadership. One participant communicated, "I just really felt like I was making these sacrifices by being in the military and being treated unfairly [without senior leadership support]. . . . So that's really what made me just want to get out" (VET012). This study found stagnant career mobility to significantly influence participants' quit decision. One participant explained, "I wasn't able to excel like I wanted to, just because of the quotas and the advancement rates, and stuff like that. . . . So that's really what made me just want to get out" (VET014). Another participant noted, "I would've stayed

in if I could've stayed in as a photographer's mate, journalist, anything along those lines, but there just wasn't anything" (VET011).

Employee Voluntary Turnover

The seminal work of March and Simon (1958) and the contemporary research of Tosi (2009) examined the correlation between employee pay and voluntary turnover. The studies found that employees remained with employers when their compensation rates outweighed the employee's perceived value of their efforts (March & Simon, 1958; Tosi, 2009). In contrast to earlier findings, however, participants in this study were satisfied with their monetary compensation while subjected to the over demanding work environment of the military. Participants acknowledged that they valued the monetary and nonmonetary (e.g., tuition assistance, medical and dental care, travel, etc.) benefits received while serving in the military but confirmed that such benefits had no bearing on their voluntary turnover decision. Similarly, compensation concerns did not have a significant influence on the voluntary turnover behavior of military members who expressed displeasure with compensation (Boesel & Johnson, 1984).

With regard to turnover intentions, previous research by Maertz, Griffeth, Campbell, and Allen (2007) and colleagues confirmed a correlation between perceived supervisor support and organizational support. In line with earlier research by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), this study found that female servicemembers who had a favorable view of leadership and command support communicated positive military experiences while those with unfavorable views communicated negative experiences, which influenced their turnover intentions. Following the work of Maertz et al. (2007), researchers examined perceived supervisor support and organizational support with the

addition of job fit and personal sacrifice as potential mediating factors (Dawley, Houghton, & Bucklew, 2010). Dawley et al. (2010) found that job fit mediates the relationship between perceived supervisor support and organizational support, and that personal sacrifice mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and turnover intention.

Dawley et al.'s (2010) findings also revealed that perceived supervisor support and perceived organizational support were negatively correlated with employees' turnover intentions. Consistent with their research, this study found that the female servicemembers identified with personal sacrifice (Dawley et al., 2010; Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001) because of their withdrawal from military service. However, the measure of personal sacrifice did not have a significant influence on participants' perceived organizational support or turnover intentions. All of the participants thrived in their military position and communicated some enjoyment and satisfaction with their career. Thus, job fit did not have a significant influence on their turnover behavior.

Decision Models

Previous research introduced the unfolding model of voluntary turnover, which suggests that employees experience five distinct paths when deliberating leaving their jobs (Holt, Rehg, Lin, & Miller, 2007; Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Russell & Sell, 2012). The model presents categories such as shocks, scripts, image violations, and search behaviors that guide employees' decisions (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). In comparison to this study's findings, image violations were prevalent among factors such as leadership support and quality of work that conflicted with participants' motivational interests. Findings also

revealed that shock events, which materialized in the *change in family dynamics* category, played a significant role in participants' decision to leave the military. Life-changing events such as divorce or unexpectedly having to care for an ill parent prompted participants' consideration to quit. However, scripts were less relevant because shocks were first-time events in which participants had no preexisting plan of action to consider. Search behaviors was not a significant factor in this current study. This finding may be explained by the fact that participants had no expectation of leaving active duty military service. Most participants admitted that they initially planned to say in the military long-term, thus eliminating the desire to seek out alternatives. Notably, one participant stated, "When I started my career with the Navy I thought, 'Oh I'm doing 20 years.' I want to serve my country" (VET006).

Limitations

In this investigation, there were a few sources for error. The main limitation of this study was the potential for researcher bias since the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection. However, reflective journaling and bracketing was used to preserve self-awareness of researcher perspectives, preconceptions, lenses, and expectations throughout the investigation (Adu, 2019). Reflective journaling and bracketing prevented the researcher's perspectives and preconceptions from influencing the data collection and interpretive process of this study. Moreover, the researcher used epoche during the bracketing process, which involves disallowing biases and assumptions one might have about the phenomenon under investigation. This allowed the researcher to reject previous theoretical notions and concepts so new theory could emerge in this study (Creswell, 2015).

Another limitation of this research was the sampling method. Purposive and theoretical sampling methods were used during this investigation as opposed to random sampling methods. Therefore, generalization was neither practical nor was it the goal of this investigation. Rather, this study centered on the systematic analytical process of grounded theory that allows for others to replicate research based on transferability. This study was also limited because it primarily focused on female veterans who worked for the Department of Defense (DOD). The sample size of 15 participants was sufficient for this investigation; however, further insight might be gained by examining other government or private organizations that employ female military veterans who have voluntarily quit active duty service.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should investigate other government organizations (e.g., U.S. Coast Guard or U.S. Border Patrol) in comparison to this study's findings. Additionally, future research should examine servicewomen's quit decision and its psychological effect on females who remain on active duty. Moreover, future research should consider whether any other influential factors or experiences exist that were not identified in this study (e.g., job/employee fit, mental toughness, family satisfaction with military lifetime, etc.). Further, future research should attempt to investigate female servicemembers' quit intentions when interventions are put in place (e.g., improved leadership involvement) to curb notions of withdrawing from the military.

Investigations concerning female servicemembers' perceived level of patriotism would benefit practitioners examining quit decision-making. Most notably, not one participant in this current study identified patriotism (i.e., pride in country or a resolute

allegiance to the military) as a motivational factor for their decision. American patriotism is one of the foremost tenets instilled in servicemembers early in their military career, specifically during basic training. Future studies using a larger sample size could glean greater insight into whether female servicemembers' level of patriotism subsides during their career, making way for other motivational factors to overshadow their pride in country.

Future research should examine this study's findings in comparison to other theoretical frameworks (e.g., neuroeconomics), adding value to the existing body of knowledge. Neuroeconomics seeks to explain human decision-making, how humans cognitively analyze alternatives, and how humans execute their decision-making (Glimcher, Fehr, Camerer, & Poldrack, 2008). Similarly, the methodology and techniques used in this current study sought to explain female choice, how females weighed alternatives, and females' course of action when making decisions. A comparative analysis of the theory developed in this study and neuroeconomics could help to glean a more integrative way of understanding female decision-making.

Finally, this study examined females who served on active duty. However, female turnover affects not only active duty but also reserve components (Dalzell et al., 2019). Therefore, future research would benefit from studies that examine quit decision-making throughout entire military workforce.

Conclusion

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to glean understanding, through rich descriptions, of the influences that guide servicewomen to choose to leave the service. Grounded theory methodology was chosen to achieve this purpose. Also, the

grounded theory method allowed for the development of a new theory that emerged from the data. The theory developed from systematic efforts in the data collection and analysis process and subsequently emerged from the participants' narrative.

The significance of the study's findings was its contribution to the quit decision-making and military retention literature. Also, it contributed by addressing the gap in the literature regarding the decision-making process of servicewomen who chose to voluntarily exit the military. Further, this information is significant to military organizations and their leadership by offering insight into female servicemembers' turnover behavior and the factors that drive such behavior. Moreover, this awareness may equip military organizations with information to develop comprehensive retention mitigation policies focused on females' quit decision process. Furthermore, information obtained in this study could support military leadership development training aimed to promote female retention efforts.

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