

UNCOMMON CORPS: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE ACADEMIC
EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY-CONNECTED HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
TRANSITIONING BETWEEN STATES

by

Norman Eugene Solomon

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Although nearly 1.1 million military-connected students attend public schools throughout the United States, few research studies have examined how transitions related to military mobility requirements affect this unique group of students from the perspective of the students. More often than not, researchers have examined phenomena related to military-connected students and their transitional experiences from the perspectives of parents, teachers, school administrators, or stakeholders other than the military-connected student. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe, from the perspective of the students, the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who transition to different states. Working closely with military-connected students who attend or attended high school in Virginia within the past 4 years, this study utilized purposeful sampling procedures to identify and recruit a diverse group of military-connected high school students (e.g., males, females, various ethnic backgrounds, various rank structures). Using transcriptions gleaned from face-to-face individual interviews, corroborated via participants' self-recordings of self-reflections and personal creative writing assignments, data were analyzed using coding methodologies and the concepts and procedural guidelines outlined by renowned phenomenologists, Edmund Husserl and Clark Moustakas. At the conclusion of this analysis, three primary themes emerged and are reflective of the true meaning or essence of the military-connected high school students' experiences: (a) Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help, (b) Coping Resources Begins With Me, and (c) Be All You Can See.

Keywords: dependents, military-connected students, military-connected schools, military-connected youths, transition

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Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to God and I thank Him for providing me with the strength, wisdom, and knowledge to complete this endeavor. Next, I dedicate this dissertation to several people who, through their love and encouragement, have always inspired me to be the very best that I can be. First, I dedicate this work to my beloved wife, Cheryl. From our time together as classmates at the United States Military Academy through full careers as officers in the United States Army, and, once again, as classmates in pursuit of our doctoral degrees, you have always been by my side for the most challenging journeys in my life. You have been a bedrock of support and love, and without you, none of this would have been possible. I also dedicate this dissertation to our four children, Christalyn, Elisa, Norissa, and Alex, and to my dear friend Bonnie Henry-Smaugh. Your inexhaustible sources of love, support, prayers, and wondrous sense of humor throughout this process have made this entire feat possible and I thank you with all my heart.

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List of Abbreviations

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)

Department of Defense (DOD)

Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA)

English Language Arts (ELA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Local Educational Agency (LEA)

Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Smarter Balance Assessment (SBA)

Standard of Learning (SOL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study seeks to give voice to the military-connected high school students and describes their academic experiences pertaining to their transitions from state to state. To accomplish this task, this chapter, via the use of a background section, provides a synopsis of key, yet relevant, literature regarding the topic. The background section addresses the historical aspects of the topic and illustrates how the issues related to military-connected high school students' experiences have evolved over the years. This section underscores the topic of standards and highlights the various legislative attempts to transform academic policies to address accountability and academic rigor. The background section also addresses the unique social contexts of the military milieu in which military-connected high school students operate.

Besides the background section, other sections are incorporated to facilitate understanding of key aspects of a qualitative study. For example, in line with the transcendental phenomenological approach, a section entitled *Situation to Self* highlights my motivation for conducting this study, delineates my philosophical assumptions, and illustrates how these views support the current constructivist paradigm that I employ throughout the study. This chapter also includes the *Problem Statement* which reflects the chasm in current literature regarding military-connected high school students and supports the concomitant *Purpose Statement* and *Significance of the Study* sections. The specific research questions that I sought to answer and the various definitions of terms that are critical for understanding the topic are delineated herein. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the key aspects of the chapter and accentuates the overall problem and purpose of the study.

Background

While they do not serve on the front lines of combat, military-connected family members, including children, serve as the sine qua non of supporting elements for the United States' fighting force. Moreover, when military family members experience difficulties related to military requirements, the service members also experience stress, and their overall readiness and focus on mission requirements decrease (Brendel, Maynard, Albright, & Bellomo, 2014; Conforte et al., 2017; Department of Defense, 2017). Often military personnel or their dependents have described the level of stress associated with deployments as one of the most stressful aspects of life as a military family (Meadows et al., 2016). Yet, military-connected high school students transitioning to new schools in support of military mobility requirements are practically invisible (Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobson, 2011; Esqueda, Astor, & Tunac De Pedro, 2012; Gilreath et al, 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth, Bailey, & Coppola, 2017). Approximately 35% of military personnel are married and have children (Department of Defense, 2017b). Approximately 80% of nearly 1.1 million military-connected students attend public schools throughout the United States (Lester & Flake 2013). Moreover, military-connected students transition to different schools in support of military mobility requirements approximately once every 2.9 years, which equates to an average of nine moves by the time a military-connected student graduates from high school (Esqueda et al., 2012).

While numerous studies have examined how deployments and other stressors related to mobility requirements have affected military-connected students (e.g., Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, & Beidel, 2016; Arnold, Lucier-Greer, Mancini, Ford, & Wickrama, 2017; Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; Castillo et al., 2017; De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, & Berkowitz, 2016; De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, &

Astor, 2014; Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010; Esqueda et al., 2012; Gilreath et al., 2016; Lester et al., 2016; Nguyen-Hoang, Yeung, & Bogin, 2014; Okafor, Lucier-Greer & Mancini, 2016), few research studies (e.g., Knobloch, Pusateri, Ebata & McGlaughlin, 2015) have examined how transitions related to military mobility requirements affect this unique group of students *from the perspective of the students*. Instead, numerous studies have addressed the phenomena related to military-connected students and their transitional experiences from the perspectives of parents, teachers, school administrators, or other stakeholders. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who transition to different states, from the perspective of the students.

Although some policymakers and educational leaders have sought to implement such tools as the Common Core State Standards as an attempt to establish a consistent national curriculum (Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015), perhaps a greater challenge remains in the manner in which states assess the attainment of standards and how states ensure accountability. Much of the variability in assessment of standards may derive from the fact that the level of rigor incorporated in a given curriculum varies greatly among states (Lauen & Gaddis, 2016).

Besides differences in rigor, lack of clarity regarding the definition of the term standards may also contribute to inconsistencies in accountability. In fact, the United States Department of Education no longer provides an updated source that clearly defines the term. Instead, it provides a link to archived information that offers guidance regarding standards, assessment, and accountability terminology. According to this source, standards refer to the mechanisms used to set goals outlining what students should know and be able to execute while they learn the academic information disseminated in the academic environment (Department of Education, 2009). Standards, moreover, are often classified as being either *content standards* or

performance standards. Content standards pertain to the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills, outlined in a codified curriculum, that students should acquire in a particular subject area (Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014; Parkay, Ancia, & Hass, 2014). Often educators and policymakers present content using “benchmarks” or “indicators that depict precisely what a student should know at a particular time or educational level ” (Parkay et al., 2014, p. 306). Performance standards, on the other hand, refer to how well the student has demonstrated proficiency in a given academic area (Parkay et al., 2014). It is important to note that standards differ greatly across curricula. The adoption and implementation of consistent educational standards across the country could offer significant relief to transient students transitioning between states.

Inconsistent state-to-state academic expectations related to policies regarding student achievement levels, grade placement, or graduation requirements, significantly affect one particular group of transient students: *military-connected students*. This term, for the purposes of this study, refers to “school-aged child(ren), enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade, in the household of an active duty member” (Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2018, Section 1.101C, p. 5), and veterans. While all 50 states and the District of Columbia did not adopt the Common Core State Standards, leaders of all 50 states did sign the Military Interstate Children’s Compact (Leatherman, 2015; Wykes, 2015). The Military Interstate Children’s Compact is a national compact jointly created in 2006 by the Council of State Government’s National Center for Interstate Compacts and the Department of Defense, and state legislators from all fifty states enacted the compact into law in 2008 (Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission, 2014). Unlike regional policies, national compacts are policy-making alternatives specifically devised to address key societal issues as they develop (Karch,

Nicholson-Crotty, Woods, & Bowman, 2016). In this case, the compact sought to heighten awareness of the multitude of challenges that military-connected students encountered when they transition to schools in different states due to military mobility requirements and monitor compliance with various military compacts (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012; Leatherman, 2015). The resulting agreement, later incorporated into law, sought to ensure that states provided a smooth transition to military-connected students transferring between various state school districts and treat the military-connected children in the same or similar manner (Aronson, & Perkins, 2013; Leatherman, 2015).

Military-connected students share some similarities with other students who transition to new schools; however, some researchers underscored the fact that military relocation requirements often have additional psychological or emotional affects coupled with concerns regarding the possibility of death or serious injury to a family member or separation anxiety issues (Astor et al., 2013; MacDermid Wadsworth et al, 2017). Hence, the environment in which military-connected students operate only exacerbates the challenges they encounter. In short, the challenges associated with military-connected students' relocation and transition requirements reveal one important fact—this unique corps of transient students is not common, but distinctively uncommon.

Historical

The composition of the military family has been changing significantly since the Vietnam War. In fact, approximately 10% to 15% of active duty service members were classified as married and having children during the Vietnam era (Lester & Flake, 2013). In 2000, the Department of Defense reported that 53.1% of all active duty members were classified as married (DOD, 2016). By the end of 2017, DOD reported that 52.6%, or a .5% decrease, of all

active duty members were married (DOD, 2018). At the conclusion of Fiscal Year 2017, of a total military force of 2,103,415 service members, approximately 39.5%, or 831,870, had children (DOD, 2018). Although military deployments for United States service members have been ongoing events for well over a century, service members and their families, including military-connected students, have executed a number of relocations in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (e.g., Afghanistan and other Middle Eastern countries) (De Pedro et al., 2016; Esqueda et al., 2012). The majority of Active Duty military-connected students are at the elementary school level of education or lower, and a cursory glance at recent data reveals that approximately three quarters of military-connected students are younger than the age of 12 (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). A recent analysis of trends (see Figure 1) pertaining to military-connected students revealed that from 2000 to 2015 the ratio of school age children ranging from ages 12 to 18 compared to all military children has consistently hovered around a 22.4% median (DOD; 2017 Demographics Profile of the Military Community, 2018).

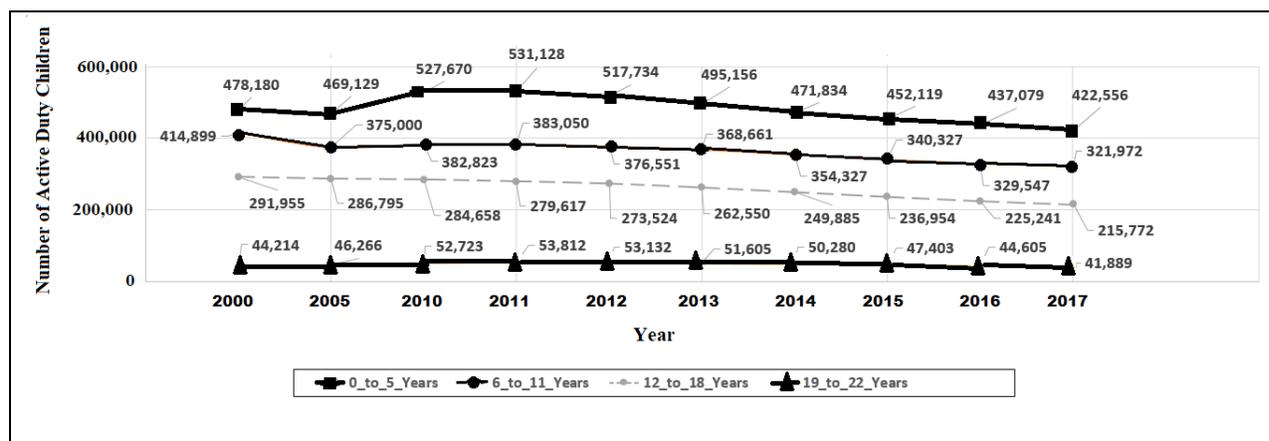


Figure 1. Number of Active Duty children by child age trends: 2000–2017.

Approximately 90% of the nearly 1.1 million military-connected students attend civilian public schools (De Pedro et al., 2014; Common Core State Standards, 2014b; Esqueda et al., 2012; Lester & Flake, 2013). Yet, as some researchers have found, many school leaders,

administrators and teachers did not possess the level of awareness and overall responsiveness to generate a constructive school experience for military-connected students (Arnold, Garner, & Nunnery, 2014; Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2014). Likewise, other researchers found that a lack of awareness was a significant and common challenge that many military-connected students face (Arnold et al., 2014; Brendel et al., 2014).

In an era where political and educational leaders emphasize accountability, generate numerous standards to codify their focus, and subsequently use high-stakes testing to measure the success of their efforts, more students are increasingly at risk of either failing to complete high school or completing high school but failing to be prepared for the rigors of college (Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014). According to the Chief of Staff of the Office of Personnel (as cited by Leatherman, 2015), greater than 300,000 Army military-connected children experience frequent transitions due to military deployment and mobility related requirements and increase their chances of encountering varying academic standards or matriculating into poor performing schools or both (Leatherman, 2015). Similar to Army military-connected children, the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission noted that other Services' military-connected children also face challenges such as enrollment and placement in proper grade levels and, due to military relocation requirements, eligibility requirements associated with graduation prerequisites (Leatherman, 2015). Given that a family of a typical career service member moves on average six or more times over a 20-year period of service or more than 2.4 times that civilian families move, such transitions often magnify the risks associated with unsuccessful graduation rates (Clever & Segal, 2013; Leatherman, 2015). In some cases, school systems experience turmoil and negative effects on graduation rates when base closures generate a mass exodus of military-connected students from the school system.

Some military-connected students who remain with family members, who are responsible for final closure requirements, suffer significant negative effects including psychological disturbances related to the loss of relations or connectivity to other students that have transitioned (Nguyen-Hoang et al., 2014).

Without understanding the peculiarities of military-connected students, legislative efforts to strengthen the educational system during the past 15 years may have inadvertently and negatively affected military-connected students. For instance, Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The purpose of NCLB was to ensure all children were afforded a fair opportunity to access quality education and attain, at the most basic level, acceptable academic achievement on State assessments (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). NCLB was significant because it considerably increased the Federal Government's authority by requiring states to incorporate school accountability systems that were applicable to all students and public schools in the states (Dee & Jacob, 2010). While some states had already implemented accountability standards prior to the enactment of NCLB, the law was the first of its kind to mandate that states implement such accountability systems (Dee & Jacob, 2010). NCLB sought to institute the accountability requirements in the form of "measurable objectives," attained via annually administered high-stakes testing in English and mathematics (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002).

The NCLB Act of 2001 also served as a leveraging mechanism to persuade states to implement standardized testing by tying Title I Federal funding to the act (Davidson, Reback, Rockoff, & Schwartz, 2015). In addition, military-connected schools also received Impact Aid funding when the school provided services via enrollment to at least 400 military-connected students or when the military-connected students enrollment level of the servicing school district

reached or exceeded 3% (De Pedro et al., 2016). Although the law instituted steep penalties such as loss of funds, designation as a failing school or providing students the option to attend school elsewhere, NCLB also noted that the law provided “greater decisionmaking [sic] authority and flexibility to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance” (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). However, embedded in the execution of the decision-making authority and flexibility guidelines were the seeds of deception and inconsistency in measuring the attainment of standards. That is, educational leaders discovered new ways to circumvent the system’s mechanism for measuring proficiency and progress.

Some researchers examining the execution of NCLB suggested that, policymakers should consider removing technical ambiguities that generate incongruities in standards among schools via use of different rules and different methods of calculations (Davidson et al., 2015). These varying mechanisms for measuring standards, depending on how they were implemented, could disenfranchise the military-connected student in the end. For example, some states may require graduating seniors to complete a year-long course in the respective state’s history as a prerequisite for graduation. However, when a military-connected student matriculates into a high school in one state and transitions to another in a different state, at a point other than the beginning to the school year, the transition significantly reduces the probability that the military-connected student will successfully complete the required coursework in time to graduate (Esqueda et al., 2012). As a result, the military-connected students often are unable to participate in college enrollment at the end of the secondary school year (Esqueda et al., 2012).

In December of 2015, the Obama Administration executed an amendment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 entitled the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. One of the unique aspects of ESSA is that it allows states to use tests that are

aligned with the state standards, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, towards graduation (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). Many educators, researchers, and policymakers have welcomed the Federal Government's relinquishment of significant levels of control and responsibilities for establishing, measuring, and assessing performance and have described this feature as the primary achievement of ESSA (McGuinn, 2016; Schanzenbach, Bauer, & Mumford, 2016; Sundquist, 2017).

Unfortunately, such freedom and control also introduced one major problem—states were entering uncharted territory because they had never been responsible for exercising such control over the measurement and assessment of academic performance (Kane, 2017). Part of the problem is reflected in the ESSA's marred definition of the term *evidence based* (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). That is, the ESSA uses a descriptive continuum ranging from *strong*, to *moderate*, to *promising* to describe the level of evidence that states must demonstrate, at statistically significant levels, toward improving student performance or outcomes (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965). This evidence, according to the Executive Office of the White House's progress report, would serve as the basis for empowering state and local decision-makers to devise their own systems and solutions for school improvement efforts; hence, the practice was contrary to the template-like solutions that the government sought to impose via the NCLB (Executive Office of the President, 2015).

Standards

The fulcrum of challenges voiced by both critics and supporters of the aforementioned laws revolves around the lack of clarity regarding the definition, purpose and, subsequently, the implementation of standards. In the past, the Department of Education provided some guidance pertaining to educational standards, assessments and accountability. In this guidance, the

Department of Education (2009) categorized standards along two paths: content standards and performance standards. Content standards, according to the document, pertained to general descriptions of the knowledge and skills that students should develop over time in core academic subjects and performance standards served as the mechanism to measure the level of achievement that students attained (Department of Education, 2009). Specifically, content standards pertained to cognitive concepts and long-lasting ideas inherent to the subject and included the reasoning function and communication functions that students engaged in while grasping a particular academic subject (Department of Education, 2009). On the other hand, performance standards consisted of the definitive evidence, examples, or definitions that students had to both know and demonstrate proficiency in skills or knowledge of such standards (Department of Education, 2009). Frequently, states and local educational agencies (LEAs) would further distinguish among performance standards to highlight the ability students should be able to demonstrate at specific times along the education continuum or how well they were able to perform a given standard.

Academic

The reality behind the invisibility of military-connected students in educational environments is manifested in the lack of studies pertaining to their academic performance as compared to other students. One of the primary reasons the chasm in literature exists is due to a combination of educational policymakers and lawmakers failing to recognize this corps of students as a significant subgroup. In fact, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1964 did not address this issue and neither did the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA via the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). One of the salient features associated with NCLB was the manner in which the Government assessed accountability of performance using the classification

of significant subgroups based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, or whether or not the child spoke English proficiently (Dee & Jacob, 2010; Polikoff, McEachin, Wrabel, & Duque, 2014). The groupings, however, did not identify military-connected students as a significant subgroup.

Such oversights galvanized a number of military-connected students' stakeholders to form advocacy groups and highlight both the plight and vulnerabilities of these students. Newly formed advocacy groups, such as the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), Collaborative for Student Success, Military Families for High Standards and others, collaborated with more established organizations such as the Air Force Association, the Association of the United States Army, the Navy League of the United States, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and the National Military Family Association. Together they acted using the tenets of agency at the behest of military-connected students around the world. In December of 2016, the advocacy groups' efforts came to fruition when the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act included a provision mandating that schools use a unique identifier to capture performance metrics related to military-connected students. This identifier has profound implications for future studies regarding military-connected students because without clear collection of proper data, decision-makers would primarily depend upon intuition to operate programs and allocate funding and other resources (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

Situation to Self

The plight of military-connected students is very important to me because I am a veteran, a spouse of a veteran, and a father. Throughout my military career, I relocated numerous times in response to military deployments and mobility requirements. Besides listening to my children express their concerns about relocating to a new home and making new friends, I had the

responsibility of quelling their anxieties regarding academic requirements at their new schools. Following retirement, I found myself tutoring my children and a number of their military-connected friends who experienced some level of difficulty adapting to Virginia's high academic standards.

Ontological Assumptions

Unlike the quantitative researcher, my ontological assumptions greatly influenced how I proceeded with the current qualitative study. Ontology, for the purposes of this study, refers to “the discipline devoted to the systematical investigation of ‘being’, through the specification of its fundamental categories” (Valore, 2016, p. 3). Creswell (2018) noted, how ontology pertains to both the various characteristics and nature of reality. One of the primary characteristics associated with ontological assumptions from a qualitative perspective, is the view that multiple realities exist (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2016). In fact, it is this latter view that Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2016) often cited as one of the primary points of opposition to the positivist's view of a single reality. Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (2016) highlighted how the concept of interpretivism requires researchers to investigate a relativist's world from the perspective of multiple realities that are created and co-created in the minds of participants and to examine these realities, not as separate components, but as a whole. Hence, one of my primary ontological assumptions for this study is that multiple realities do exist.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2016), acknowledgement of the aforementioned assumption regarding multiple realities is not sufficient to truly convey one's ontological position. Rather, Lincoln and Guba (1985) challenged researchers to define their positions regarding the nature of reality and to use this understanding as a seminal position from which to develop one's research. Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported that reality could be

viewed from one of four basic levels at which reality exists: (a) objective reality, (b) perceived reality, (c) constructive reality or (d) created reality. In the case of objective reality, for example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that a researcher may contend that a definitive reality exists and that through exhaustive inquiry and frequent interaction with this reality, the concrete reality can be completely known. A researcher, therefore, would view the resulting research only as a swath of the ultimate reality fabric and can only conclude that additional research will be necessary to move ever closer to the definitive reality.

On the other hand, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), researchers who possess a created reality ontological position purport that reality does not exist. That is, supporters of created reality contend that something is not realized until something interacts with it, and the probability of such interaction suspends realization of an event until it is acted upon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Still, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described another ontological assumption, perceived reality, which postulates that reality can never be fully known; instead, it can only be partially comprehended from the perspective of the individual observer or actor. Conjuring up images from John Godfrey Saxe's (2012) poem from 1872 about the blind men and their first encounter with an elephant, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described how some people can have a high level of confidence in their perception of reality—even to the point of discounting others' views; yet, their views are not necessarily the complete truth or reality.

The final ontological position that Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported suggest that the mere existence of reality is uncertain or questionable at best—*constructed reality*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), much of this uncertainty revolves around the idea that each individual can construct a number of realities; hence, an infinite number of realities can exist. Manifested in this assumption is the realization that regardless of the amount of research dedicated to

converging upon a definitive reality, such a reality can never be known. Even in cases where participants' somewhat isomorphic views of realities are juxtaposed against one another, numerous differences in individual meanings make it practically impossible to derive an absolute meaning of a conceived reality. In high schools, for example, the denotive term *senior* may provide some form of a common meaning to school administrators, teachers and students alike; however, the term undoubtedly evokes vastly different meanings among individuals in these groups.

For the purposes of this study, I assume that reality exists at this construction level. To possess such an assumption does not discount the physical aspects of reality, but simply acknowledges that there are two forms of reality—physical and the realities constructed through social interaction and associated meaning making activities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is this latter form and its innate meaning making properties that serve as the catalyst that motivates people to interact with the surrounding reality in which they exist (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout this study, I illustrate how my selection of a phenomenological methodology and various aspects of data collection and analysis, processes, and procedures are reflective of these construction level ontological assumptions. Examining how military-connected high school students construct meaning of their academic experiences, including various temporal aspects of this process, is a major focus of this study. Although many researchers have addressed the issue of inconsistencies in state-to-state standards from the perspective of teachers, administrators, and parents, military-connected high school students possess realities that are uniquely their own. This study uses a phenomenological approach to highlight the various realities of military-connected high school students (Creswell, 2018).

Epistemological Assumptions

Similar to my ontological assumptions, my epistemological assumptions are also driving forces behind my selection of an approach to address the research problem at hand. According to Creswell (2018), epistemological beliefs address what amounts to knowledge and how one who inquires of knowledge justifies such claims. Moreover, Creswell underscored the necessity of the researcher to establish a close relationship with the participant to acquire knowledge that is critical for addressing the phenomenon under investigation. As part of my efforts to facilitate gaining closeness to the participants, I sought insights from military-related organizations that are specifically designed to assist students with state-to-state transitions. These organizations provided valuable a priori insights about certain issues to facilitate proper identification and analysis of the social context and execution of purposeful sampling procedures near military installations.

Although this study examines the multiple realities concerning military-connected high school students' perceptions of their academic experiences as they relocate from state to state, I did not seek to establish an agenda aimed at resolving the issue. Such an effort would require the use of a transformative interpretive framework, because such a framework advocates for action to "help individuals" (Creswell, 2018, p. 20). Given numerous advocacy groups already exist to assist military-connected high school students overcome the inconsistencies in state-to-state academic standards, perhaps a more useful purpose of the work provided herein is to serve as a seminal resource to facilitate attainment of the aforementioned goal through in-depth study, analysis and understanding of the phenomenon.

This study examines the phenomenon through the perceptions of the military-connected high school students. Hence, it was imperative that I described the experiences of the military-connected high school students as they sought to understand the world in which they reside

(Creswell, 2018). Based on my epistemological assumption that I can only gain such insights via forming an intimate co-researcher relationship with the participants, I used a social constructivist interpretive framework to conduct this study. This social constructivist framework was applicable because I was trying to emphasize the voices of the participants in an effort to learn of their life experiences with the phenomenon under examination. I also used a transcendental phenomenological theoretical framework; hence, I executed actions to avoid interpretations and set aside my presuppositions in an effort to ensure that the participants' voices, and not mine, were heard.

Problem Statement

There is a problem in schools across the United States. The problem is the lack of visibility and awareness of the academic challenges military-connected high school students experience when relocating to new schools due to military mobility requirements (Arnold et al., 2017; Arnold et al., 2014; Castillo et al., 2017; De Pedro et al., 2016). One of the most challenging obstacles to ensuring that military-connected students are prepared for college after high school is created through the combination of frequent military relocation requirements and inconsistent academic standards among states. Some military-connected students wrestle with stress stemming from their unfamiliarity with the new school's curriculum that the new school's educational leaders classify as "critical pre-requisite knowledge" (Arnold et al., 2014, p. 11). Others find themselves steeped in boredom due to the improper placement or the requirement to repeat courses covering topics they learned in previous school settings (Arnold et al, 2014; Leatherman, 2015). Although the United States' military involvement in the Middle East and other areas around the world continues to increase the mobility requirements of military families, the issues pertaining to the needs of military-connected students have been significantly under-

investigated by educational researchers, even though nearly 90% of the nearly 1.1 million military-connected students attend public schools operated by civilians (Castillo et al., 2017; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Despite herculean efforts on the part of legislators and educational stakeholders to establish rigorous academic accountability standards through various modifications and reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, until the most recent reauthorization of the ESEA via the Every Student Succeeds Act in December of 2015, national education policies did not include a military-connected student identifier to track or study the progress of this unique group of students (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Military Child Education Coalition, 2015; Wykes, 2015). Undoubtedly, the lack of a military-connected student identifier at the national, state, or local level hindered efforts to study this unparalleled group of students.

However, the most likely cause of this problem revolves around the lack of awareness of the challenges military-connected high school students themselves experience. Numerous efforts to study this group of students, for example, have often resulted in studies where researchers used aggregate data from an entire school's or school district's population due to the lack of an identifier. Although some researchers have examined the problem of variability of academic standards from state-to-state, only a few studies have specifically addressed how the variability in academic standards affects the military-connected student (Arnold et al., 2014; Harris, 2016; Mittelberg, 2014). In many cases, these few studies typically addressed the issue from the perspectives of teachers or administrators (Arnold et al., 2014; Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Harris, 2016; Mittelberg, 2014). As a result, a

study which examines the experiences of the military-connected students from the perspective of this unique group by using a transcendental phenomenological approach, could add a more profound understanding of these experiences and prove to be a valuable tool to policymakers, educational leaders and other stakeholders.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who conduct interstate relocations related to military mobility requirements. The participants for this study were recruited from locations throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. At this stage in the research, transition as it related to academic standards when relocating to a new state was defined as “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 39). The central theory guiding this study was Albert Bandura’s (2001) Social Cognitive Theory. Bandura’s theory was apt for the current study because it explicitly addressed issues regarding change, transition, and social influences on the construction of meaning that were applicable to the military-connected high school student. Dr. Nancy Schlossberg’s (2011) Transitional Theory was also used as a supporting theory and provided both a framework of the transition process and an in-depth understanding of the unique aspects of transitions as they applied to military-connected high school students.

Significance of the Study

Unlike previous studies which addressed issues from the perspectives of the administrators and teachers, this study gives a voice to military-connected high school students. That is, the focus of this study is to allow the military-connected high school students to describe their own experiences from their own points of view. In one of the most recent longitudinal

studies of military families, researchers noted that their results were more robust when they inquired of teens regarding a pre-deployment experience relating to adjustments and later followed-up with the teen regarding the post-deployment experience for the same matter. On the other hand, researchers found that results were not as robust when parents were asked about a pre-deployment experience pertaining to teen adjustments during pre-deployment and later teens were asked questions regarding post-deployment experiences (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

Apparently, the input from sources other than the teens who experienced the phenomenon lacked some level of rigor. Similarly, some researchers purported that parents tended to overstate the level of positivity associated with experiences and, as a result, suggested that future researchers collect information directly from the military-connected children themselves (Skomorovsky, Norris, Bullock, & Evans, 2016). This study reflects a sense of respect in that the military-connected high school students served as active participants in the study. Beyond hearing their voices, this study gives the students a platform from which to describe their experiences and provides a receptive audience to hear and consider the overarching implications of their message (Johnson, 2017). To facilitate capturing these experiences from a group that can more effectively articulate those experiences, the study introduces delimitations to address only military-connected high school students' experiences as opposed to all adolescent military-connected students. This decision coincides with similar procedures where researchers chose to gather data from the parents of younger children but allowed teens to provide data for their respective studies (Meadows et al, 2016). As citizens of a free country, many Americans often take for granted the numerous sacrifices service members endure to ensure that America maintains such freedom. Yet, when considering that approximately 2 million military-connected children have had at least one parent deploy in support of military requirements since

September 11, 2001, the nation must take notice of this unique group of people (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012).

From a theoretical perspective and based on review of the related literature, Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory can address key areas of transitions military-connected high school students encounter. For example, areas that transcend definitive separations of adulthood and young-adults' transitional experiences could be addressed. Central to Schlossberg's theory, is the concept of how the individual perceives transition. That is, if the individual perceives the transition as such, then it does exist (Schlossberg, 1981). Both Moustakas (1994) and Bandura (2001) view intentionality as a key aspect of consciousness. As a result, Bandura's social cognitive theory may offer similar or more revealing insights regarding how military-connected high school students form their meanings and make sense of reality.

The empirical significance of this study hinges upon the current study's approach to address one of the primary research gaps pertaining to military-connected students—description of the experiences of academic challenges associated with military mobility requirements from the perspective of the military-connected high school students themselves. From methodological and scholarly perspectives, the insights gained from the use of one-on-one interviews with military-connected high school students introduces an opportunity to join other scholarly discussions taken from different perspectives (Knobloch et al., 2015). Unlike prior studies providing views regarding the challenges that military students encounter from the perspective of community and educational stakeholders (e.g., Arnold et al., 2017; Arnold et al., 2014; Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017), the goal of this study is to obtain the essence of what the military-connected students experience from their perspective. Moreover, the current study is significant because it seeks to advance the

intellectual dialogue regarding military-connected high school students and the academic challenges they encounter when relocating across state lines by pursuing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Such a scholarly advance forward, as renowned anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) noted, “is not from already proven theorems to newly proven ones, it is from an awkward fumbling for the most elementary understanding to a supported claim that one has achieved that and surpassed it” (p. 25).

From a practical perspective, this study may reveal insights that lead to the formulation of solutions to challenges related to military-connected high school students’ transitions. After gaining greater understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of military-connected high school students, possible interventions or ways to better support the student related to state academic standards could emerge. Family members, educators, policymaker, and other stakeholders interested in assisting military-connected students could also review the results and devise ways to increase awareness among counselors and teachers and consider ways in which peers can facilitate a positive transitioning experience this unique group of students (Knobloch et al., 2015). Similarly, students may express matters during the study that may prompt school psychologists to be more aware of issues affecting military-connected high school students and, subsequently, implement services that can better address the needs of this unique group of students (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Though many voices in the educational policy realm can be heard clamoring for attention, this study seeks to elevate the voices of the military-connected students so that they can become the quintessential voice for policymakers and other stakeholders to consider when developing or revising policies that directly affect military-connected students (Simpson & Quigley, 2016).

Research Questions

RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academics when relocating to a new state? This question seeks to gain insight into the central issue of the military-connected student's perspective regarding his or her academic experiences including inconsistencies in state-to-state academic standards. I hope to convey the sense of significance, as defined by the student, to the readers and stakeholders interested in understanding the military-connected student's experience.

RQ2: What coping resources do military-connected high school students use and how are they employed to adapt to various academic challenges related to military mobility and relocation requirements? Anderson et al. (2012) purported that while transitions and people differ, the basic structure for comprehending people in transition is sufficiently steadfast and resistant to change. Anderson et al. purported that conditions can impact people within the same group differently because of variations in the manner in which they employ coping resources. The term *resources* as opposed to *strategies* is used because strategies is a subset element within Anderson et al.'s definition of coping resources (i.e. Situation, Self, Support and Strategies). In addition, resilience is a multifaceted phenomenon, which pertains to the myriad of cognitive processes that facilitate a person's ability to handle and adapt to stressful situations or events while combating hostilities or threats in an effort to maintain psychological equilibrium.

RQ3: How do military-connected high school students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook? A person's outlook, according to Anderson et al. (2012) is significantly influenced by two key factors: "optimism and self-efficacy" (p. 78). While the rewards of optimism as pertains to outlook may appear self-evident, the constituents of self-efficacy including resiliency on the other hand, are a bit more complex. Numerous researchers

have found that resilience and the level of belief that a person has regarding his or her future outlook are closely related (Svetina, 2014). Moreover, much of this belief is purportedly solidified through a person's perception of trust in the environment in which they interact (Svetina, 2014). Resilience is also credited as being one of the key variables responsible for bolstering autonomy and independence. Thus, it serves as a common factor among theories postulated by Schlossberg, Bandura, and Erikson. Numerous quantitative studies have been executed using quantitative tools and techniques to measure beliefs and trust characteristics (Lucier-Greer et al., 2014; Svetina, 2014). While this study does not attempt to measure the level of resilience among military-connected high school students, it does seek to examine the responses pertaining to resilience and share such elucidations with reviewers. Ultimately, acquiring knowledge via a qualitative method using a transcendental phenomenological approach can possibly add to the scholarly dialogue regarding resilience and how it affects military-connected high school students.

Definitions

The following terms are considered pertinent to the current study and are listed and defined below.

1. *Active duty*: This status refers to “full-time duty status in the active uniformed service of the United States, including members of the National Guard and Reserve on active duty orders pursuant to 10 U.S.C. Section 1209 and 1211” (Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2018, Section 1.101A, p. 5).
2. *Dependents or federally connected-students*: Either term is synonymous with military-connected students in other literature. Dependents are “children who are unmarried and under age 21 years or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally

incapable of self-support” (Joint Publication 1-02, 2019, p. 62).

3. *Deployment cycle*—This cycle encompasses three phases of a deployment: a) a period, sometimes ranging from days to months, before military personnel deploy (pre-deployment phase); b) during the deployment (deployment phase); and c) the period following the return from deployment (post-deployment phase) (Meadows et al., 2016).

4. *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*: These standards are a series of “research and evidence based” (Common Core State Standards, 2010a, p. 3) educational standards that were created for students in the United States, ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade, to “help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school” (Common Core State Standards, 2010a, p. 3).

5. *Common Core State Standards for Mathematics*: These mathematical standards stress “understanding of key ideas [and] continually returning to organizing principles such as place value or the properties of operations to structure those ideas” (Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, 2010b, p. 4).

6. *Continuously enrolled students*: Applicable to students subject to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 accountability standards, the term refers to the length of time that school systems require students to be enrolled at their schools—one calendar year prior to testing—before being included in a schools’ Adequate Yearly Progress reporting statistics. In some states, students are eligible for testing inclusion only if they tested “in the spring and had been enrolled at their schools since late September or October” (Davidson et al., 2015, p. 349).

7. *Coping Resources*: Anderson et al. (2012) delineated a coping resources

identification system that counselors can use to help individuals cope with transition.

The system, also termed *The 4 S System*, is comprised of four components which “refer to the person’s Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies” (p. 39). Anderson et al. purported that regardless of the point in the transition process or the transition itself, individuals will navigate the transition based on their access and use of these four components (p. 39).

8. *Deployment*: A deployment is “the movement of forces into and out of an operational area” (Joint Publication 1-02, 2019, p. 63).

9. *Formal Network*: This type of network is “a network that reflects the policies and systems operating under military or civilian authority as instruments of socialization and support” (Department of Defense [DOD], 2012, p. 30).

10. *Informal Network*: This type of network refers to the “the associations, interactions, exchanges, and connections that people and families make in everyday life, including group associations and less organized networks of personal and collective relationships” (DOD, 2012, p. 31).

11. *Military-connected schools*: These schools are “located on or in the area surrounding a military installation and serve a substantial number of military-connected students” (De Pedro et al., 2014, p. 2).

12. *Military-connected students*: This term refers to “school-aged child(ren), enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth (12th) grade, in the household of an active duty member,” (Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2018, Section 1.101C, p. 5) and veterans released from service within five years.

13. *State*: This term refers to “each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the

Commonwealth of Puerto Rico” (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965).

14. *Transition* (also synonymous with *relocation*) (*military perspective*): The use of the term transition within the military has one of two meanings: “1) the formal and physical process of transferring from school to school or 2) the period of time in which a student moves from one school in the sending state to another school in the receiving state”

(Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2018, Section 1.101S, p. 5).

15. *Transition* (*theoretical perspective*): From a theoretical perspective, transition is “an event or nonevent resulting in change” (Anderson et al, 2012, p. 40).

16. *Uniformed service(s)*: This term refers to members of “the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard as well as the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Public Health Services” (Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2018, Section 1.101T, p. 5).

Summary

In short, military-connected high school students face a plethora of challenges when they experience state-to-state relocations. Most notable for military-connected students themselves may be the social and academic challenges related to inconsistencies manifested in the implementation and assessment of state-to-state academic standards. While numerous studies have examined how stakeholders, other than the student, have viewed these challenges, research seeking to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the military-connected high school student could potentially provide valuable insights. Using various aspects of Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory and Schlossberg’s (1981, 2011) transition theory, this research could help educational leaders, military families, military-connected students and other

stakeholders to conceptualize various elements of the transition process and subsequently generate collaborative efforts to help military-connected students cope with transition. Hence, the current study can contribute greatly to the literature regarding military-connected students because it seeks to advance the amalgamation of theory and philosophical assumptions manifested in qualitative research design and highlights the significance of gaining insights to the challenges that military-connected students encounter via using their own words to articulate their experiences (Knobloch et al., 2015).

Chapter One addressed the problem of the lack of the military-connected student's voice in educational literature pertaining to the academic challenges associated with relocations to different states due to military relocation requirements. This chapter provided both the purpose and rationale for conducting this study and why it is important to give this unique group of students a voice in the scholarly dialogue regarding their plight. Chapter One also provided a synopsis of the key historical issues pertaining to the topic and illustrated how the phenomena has taken shape over time. In accordance with tenets espoused by both Husserl (1931/1967) and Moustakas (1994), I outlined my rationale for the need to conduct bracketing and illustrated how it will facilitate getting to the essence of the phenomena. I also delineated personal aspects surrounding the formation of my worldview, highlighted my motivation, biases, and the philosophical assumptions underpinning my research approach and design decisions. All of these actions, coupled with the delineation of pertinent definitions drawn from the literature, served as perquisites to help me formulate the aforementioned research questions and better articulate the significance of the current study. Using Chapter One as a foundation, Chapter Two provides the context for this research by using relevant literature to illustrate the need to address the problem and to highlight those areas where a gap in the literature may exist. Chapter Two

also explains the theoretical framework, which will guide the study and help anchor the findings in the appropriate context.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, it illustrates why examining military-connected high school students' perspectives regarding their academic experiences related to military mobility transitions is best addressed using a qualitative research approach. Next, it underscores the relevance and importance of this study based on challenges identified in the extant literature. Next, it identifies key gaps in the current literature and provides the rationale for the need to conduct the current research.

To accomplish this goal, I initially considered presenting my review of the literature in one of two ways. First I considered presenting as much information as possible to illustrate a deep understanding of the topic area that I intend to address—thus, appeasing those scholars familiar with the area of interest (Boote & Beile, 2005). Conversely, I considered including only selective sources in the dissertation following a thorough analysis and synthesis of the literature (Maxwell, 2006; Ridley, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). At the conclusion of my personal metacognitive debate, I decided to present my information in a manner reflective of the latter espoused guidance. That is, I approach the literature review as a tool to help me form an argument and substantiate why the topic of military-connected high school students' perceptions of their academic experiences related to interstate mobility transitions are worthy of discussion and research. For this reason, it is imperative that the literature review reflect aspects of the topic that are relevant to the phenomenon I am researching. I define relevant literature as those sources that have profound implications regarding my selection of the design for this study, the manner in which I conduct the study, or affects the way I interpret the study (Maxwell, 2006, p. 28). Moreover, I present my information in a manner that can potentially appeal to various

stakeholders, including scholars, using a concept espoused by Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding and described as “*community with fellow learners*” (2014, Chapter 12, pp. 133-134). That is, I intend to share my thoughts and findings with other scholars and stakeholders in the educational community and allow this dissertation to serve as a medium to generate conversation, solicit feedback, significantly increase my knowledge, and create groundbreaking insights that challenge my current worldview (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014).

In this attempt to expand my knowledge and generate dialogue, I summarized some literary sources to reflect current theoretical perspectives but synthesized these sources in a manner that generates an original perspective (Boote & Beile, 2005). To facilitate this effort, I relied on a combination of Albert Bandura’s (2001) *Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective* as my central theory and Nancy Schlossberg’s (1981, 2011) *Human Adaption to Transition Theory* as a supporting theory. These two theories facilitated understanding and conveyed the integral aspects of transitional ideation among military-connected high school students as they relate to their academic experiences. As part of the theoretical discussion, for example, I used Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model that addresses various elements of the transition process pertaining to adults. In doing so, I hope to generate scholarly dialogue regarding the use of an adult oriented transition model to explain the transition process for military-connected high school students. Such a perspective, hopefully, will challenge the often-restrictive theoretical demarcation line between youth and adults and illustrate how models regarding process can transcend such boundaries. This approach seeks to capitalize on Schlossberg’s (1981, 2011) theory and expand it in an area—youths as opposed to adults—that otherwise might go unexplored (Lenz, 2001). Perhaps Geertz (1973) best described the essence of my intended approach when he noted the following:

Studies do build on other studies, not in the sense that they take up where the others leave off, but in the sense that, better informed and better conceptualized, they plunge more deeply into the same things. . . . A study is an advance if it is more incisive—whatever that may mean—than those that preceded it; but it less stands on their shoulders than, challenged and challenging, runs by their side. (Geertz, 1973, p. 25)

If, in the course of capturing the military-connected high school students' experiences, I find that various aspects of transitional theory pertaining to adults are apt for enhancing the understanding of the transitional experiences of the participants in this study, scholars in the field of education could consider the findings as an advancement in the field.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework, which is the second phase of abstract formulation, reflects those philosophical assumptions, theories, and views guiding the study (Gearing, 2004). The theories used serve as lenses to help theoretically frame the study (Creswell, 2018). Before an in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework can pursue, it is imperative to acknowledge that the theoretical framework discussed herein is placed in the context of qualitative research and that theory has a unique role in such research (Bradbury-Jones, Taylor, & Herber, 2014; Creswell, 2018; Meyer & Ward, 2014; Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). In his definition of the term *qualitative research*, author and researcher Creswell (2018) underscored how philosophical assumptions influence the development of various interpretive/theoretical frameworks, inform the study of the research problems, and address the meanings that either individuals or groups attribute to a human or social problem. In addition, Creswell highlighted key characteristics manifested in qualitative research such as the deductive and inductive nature involved in data collection and analysis, giving voice to the participants, incorporation of reflexivity on the part of the researcher

and the overall the complex nature of problems that qualitative studies tend to address.

Creswell's (2018) points of emphasis are not unique in that other researchers also address how qualitative researchers often delve into more complex aspects of problems and address problems in a broader scope than quantitative researchers (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014; Meyer & Ward, 2014; Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). While quantitative studies may underscore the importance of validity and reliability for measuring the value and usefulness of certain aspects of a given problem, qualitative research seeks to understand the more complex concepts, such as an array of emotional expressions or strong feelings (e.g., rage, love, desire, fear) that exist in life's social milieu (Meyer & Ward, 2014). Similarly, Tavallaei and Talib (2010) highlighted how qualitative research also gives voice to those participants taking part in the study so that their inaudible voices can be heard. In the case of military-connected students, researchers have addressed their plight from the perspectives of school administrators, parents, and other stakeholders. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, using the voices of the participants, could add a more robust understanding of the social phenomenon (Tavallaei & Talib, 2010). The current use of a transcendental phenomenological approach is based on the works of Husserl (1931/1967), and therefore revolves around a descriptive phenomenology (Gearing, 2004).

The Linkage of Philosophy and Theory in Qualitative Research

The decision to select a qualitative research design to investigate the research problem supports the integration of the methodology used to collect, analyze and interpret data, and document findings; hence, the theories and methodology are inextricably linked. In qualitative research, the amalgamation of theory and research methodology is essential to the success of conducting a quality study (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014; Meyer & Ward, 2014; Tavallaei &

Talib, 2010). To understand this linkage, it is imperative to first define the term as follows:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)

Creswell (2018) noted how the aforementioned definition highlighted the importance of the process of qualitative research and underscored how this process emanates from philosophical assumptions, leads to the development of the researcher's interpretive perspective and influences the selection and organization of procedures that are necessary to study a phenomenon (Creswell, 2018).

To counter criticisms that purport qualitative research as replete with obscurity and vagueness, qualitative researchers incorporate theory throughout the research process (Meyer & Ward, 2014). One aspect of research that facilitates a deeper understanding of the topics researchers study revolves around the manner in which theory is defined and functions. That is, qualitative researchers view theory as an interpretive, systematic collection of propositions that inherently functions to give some degree of order to the research process and to predict or explain essential concepts or abstract ideas of phenomena (Denzin, 1970; Meyer & Ward, 2014). In qualitative research, philosophical assumptions help to integrate the relationships between the

frameworks researchers choose to conduct, studies, and the descriptions of the type of problems requiring research. Theory also possesses a descriptive element; however, theory transcends description by coalescing themes and categories around the primary theme of the research and provides statements or postulates regarding relationships of concepts (Meyer & Ward, 2014).

Theory serves as an agent that unites facts and concepts together in a valid manner (Husserl, 1931/1967); however, the degree of significance of theory in a qualitative study is predicated on the underlying philosophical assumptions used to conduct research. Unlike quantitative studies reflective of deductive reasoning, qualitative studies are characterized as inductive in nature and requires a clear connection to the data and theory (Flick, 2017; Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Willgens et al., 2016). Theories provide a framework in which to encapsulate and implement boundaries and explain the analysis of data.

As such, qualitative researchers can use data to eventually arrive at a theory (e.g., grounded theory). However, a closer examination of the derivative philosophical assumptions associated with transcendental phenomenology reveals only a loose and rather distant tether to theoretical roots. That is, Husserl (1931/1967) stated that the linkage of theory and the philosophical assumptions associated with transcendental phenomenology is rather emotionally cold, distant or detached, because the aim of this type of research is to arrive at the very essence of a phenomenon via “pure description prior to all ‘theory’” (p. 110). Husserl (1931/1967) expanded on this idea and stressed the potential and the importance of using pure descriptions to attain systematic inclusion and exhaustive characterization of data to the highest degree such that it could eventually facilitate the formation of a theory. For transcendental phenomenologists, however, Husserl (1931/1967) concluded that such a task “*is not ours to attempt* [emphasis added]” (p. 110).

When conducting qualitative research, researchers often convey their personal philosophical assumptions within the research (Flick, 2017). Embedded within the various interpretive frameworks, moreover, are the roots of various philosophical assumptions, and Creswell (2018) cautions researchers to be cognizant of these assumptions. Despite this caution, it is imperative that researchers discern the difference between philosophy and theory. That is, philosophy encompasses ethical judgments pertaining to the manner in which things ought to be but are not necessarily verified using empirical data; on the other hand, scientific theories are swatches of abstract representations of the empirical universe (Meyer & Ward, 2014). Hence, philosophy focuses on the manner in which things should be and theory seeks to address how things relate to the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2013; Meyer & Ward, 2014). While understanding the linkage between philosophy and theory is important, in qualitative research, this linkage is neither easily nor necessarily extricable from “methodological interpretations of theory” (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014, p. 137). Furthermore, researchers may possess numerous philosophical beliefs, but the nexus between philosophy and theory is embedded in the variety of interpretive and theoretical frameworks that solidifies these beliefs (Creswell, 2018).

These interpretive frameworks, or paradigms, provide direction and give clarity to researchers as they attempt to execute qualitative research. For example, Husserl’s (1931/1967) transcendental phenomenological approach requires researchers to set-aside their presuppositions. This action, however, has three unique phases: “(a) abstract formulation, (b) research praxis, and (c) reintegration” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1432). The first phase, abstract formulation, is comprised of two components, which are the orientation standpoint and the theoretical framework (Gearing, 2004). The orientation standpoint pertains to the epistemological and ontological positions of the researcher. As part of my epistemological

position, I will view my participants as *co-researchers*, as described by Moustakas (1994). That is, I will inform the co-researcher of the true nature of the study and make a conscious effort to acknowledge him or her as an equivalent partner in search of knowledge regarding the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). I will also work to develop a close relationship with each participant in an effort to gain trust, build rapport, and elicit robust information about their experiences. Despite the desire to attain closeness with my co-researchers, for the current study, I bracketed my presuppositions as I sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

While Creswell (2018) suggested employing a framework to facilitate understanding of the linkage between a researcher's philosophy and theory, the current study sought to employ a combination of interpretive frameworks—social constructivism and post-positivism. Despite the manifestation of salient aspects in each interpretive framework (e.g., narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory), these aspects are not definitive concepts that can be isolated or limited to one framework. Instead, some concepts noted in some frameworks underpin other frameworks, transcend the boundaries of nomenclature, and are quite apparent in others. Hence, the *primary* interpretive framework for the current study is the social constructivist paradigm. In this type of research, the individual's primary goal is to seek understanding of the world in which he or she lives (Creswell, 2018). When using this paradigm, researchers rely heavily on the participant's perspective of the given situation (Creswell, 2018). Although this research seeks to focus on a marginalized group (i.e., military-connected high school students), it seeks neither to directly advocate for actions to help the individuals nor to present some form of an action agenda promoting change (Creswell, 2018). These limitations in purpose, therefore, are factors that distinguish the appropriateness of the social constructive framework that is employed from the

transformative framework that perhaps other researchers could use in future studies to achieve the aforementioned goals.

In addition to the social constructivist interpretive framework, a post-positivism paradigm is used to support and execute this research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), researchers must remember that paradigms “represent a distillation of what we *think* about the world (but cannot prove). Our action in the world, *including actions that we take as inquirers* [emphasis added], cannot occur without reference to those paradigms: ‘As we think, so do we act’” (p. 15). It is these ‘actions’ attributed to the qualitative researcher’s efforts that align with the post-positivism framework. In essence, post-positivist researchers purport that inquiry is a series of steps fused together via logic, and participants possess multiple realities; in addition, these researchers embrace the idea of using rigorous methods to collect data and conduct analysis (Creswell, 2018). These key attributes are embedded in the concept of post-positivist inquiry; however, they are also manifested in the data collection and analysis functions of the social constructivist framework and thus transcends any form of an abstract boundary between the two frameworks. In-depth understanding of these unique philosophical, methodological and theoretical aspects of each framework generates an opportunity to tailor the methodology using a multimethod approach, as oppose to a mixed-method approach, to address the purpose of the current study (Flick, 2017; Levitt et al., 2017)

In short, qualitative research manifests a definitive link between theory and philosophy. Moreover, qualitative researchers must take a reflexive perspective and consider the role that theory will assume within their studies (Creswell, 2018; Meyer & Ward, 2014). Without fully understanding this relationship, researchers are vulnerable to using theories to develop simple approaches to research methodology, engaging in sciolism, reducing quality of the research and

prohibiting the possibility of gaining an in-depth understanding of what it means to generate a justifiable claim about a given phenomenon (Boote & Beile, 2005; Bradbury-Jones et al., 2014).

Theories Used in Studies Pertaining to Military-Connected High School Students

There are a number of researchers whose names frequently appear in many of the major studies specifically designed to examine issues related to military-connected students. For example, authors like Astor, Benbenishty, De Pedro, Esqueda, and Gilreath have published several studies, often in collaboration with other researchers, and many of these works are referenced throughout this study. Often, these researchers used a combination of theories and sought to integrate the theories, draw parallels or underscore linkages between the more salient aspects of the theories and the unique attributes of the military-connected students (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, & Berkowitz, 2016; De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, & Astor, 2014; Esqueda, Astor, & Tunac De Pedro, 2012). On the other hand, some researchers appear to have begun with an overall view that military-connected students are under stressful conditions and subsequently decided to use theories related to stress, such as *family stress theory* (Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010, p. 85; Mittelberg, 2014) or *psychological trauma theory* (Murphy & Fairbank, 2013) to guide their studies. Another group of researchers used grounded theory to study the intersection of deployments, military mobility transitions and school cultures (Arnold, Garner, & Nunnery, 2014; De Pedro et al., 2014).

A number of studies cited resilience as an important aspect related to military-connected students and subsequently incorporated theories to examine the concept. Some researchers examined the ability of some military-connected students to function in stressful environments despite multiple challenges at multiple levels (e.g., school, home, personal) and chose to

underscore the importance of *resilience theory* either as a central theory or supporting theory (Cozza, Holmes, & Van Ost, 2013; Eastbrooks et al., 2013; Lester et al., 2013; Zimmerman, 2013). On the other hand, some researchers acknowledged resilience as important but found relationships to be a key area of interest when studying military-connected students; as a result, they often used theories such as *relational developmental systems theory* or *attachment theory* to guide their respective studies (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013). Some researchers alluded to resilience theory in their studies but did not specifically acknowledge the theory as either a central or a supporting theory (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016). For the most part, researchers who used resilience theory appeared to offer a positive perspective regarding how military-connected students cope with transitions. Given the current study addresses perceptions, the formation of individual meanings, and examines how military-connected high school students adapt to transitions, Bandura (2001) and Schlossberg (1981, 2011) are appropriate works to address the meaning-making elements of the military-connected students' transitional experiences as they relate to coping and adapting to change.

Theories Guiding This Study

The overall purpose of this study is to describe the military-connected students' academic experiences related to interstate transitions due to military mobility requirements. To accomplish this task, the elements of thought formation and meaning ideation serve as the foci for the theoretical approach of this study. This study will use Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory as the central theory to guide this effort and Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transitional theory as the supporting theory. Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory offers unique insights to the inner workings of the cognitive forces manifested in the transitional phenomenon that military-connected high school students experience. As a result, it will serve as guide or map in which to

frame the study.

Social cognitive theory. While there are several aspects to Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, he noted that the most salient features revolve around the empowering role that agency assumes in the way people develop themselves, adapt to changes, and renew themselves to align with changing times (Bandura, 2001). Such concepts will undoubtedly underscore the plight of military-connected students because they frequently relocate from one school to another and adapt accordingly due to mobility requirements associated with military service. These concepts are manifested in the transitional processes that military-connected students experience and quantitative data collection means cannot adequately capture the essence of their experiences. As Bandura noted in his discussion of consciousness, some researchers have made futile attempts to reduce such social concepts to secondary "by-product of activities" (p. 3) or in the lifeless form of an informational processing mechanism, addressing inputs and outputs. Similar to the proverbial "elephant" (p. 3) in the room that goes unnoticed, however, Bandura purported that "reductive accounts remain conceptually problematic because they omit prime features of humanness such as subjectivity, deliberative self-guidance, and reflective self-reactiveness" (p. 3). Hence, Bandura's work appeared to suggest that researchers use an approach that allows for the understanding of "phenomenal and functional consciousness" (p. 3) as opposed to approaches that are merely objective or "devoid of subjectivity" (p. 3) when studying the social aspects of people.

Given the fluid nature of many military-connected high school students' lives, being able to predict changes and adapt is an integral part of surviving during transition. It is the process of thought formation, Bandura (1989) purported, that enables people to "predict the occurrence of events and to create the means for exercising control over those that affect their daily lives" (p.

1176). Bandura (2001) introduced the concept of agency and described how it refers to a person's ability to bring about actions intentionally. According to Albert Bandura (2001), the concept of agency refers to a person's ability to "intentionally make things happen by one's actions" (p. 2). Moreover, he constricted this view by noting that, "The core features of agency enable people to play a part in their self-development, adaptation, and self-renewal with changing times" (p. 2). These 'core features,' enumerated as *intentionality* and *forethought*, *self-regulation* by *self-reactive* influence, and *self-reflectiveness*, are the focus of the current study that seeks to describe how military-connected students perceive their academic experiences related to interstate relocations due to military mobility requirements (Bandura, 2001, p. 1). Bandura (2001) purported that the ideas of experiences, perception, and thought are not mere physical activities or "constituent elements" (p. 4) of the brain; rather, these cognitive developments are "emergent" (p. 4) undertakings on the part of the brain and exercise formative influences. It is these 'emergent' attributes, Bandura (2001) contended, that are qualitatively different from the constituent ones, and thus proscribes one from reducing these emergent properties to constituent ones.

What is important to note is that Bandura (2001) did not contend that everyone was capable of deriving the best possible solution for a given situation, because some people may engage in the "miscalculation of consequences" (p. 6) as they attempt to develop a viable solution. Still, it is this acknowledgement that aligns with Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) perspective that people deal with transitions differently depending upon their use of four resources—situation, self, support, and strategies.

The other aspect of Bandura's (2001) theory that may inform military-connected high school students' experiences with different academic standards pertains to *forethought*. In

simple terms, the concept refers to the ability of a person to cognitively anticipate some future event and use anticipated event to generate motivation or govern behavior (Bandura, 2001, 7). As part of this concept, Bandura purported that people are “self-directed” (p. 7) but qualified this view by noting that people must first assume standards on a personal level before they can execute such direction and regulation.

Schlossberg’s transitional theory. Schlossberg (1981) complements Bandura’s (2001) view by suggesting that generational factors may affect the adoption of personal standards. Schlossberg (2011) argued against assigning a label to any age-specific group of people and sought to justify her position by relying on Frederic M. Hudson’s (1991) work that outlined how people can change courses in their lives. In his book entitled, *The Adult Years: Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal*, Hudson described how various groups of people or cohorts born within the same decade can share similar values due to common events that took place during certain historical periods in their lives. In the case of the current cohort of military-connected high school students, parental feedback about the wars in Afghanistan and other Middle Eastern countries coupled with popular Western values probably influenced the group’s value reference points significantly (Schlossberg, 2011). For example, some researchers purported that military-connected students are a part of a unique group that shares values of various groups, but these researchers acknowledged that military-connected students also share common experiences that are uniquely their own, which emanate from “the structure of their parents’ occupation” (Arnold et al., 2014, p. 9).

Some studies tend to support Schlossberg’s (2011) position regarding the commonalities of values associated with generational identification. In one study, some teachers provided military-connected students with opportunities to support the class in an effort to connect with

the strong sense of volunteerism that teachers attributed to the assimilation of military-connected students in the military culture of their parents (Arnold et al., 2014). Other studies suggested that many military-connected students credit their strong sense of belonging to the common values and missions espoused in supportive military communities and perceive this view as a source of strength to build resilience (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013). However, researchers must conduct more longitudinal studies to examine how these values of military-connected students are formed and solidified over time (Astor et al., 2013; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Wykes, 2015).

Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory also highlights the importance of schools within the social context of the transition process. Schlossberg purported that access and the use of various resources are key functions of the coping mechanism manifested in the successful execution of transitions (p. 39). Although Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transition theory focuses on adults, she posited how restrictive theories, which seek to define the various stages of adulthood, are not necessarily applicable in a number of cases. Schlossberg contended that there is an interactive relationship between contextual and stage theories (p. 11). Schlossberg (1981) addressed transition and several components of the concept in detail and updated her perspective in collaboration with other researchers in 2012 (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

While Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) theory presented information geared toward adults, researchers can apply her prescription of a system to cope with transition to practically any form of human transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Researchers and educational and professional stakeholders who interact with military-connected high school students can use the social aspects of transition to understand the process and subsequently develop solutions to help military-connected high school students cope with change. For example, Arnold et al. (2014) explicitly

noted that one of the goals of their study was to capture the experiences of military-connected students' transitions from the perspectives of teachers and attempt to understand how these teachers comprehended the connection between the military-connected students' experiences and the context of the classroom (p. 10). Despite this goal, the researchers appeared to conduct the study without considering transition as *a process* that required special attention, care and skill to effectively deal with military-connected students.

As a result, Arnold et al. (2014) correctly addressed social issues pertaining to the cultural aspects of the transition process—as evident by their call to use a “culturally responsive pedagogy as a framework for teaching military-connected students” (pp. 10-11). The researchers, however, missed an opportunity to highlight how gaining an understanding of the inner workings of the transition process could help teachers to view military-connected students from a different perspective that may otherwise become lost in the process of trying to help them. That is, the transitioning aspect of the military-connected student's life is manifested as part of his or her psychological makeup; hence, it is rarely, if at all, visible to stakeholders seeking to assist the military-connected student unless they are informed or have experience in this area. Even with their emphasis on using a cultural pedagogy to teach military-connected students, it is not surprising Arnold et al. stated the following:

It may be more difficult for teachers to identify and teach to cultural differences that are not outwardly observable. . . . It may be harder for teachers to ‘see’ military students than other culturally diverse groups, making it more difficult for them to develop cultural awareness and relate it to pedagogy for these students. As one of our participants told us, ‘A lot of times, a military child will blend in well with everyone else.’ (p. 11).

Hence, it would be difficult for teachers, parents, and professional stakeholders to assist military-

connected students if they cannot see them as they truly exist.

Within a social context, Schlossberg (2011) purported that transitions and individuals differ but the overall structure for understanding individuals in the midst of transitioning remains the same (p. 39). Once informed, Schlossberg noted that the helper could listen in a way that facilitated responsible probing and provide some form of structure and guidance for the person in transition to understand his or her situation and affect them in such a way that they could cope with transition in a more creative manner. In essence, stakeholders and advocates seeking to assist military-connected students in transition could become knowledgeable of key issues and concerns confronting individuals in transition and serve as advocates to garner foreseeable services and resources to facilitate better transitions (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Schlossberg, 2011).

Commonalities Among Schlossberg's and Bandura's Theories

To better understand how military-connected students perceive values or how such values affect their thinking and regulation of behaviors, the works of Bandura (2001) and Schlossberg (2011) were used to guide this study. Both Bandura and Schlossberg addressed the concept of self-regulatory processes and perceptions of self. Bandura coined the concept of *self-reactiveness* and described it as a factor that functions through the process of self-regulation and purported that it is the nexus between thought and action. Bandura maintained that a person's actions are the seminal forces to self-reactive influences, which are generated by comparing personal standards and goals. According to Bandura, goals constituted in a meaningful value system, coupled with a clear awareness of one's personal identity, generate meaningful and purposeful activities. Hence, perception of personal identity and the formulation of meaning, are key concepts that also pertain to military-connected high school students.

Schlossberg (2011) suggested a similar concept but used the term “autonomy” (p. 109) and defined it as “independence or self-directed freedom” (p. 109). The concept of autonomy develops over a continuum of a person’s lifespan and can be described as corresponding to the following pattern:

(a) The young child is dependent for all its needs on a nurturing parent. With growth comes a period of (b) counterdependence, a time of rebellion during which individuation and autonomy take place and then a period of (c) independence during which the individual leads or attempts to lead a completely separate life. (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 110)

Given that many of the military-connected students for this study are enrolled in high school, it may be plausible to assume that many of the students will be in the counterdependence stage as described above or in the embryonic phases of the independence stage. If Schlossberg (2011) posited correctly, some students may express a sense of rebellion in the face of academic challenges associated with military mobility requirements. Perhaps Schlossberg’s view could provide insights to illuminate why some researchers suggested that military mobility requirements and possible deployment requirements of the parents could lead to heightened risks in the areas of emotional, psychological and behavioral challenges (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Brendel et al., 2014; Gilreath, Estrada, Pineda, Benbenishty, & Avi Astor, 2014; Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Bandura’s perspective regarding reflection (self-reflectiveness). Another common concept embedded in Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive agency theory pertains to the ability of the person to execute *self-reflectiveness*. Bandura defined this concept as “The metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one’s thoughts and actions” (p. 10). This

concept is significant because Bandura suggested that through this process, people assess their values and motivations and attempt to determine the meaning behind their life pursuits. Given this particular concept addresses how individuals codify meaning and its overall value to them, this concept proved useful in the current study by adding greater understanding of cognitive concepts and by providing a typological framework to assist with the coding of emergent themes.

Schlossberg's perspective regarding reflection (element of coping strategy).

Although Schlossberg (2011) did not use the term *self-reflection*, she noted that the process of “coping is the overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations” (p. 87). Use of the term implies that a cognitive process must take place in order for the person making the decision to decide which strategy will result in the best chance of achieving the desired goal. Schlossberg similarly noted that coping was a “strategy” and contended that it was the factor that greatly influence adaptive outcomes (p. 87). Given the current study addressed relocations and transitions and sought to examine how military-connected high school students perceive their ability to adapt to new environments, the concept of self-reflectiveness or coping proves to be a critical concept to consider.

Related Literature

The related literature addressed herein serves several key purposes. First, it seeks to provide a synthesis, as opposed to a summary, of the existing knowledge regarding the academic experiences of military-connected students who relocate due to military mobility requirements. The related literature also seeks to link this knowledge to the current study and illustrate why research of the phenomenon is not only significant, but necessary to properly comprehend some of the key issues highlighted in the review. While the literature noted herein conveys what topics have been investigated in the past, it also addresses areas that are still being developed and

reveal what has not been adequately addressed thus far and illustrate how the current study could address such research chasms and advance the understanding of military-connected high school students' academic experiences as they relocate from various states throughout the country. Instead of delineating each issue individually, this review organizes themes and coherently presents information using a conceptual or thematic structure (see Figure 2) (Torraco, 2016).

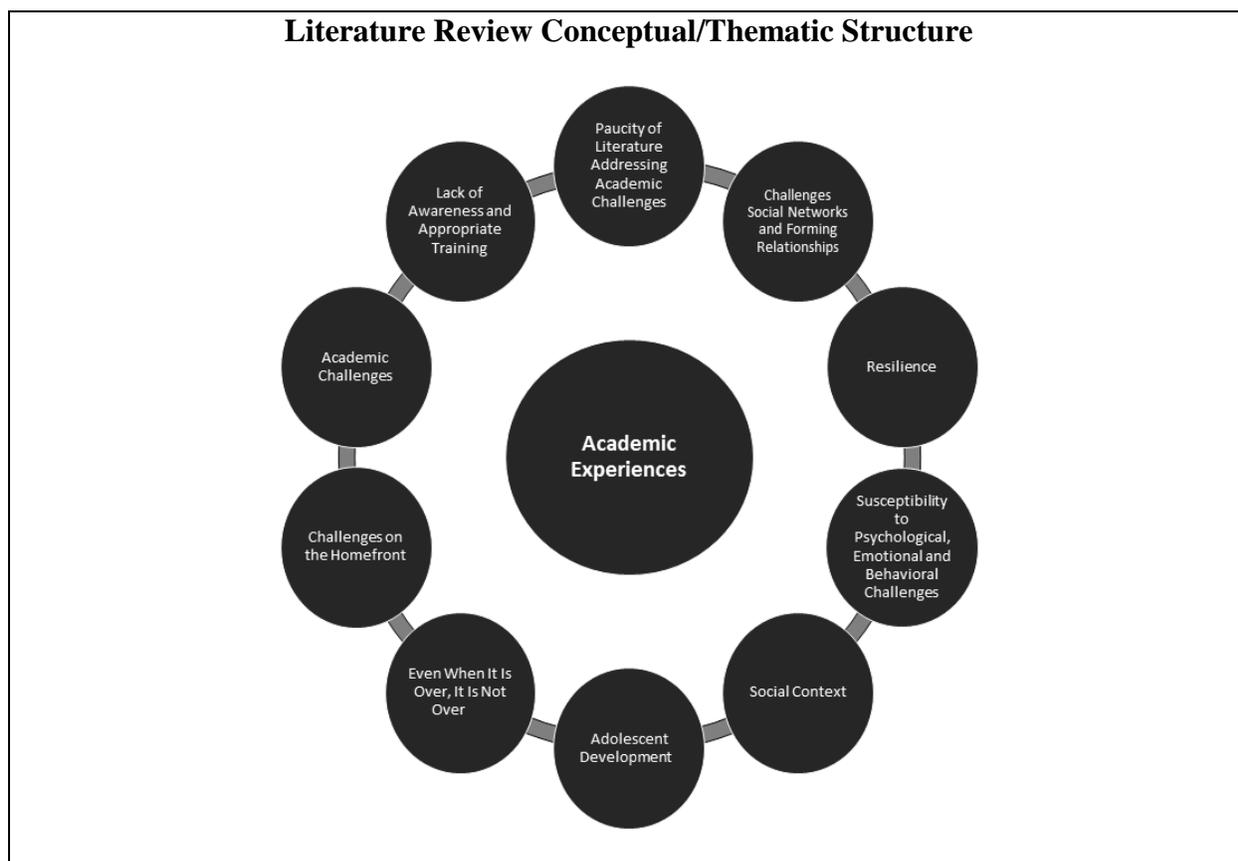


Figure 2. Literature review conceptual/thematic structure.

Paucity of Literature Addressing Academic Challenges of Military-Connected Students

The paucity of literature related to the challenges military-connected students encounter following military mobility relocations with varying state-to-state academic standards are astonishing. Challenges associated with the education of today's military-connected students are

numerous and diverse. As a result, any form of literature review involving this unique group of students often requires the inclusion of a vast array of literature because a common consensus among stakeholders regarding standard methodologies, knowledge, or even commonly agreed upon problems cannot be easily assumed (Boote & Beile, 2005). In fact, many researchers who conducted the few studies pertaining to military-connected students often underscored the dearth of literature and identified numerous areas where more studies were needed (Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, & Beidel, 2016; Conforte et al., 2017; Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014; Lester et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016; Murphy & Fairbank, 2013; Skomorovsky, Norris, Bullock, & Evans, 2016; Stites, 2016). Much of this dearth can be attributed to the fact that the majority of military-connected students, approximately 80%, are not educated within the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) school system (Esqueda et al., 2012).

Even when researchers posit that military-connected students are unique in nature, comparison with civilian counterparts is often difficult or determined to be inappropriate because, at practically every level, “civilian norms on standardized measures likely do not reflect baseline military-connected child ‘norms’” (Lester et al., 2016, p. 946). One of the few exceptions that examined academic achievement among military-connected students took place as part of a cross-sectional cohort study conducted in Washington State in 2008 (Reed, Bell & Edwards, 2011). During this study, researchers used the Washington State 2008 Healthy Youth Survey (HYS), Form B to collect data from students in grades 8, 10 and 12 in 2008 (Reed et al., 2011). Prior to participating in the survey, students were asked if their military guardian or parent were deployed to one of the then current combat zones, and students were allowed to confirm or deny such deployments or state that they did not have a parent or guardian in the military (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Reed et al., 2011). After isolating the military-connected

students, academic achievement was assessed based on a self-report question that asked students to classify their achievement as high (primarily As and Bs) or low (predominantly Cs, Ds, and Fs) (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Reed et al., 2011). From the traces of literature that do exist, a myriad of research themes related to military-connected students have emerged—either from the clusters of literature addressing similar topics or from the researchers who have identified areas where greater research is needed. Although the school has been described as a great source to augment efforts to improve the well-being of military-connected students and mitigate or preclude the negative effects associated with frequent relocations, there is little research in the area of school-based intervention (Brendel et al., 2014).

The paucity of literature regarding military-connected students becomes even more apparent when researchers seek to find studies that give voice to military-connected students. In 2010, the Department of Defense Education Activity, in collaboration with Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Military Child Initiative, commissioned a qualitative study designed to examine stressors affecting military-connected students during transitions, coping strategies, and potential strategies to facilitate better adaptation to transitions, from the perspective of military-connected students, parents and teachers (Bradshaw et al., 2010). A review of the literature from 1976 to 2013 revealed that of 26 studies commissioned to examine the effects of military deployment on school-aged children, only 3 studies—used interviews to capture such data (Moeller, Culler, Hamilton, Aronson, & Perkins, 2015). Moreover, one of the three provided input regarding the military-connected students' view of the challenges facing the military-connected students from the perspective of the parents (Moeller et al., 2015).

Similarly, a recently published literature review focused on the impact of military transition on military-connected students. Ruff and Kiem (2016) identified only a few studies

that used a qualitative approach, and only one—the aforementioned Bradshaw et al. (2010) study—provided insights from the perspective of military-connected students. Moreover, Bradshaw et al. conducted the study using focus groups as the primary method of data collection, covered a full array of ages—12 to 18—of military-connected students, and did not conduct any individual interviews. As a result, it is possible that some, if not all, of the students did not reveal their most intimate opinions in such a setting—a common disadvantage associated with using focus-group-type data collection methods (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013).

Other studies used stakeholders other than the military-connected students to provide insights. Many studies address teacher and administrators' perceptions of the challenges of fulfilling the needs of military-connected students (Arnold et al., 2014; Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Astor et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Creech et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012; Harris, 2016; Mittelberg, 2014; Murphy & Fairbank, 2013). Other studies underscored monetary cost factors associated with military-connected schools that military-connected students attended (Leatherman, 2013; Nguyen-Hoang, Yeung, & Bogin, 2014; Rossiter, D'Aoust, & Shafer, 2016). The latter studies illustrated how the military-connected students were an integral part of the local economies; yet, these studies did not give voice to such an important source of economic income.

Many studies approached the subject of military-connected students from the perspective of school climates and highlighted the importance of school relationships among peers and teachers as a key factor to successful adaption to challenges faced in schools; yet, these studies used surveys for elicitation and thus, omitted the *direct* voice of the students (Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Gilreath et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016). The primary data collection instrument used in these school climate studies was the

California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS). This instrument, however, was limited in scope because the survey omitted key contextual elements (e.g., Active or Reserve duty status of parents, rank of military affiliate, deployment status) that could further identify and define military-connected students other than simply being a sibling or a child of a military parent (De Pedro et al., 2016). One researcher who used surveys completed by parents as one of the primary data collection tools concluded the study by noting that, “surveys should be designed so that children can respond for themselves instead of relying on parental interpretation” (Stites, 2016, p. 117). Hence, silence from the voices of the children, or more aptly stated, the voiceless children, appear to be the most significant gap in the literature regarding the academic challenges that military-connected students face as they relocate across state lines.

Lack of Awareness and Appropriate Training

Current literature regarding military-connected students have revealed a significant factor that greatly adds to the challenges that military-connected students face in many non-DODEA schools—*lack of awareness on the part of key stakeholders*. Researchers consistently find that school leaders, including principals, teachers, and some counselors lack awareness of the unique challenges facing military-connected students (Arnold et al., 2014; Astor et al., 2013; Brendel et al., 2014; Clever & Segal, 2013; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2014; Mittelberg, 2014; Murphy & Fairbank, 2013; Rossiter et al., 2016; Stites, 2016). An insightful point revealed in one study described how teachers, who many would describe as “culturally responsive” to students of different cultures, failed to recognize military-connected students as a diverse group due to the lack of “outwardly observable” characteristics and consequently failed to present various teaching pedagogies accordingly (Arnold et al., 2014, p.11). In some studies, researchers observed the lack of awareness of the military culture among

members of the school staff and administrators and military-connected students' peers (Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth, Bailey, & Coppola, 2017; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010). Some researchers purported that such lack of awareness of the military-connected students' culture and way of life among both teachers and classmates served as an obstacle to successful transitions because it hindered the development and fostering of meaningful relationships in the school environment (Astor et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016). When school administrators and teachers are not aware of the unique challenges military-connected students encounter, the concomitant lack of resources to support these students ostensibly exacerbates the challenges (Astor et al., 2013).

Besides highlighting the challenges associated with the lack of awareness, some studies described how the lack of training among key educational stakeholders to recognize military-connected students and their unique situations also exacerbated the problem (Arnold et al., 2014; Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobson, 2011; Moeller et al., 2015; Perkins, Aronson, Karre, Kyler & DiNallo, 2015). Some studies, for example, underscored the need for social workers to increase their level of awareness of the military culture so as not to apply a "broad deficit perspective" (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016, p. 429) when conducting evaluations of military-connected students' family environment (Brendel et al., 2014; Castillo et al., 2017; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016). In some cases, teachers may need to be educated on the various phases of the deployment cycle to provide the proper support and level of understanding military-connected students need. Multiple researchers have cited how some teachers have demonstrated a high level of intolerance of absences when military-connected students take time to participate in pre-deployment, deployment or post-deployment activities (Astor et al., 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012). These

activities often include opportunities for military-connected students to bid farewell to deploying service members or greet them upon their return. Hence, understanding all phases of deployment and the “unique challenges [that] are associated with each phase” (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016, p. 430) are integral constructs that educational leaders must acquire if they desire to facilitate the well-being of military-connected students (Brendel et al., 2014; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016).

Besides educational stakeholders within the school environment, some studies also identified military-connected students’ parents as potential advocates who could also benefit from additional training (Alfano et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016). Specifically, one study highlighted how parents were often surveyed to provide input about a child’s ability to function and adapt to challenges associated with military mobility requirements but noted that such reports “may or may not provide a valid estimate of child functioning” (Alfano et al., 2016, p. 26). That is, many of the problems addressed occurred while military-connected students were in school and were unobserved by the parent (Alfano et al., 2016). Moreover, the researchers suggested that the lack of awareness on the part of the parent could possibly have a direct correlation to the parent’s psychosocial functioning and mental health (Alfano et al., 2016; Conforte et al., 2017). In fact, following a longitudinal study of military-connected families, researchers concluded that mental health problems among military family populations are statistically high; as a result, parental reports of military-connected children’s mental health status possess possible distortions or inaccuracies (Meadows et al., 2016). Regardless of the source, these researchers convey a common theme—without awareness of the military-connected students’ culture, it is difficult to provide appropriate support (Alfano et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016).

Academic Challenges

Military-connected students face a number of challenges in the academic environment associated with relocating due to military mobility requirements. When addressing these challenges, many studies highlight the realistic challenges related to the lack of flexibility in state-specific academic timelines (e.g., graduation prerequisites, enrollment requirements, athletic eligibility) as major obstacles. For example, some researchers described how many military-connected students relocate to schools in different states and, upon their arrival, they learn that they must repeat a course or take course specific to the respective state (e.g., history) in which the military-connected students now resides (Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Ruff & Keim, 2014; Sherman & Glenn, 2011; Wykes, 2015). Often, these requirements are prerequisites for graduation that significantly decrease the probability of completing them in time for graduation or they will lead to delayed entry into college (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Esqueda et al., 2012; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

Other studies underscored how various issues such as inconsistent placement determinations, varying guidance regarding the transfer of student records, and academic or extracurricular activity eligibility requirements can also exacerbate challenges associated with military mobility requirements for military-connected students (Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al. 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Leatherman, 2015; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Ruff & Keim, 2014; Sherman & Glenn, 2011; Wykes, 2015). In some instances, researchers revealed how some military families are compelled to demote their children to a lower grade because the new state they relocated to had a different policy regarding the age in which a student could start school (Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014). As for the challenges associated with extracurricular activities, many of the related concerns revolve around timing and time. That is, many military-connected students may arrive at new schools following the designated tryout

period and may not get an opportunity to participate in some activities (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Another major challenge that many military-connected students encounter when they relocate to new schools across state lines is the challenge of finding quality schools to attend. That is, some service members are required to live on the military installation where they are assigned due to the nature of their assignment (Leatherman, 2015; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). Many states have strict policies regarding which schools children are allowed to attend based on the area where the students reside at the time of registration (Leatherman, 2015; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). Such policies often have a detrimental effect on military-connected students, because the decision to live in other areas where better schools are located often is not an option for some military families (Leatherman, 2015; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). This particular challenge related to access to quality schools is especially puzzling and disheartening to many military leaders and family members because some of the communities where the poor performing schools are located are heavily depended upon the military installations and the associated populations for economic support (Leatherman., 2015; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

In an effort to highlight the importance of having quality schools to support military families, in 2013, General Raymond Odierno, then Chief of Staff of the Army, informed some congressional representatives and governors that future decisions regarding military base realignments will consider the quality of schools in the local communities as a significant factor for location of future bases (Leatherman, 2015). Odierno's actions were reflective of a key military stakeholder proposing the employment of a policy lever to influence how the states prioritize and provide resources to schools providing educational services to military-connected students. Policy levers are descriptions of definitive mechanisms intentionally generated to

modify behavior, influence priorities, and channel the distribution of resources of individuals or organizations (Gross & Berry, 2016). Like many policy levers, General Odierno's assertions did not delineate specific steps that legislative and educational policymakers must take; rather, the statements served both as a challenge and as a general framework in which an array of alternatives can be generated and considered when deciding how best to meet various goals and outcomes designed to facilitate the education of military-connected students (Gross & Berry, 2016; Leatherman, 2015).

The quality of the school also has lingering effects once students relocate to schools in different state. That is, if military-connected students are not at the levels they need to be once they arrive at new schools, they often face difficulties trying to obtain the help from teachers and administrators they so desperately need to succeed. Some studies found when teachers at new schools identified students that were not at the proper level of learning upon entering their classes, some teachers sought to work with students and use the students' current abilities as the starting point (Arnold et al., 2014; Lee, Liu, Amo, & Wang, 2014). Unfortunately, such "efforts to enact culturally relevant pedagogies" (Arnold et al., 2014, p. 14) are often thwarted, or in some ways challenged, by the pressures of high-stake-testing. Such challenges often lead advocates of military-connected students to call for implementation of "a common core curriculum across the states, [even though] the reality is that expectations still vary across jurisdictions" (Stites, 2016, p. 116). At least, in theory, schools could establish a standard foundation or a common baseline to measure a student's strengths and weaknesses and better facilitate efforts to communicate such assessments to follow-on or receiving school administrators and teachers (Stites, 2016). But the Common Core curriculum (CCSS), some

argue, “does nothing” (Wykes, 2014, p. 14) to help relieve the psychological stressors related to deployment (e.g., worrying about loved ones who are deployed, mourning the loss of a parent).

While CCSS may serve as a basis for ensuring a consistent academic standard nationwide, the topic of standards also obfuscates the problem for military-connected high school students when the mere definition of standards is not clear. At times, educational policymakers, researchers, and legislative leaders inject ambiguity into the topic of standards when they use different terms to convey similar concepts. For example, the term *codification* is frequently used to describe the act of forming specific descriptors of standards—similar to content standards—while *coding* refers to the act of conveying a given level of achievement by denoting a grade, evaluation or rating (Sadler, 2014). In other cases, the term *criteria* is sometimes used interchangeably with *standards* and the precise meaning, when not used in context, can be lost. A criterion refers to the attribute, characteristic, or quality used to evaluate a student’s response to a task being assessed, whereas the standard can be viewed as the marker or gauge by which the appraiser determines how far the student exceeds or fails to exceed the mark and can subsequently assign a grade to denote the delta (Sadler, 2014). Hence, standards are dependent upon criteria to convey qualitative aspects desired; however, criteria are independent and can serve as qualities without having a need to refer to the standard (Sadler, 2014).

Validation of various codified content and performance standards requires both an assessment function and an accountability function, and embedded in these functions are the seeds of confusion and potential inequity. At one end of the spectrum, some argue that it is futile to attempt to codify academic achievement standards (Sadler, 2014). That is, standards are often comprised of conceptual properties and principles; hence, they frequently lack a physical realm

that can be observed and measured precisely and indelibly require some form of judgment to assess success (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014; Sadler, 2014).

At the other end of the spectrum, some argue that the barrage of legislative and policy decisions requiring testing of students at nearly every level of schooling has helped usher in the age of the “global ‘audit culture’” (Thrupp & White, 2013, p. 30). Regardless of one’s position, the trifold purposes behind assessments—(a) facilitating learning; (b) ensuring accountability via assessment of the learning; and (c) disseminating to parents and other stakeholders how the student’s performance compares to the standards—are delicate balancing acts that educational leaders must navigate daily (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). Yet, to effectively balance anything requires one to be attuned to the minutest perturbations in the environment and to adjust accordingly. Hence, educational leaders must be cognizant of both academic and nonacademic elements that influence student performance. In the case of military-connected students, if teachers, administrators, and other educational stakeholders are unaware of the existence of this unique group of students or the unparalleled challenges they face, improper assessments could render an unjust verdict on their performance. As some researchers have noted, when institutions implement accountability policies or systems that fail to make specific stipulations to account for influential factors on achievement that are exterior to the school environment, chances are, the systems will exhibit some level of unfairness (Ehlert, Koedel, Parsons & Podgursky, 2016; Polikoff, McEachin, Wrabel, & Duque, 2014).

Besides personal challenges associated with relocating to different states due to military mobility requirements, military-connected students also encounter numerous challenges related to improper funding of some schools. Often military requirements around the world prompt significant reorganizations of military units and supporting communities. At times, these

reorganizations can lead to the closure of military bases and the associated decline in the level of funding to those schools that supported the military-connected students (Nguyen-Hoang et al., 2014). When schools are poorly funded, military-connected students, including those with special needs, often do not have access to the resources necessary to succeed academically (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Moreover, parents have expressed frustration and feelings of hopelessness when their children are unable to receive proper resources to succeed academically and they, the parents, are often unaware or ill-equipped to provide the necessary resources or training (Arnold, Lucier-Greer, Mancini, Ford, & Wickrama, 2017; Arnold et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2017; Clever & Segal, 2013; Conforte et al., 2017; De Pedro et al., 2014; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Mmari et al., 2010; Ruff & Keim, 2014). The dearth of resources is especially challenging when the military-connected student also has a disability or requires special education (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017). Conversely, some teachers have expressed some level of disenchantment when working with military-connected students because of military parents who work long hours or odd schedules and are unable to assist military-connected students with their homework requirements (Arnold et al., 2014; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016; Skomorovsky et al., 2016). Moreover, stressors and frustrations associated with poor quality schools and lack of military unique resources are often multiplied when the families are those of National Guards and Reserves who may not be located in proximity to a military installation (Clever & Segal, 2013).

Despite all of the aforementioned challenges, the consensus regarding the overall impact of relocations and deployment on academics appears to be *somewhat fluid yet opaque*. That is, over time, many researchers have gone from a significant consensus that mobility relocations have little or no negative impact on academic performance, to a view of some negative impact on

academic performance based on several mixed findings, to a more recent view of positing an overall negative impact. To make sense of these studies, researchers and readers of these studies, must view the academic challenges in historical context. That is, before 2010, several research studies suggested that military children were resilient and found ways to continually adapt to changing situations, and that there was little or no negative impact on academic achievement (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Finkel, Kelley, & Ashby, 2003; Smrekar & Owens, 2003).

Eventually, the sense of prolonged wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other Mid-East countries began to take a toll on military families, and researchers began to cite findings contrary to the original view. For example, in 2010, one group of researchers found a statistically significant negative correlation between a military parent's deployment in the past 5 years and academic performance of the respective military-connected students (Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010). Other studies suggest an overall decline in military-connected students' academic performance when parents are deployed (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). Similarly, another group of researchers underscored the decrease in resilience as prolonged wars continued and cited one teacher as describing military-connected students' perspectives regarding multiple deployments as becoming "calloused" (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins & Richardson, 2010, p. 221).

Some researchers have offered a rationale for the differences in perspectives relating to adolescent academic performance. For example, Castillo et al. (2017) cited parental trauma resulting from service while on Active Duty, whereas, Conforte et al. (2017) cited the military-connected students' perception of community support. Others have posited that family structure appears to reflect a significant correlation between adolescent military-connected students and academic performance (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al, 2017; Castillo et al., 2017; MacDermid Wadsworth et al, 2017; Stites, 2016). Whatever the rationale, many researchers since 2010,

began finding a direct correlation between poor performance and military family deployments or family separation (Arnold et al., 2017; Arnold et al., 2014; Castillo et al., 2017; Chandra et al., 2010; Mmari et al., 2010; Stites, 2016).

Despite the apparent swing in the pendulum regarding the impact on academic performance, many researchers still found the situation unclear. More in-depth review of more recent literature exposed a potential hazard manifested in research, but it is often cloaked in obscurity when researchers fail to investigate and understand current trends. That is, what may have been relevant and accurate five to 10 years ago may no longer be the case presently. In the case of military-connected students, many studies before September 11, 2001 were conducted during times of relative peace; thus, the stress of possible death via combat was relatively low and the academic performance correlated well with an environment that is not reflective of today's environment (Bradshaw et al., 2010). In fact, researchers examining the challenges facing military families, including academic performance and deployments, specifically noted that they did not inquire about the "strengths and adaptability" (Aronson & Perkins, 2013, p. 522) of military families because prior research, conducted in 2005 and 2008, had found military families to be resilient (Aronson & Perkins, 2013, p. 22). While such a conclusion may have been true in some cases, without examining current trends and the latest operational state of affairs that military families are experiencing, researchers risk decreasing the level of trustworthiness associated with their efforts (Engel et al., 2010).

To make matters even more turbid, some researchers underscored the lack of research focused on academic outcomes and acknowledged the difficulty of arriving at an unequivocal conclusion (Alfano et al., 2016). Others appear to suggest that the overall impact of factors related to the military may not have as significant or definitive of an impact on negative

outcomes for military children as previously believed (Card et al., 2011; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016; Okafor, Lucier-Greer & Mancini, 2016).

To add to the complexity of the problem, prior to the December, 2015, enactment of the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), the lack of a military-connected student identifier wreaked havoc on researchers trying to distinguish these students from the aggregate non-military-connected student population (Astor et al., 2013; Kane, 2017; Wykes, 2015). Because a unique identifier had never been included in performance measurements at the national or state level, few, if any, schools tracked or recorded such data; as a result, researchers should exercise caution when drawing inferences from studies pre-dating the enactment of ESSA. In many cases, studies that addressed academic performance of military-connected students used the selected schools' aggregate data, inclusive of all students, and the researchers reviewing the data often were unable to distinguish the differences between military-connected students and other students due to the lack of a unique military-connected student identifier (De Pedro et al., 2014; MacDermid Wadsworth et al, 2017; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Wykes, 2015).

Although some researchers have acknowledged the shortcoming associated with the lack of a unique identifier for military-connected students, some have chosen to use empirical data from Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) schools and compare results to national averages reflected in scholastic aptitude tools such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the TerraNova or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (Wykes, 2015). While these types of studies may extrapolate results from such comparisons, the validity of such studies, at the very least, is suspect. That is, military-connected students in DODEA school systems operate in a setting where teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders are acutely aware of the military-connected students' milieu and, more than likely, possess both the

resources and the training to address many of the challenges that military-connected students encounter (Esqueda et al., 2012). Hence, data and information gleaned from these studies are possibly skewed and not reflective of those military-connected students attending public schools.

Given that every public school district in the United States has military-connected students enrolled in them, it is not surprising that many researchers have suggested using a common core curriculum to alleviate some of the academic stress that military-connected students encounter in connection with inconsistent or variable academic standards due to relocations across state lines (De Pedro et al., 2016; Wykes, 2015). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) served as the primary mechanism to provide rigorous national educational standards, coupled with accountability, for kindergarten through 12th grade students so that, upon graduation, they would be prepared to compete in the global market (Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSI, 2010a, 2010b; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013; Menken, Hudson, & Leung, 2014; Stair, Warner, Hock, Conrad, & Levy, 2016; Swars & Chestnutt, 2016). These standards were designed to provide consistency regarding what students were learning, when they were learning it and, given the emphasis for each state to adopt the CCSS, regardless of where they were learning it (CCSI, 2010a, 2010b; Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015). Moreover, the Obama Administration's use of competitive grants via the Race to the Top (RTTT) encouraged states to work collectively to enact important policy changes including those pertaining to common core standards and accountability, improving subpar schools and teacher evaluation processes and procedures (McGuinn, 2016).

From the perspective of support for the military-connected student population, several states and the Department of Defense Education Agency (DODEA) have adopted the CCSS. Researchers have repeatedly found that military-connected students move at rates far greater than

their civilian counterparts and such volatility exposes these students to several different academic standards in each state (Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Ruff & Keim, 2014; Sherman & Glenn, 2011; Stites, 2016; Wykes, 2015). DODEA, for example, adopted the CCSS during the 2015 to 2016 school year (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). As of 2018, 46 states have adopted the CCSS since its inception; however, Virginia, a state with one of the largest military populations, has not adopted the CCSS (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2018; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). While the complete rationale for Virginia's decision is debatable, advocates in support of implementing CCSS throughout the country have expressed some concerns that such a decision could be detrimental to military-connected students. That is, some have noted that a common core curriculum and standards are critical to ameliorate some of the stressors that military-connected students encounter as they relocate from state to state and propel their progress forward (McGuinn, 2016; Wykes, 2015).

In addition, some advocates argue that CCSS would also provide a framework to improve teachers' competencies (Swars & Chestnutt, 2016). On the other hand, opponents argue that even if the CCSS could be implemented throughout the country, military-connected students would still encounter variations in expectations due to each jurisdiction's idiosyncrasies (Stites, 2016; Wykes, 2015). Others argue that as high-stakes test makers adjust to new CCSS standards, there is a significant risk that textbooks, testing and assessment materials and curriculum will become misaligned if implementation of the CCSS, in its entirety, does not occur (Porter et al., 2015). Some opponents also argue that there is no definitive evidence-based research to support such claims of improved academic performance once states implement CCSS (Wykes, 2015). Even in the face of colossal challenges, stakeholders cannot agree on the best way to move forward and alleviate some of the stressors affecting military-connected students.

Still, there are other researchers who claim to have strong evidence-based data to support their pro-CCSS stance and upon a closer review, it appears as if military-connected students could also benefit from these findings. For example, Bailey (2014) conducted a review of several research studies to provide a “contextual understanding of the background and current conditions that exist for rural preschool children and their families in America” (p. 389) and to provide recommendations geared toward improving their plight. As part of the contextual description of the families, Bailey determined that key economic and social conditions had to be addressed if the families were to gain any level of resilience to overcome their condition. Bailey found a positive correlation between increases in income and increases in education, especially in cases where completion of high school and college were of interest. Besides educational levels, Bailey’s research revealed that rural students often fell victim to high truancy rates. Bailey noted that when researchers infused the sequentially designed curriculum of the CCSS in the earliest stages of the educational system, children were able to develop cognitive skills that proved beneficial through 12th grade. Hence, Bailey recommended infusing CCSS into all rural area educational curricula.

Similar to the contextual conditions that Bailey (2014) addressed, the United States Armed Forces appear to exhibit similar contextual conditions. A detailed examination of the educational levels of members of the United States Armed Forces revealed that approximately 8.0% of enlisted members possess an undergraduate degree or higher as opposed to 85.0% of officers (DOD, 2017a). At the end of Fiscal Year 2016 the United States Armed Forces was comprised of “82.3 percent enlisted personnel (1,060,141) and 17.7 percent officers (228,455)” (DOD, 2017a, p. 3).

Frequent relocations also cause a number of military-connected students to miss classes

or start some classes after the school year has already begun. In addition, many service members retire from the military and remain in proximity to the last military installation at which they were assigned; hence, these veterans often find themselves facing new challenges including living in a rural area, including regions “in the rural South, the Eastern Seaboard, and California” (Clever & Segal, 2013, p. 31) where resources are often limited. Furthermore, there are still some aspects of the new law that educational leaders, policymakers and other military-connected students’ stakeholders will need to correct. For example, the identifier mandate pertains to children of Active Duty personnel; as a result, it is possible for children of National Guard and Reserve service members to be overlooked in the process (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). Hence, it is possible that the Department of Defense could gain insights applicable to military families from some of the findings and recommendations regarding rural American families.

Social Context

Unlike organizational or institutional context, which focuses on the military and academic organizations where learning occurs, the social context centers on the wider more comprehensive aspects of the military and educational milieu in which military-connected students function and learning activities transpire. The social context does not dismiss various physical aspects of reality; however, the focus of the social context is to understand the “meaning making activities and meaning ascribed realities,” (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, Location 136) which stimulate people to act. The social contextual factors pertaining to military-connected students revolve around overall feelings or beliefs about military-connected students or the military in general. For example, researchers have identified several social contextual factors related to the following areas: (a) “military specific external risk factors” (Astor et al., 2013, p. 239); (b) support networks comprised of family and community members; and (c) the psychological,

social, and emotional development of military-connected students (Astor et al., 2013; Bello-Utu & DeSocio, 2015; Brendel et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2016).

Serving as a foundation for many of these studies is the idea that the school environment is a potential source to alleviate many of the risks associated with military-connected students' transitions. Some researchers contend that for at-risk children or adolescents, school environments can potentially serve as a protective barrier against a variety of negative emotional, social and psychological consequences (Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2016). Likewise, some researchers have underscored how caring relationships from the adults in schools, higher levels of participation on the part of the students, and connectedness to schools correlate to lower levels of peer victimization among military-connected students (De Pedro et al., 2016). These researchers and many others, view schools as a social institution where leaders should make a conscious effort to understand their students and the issues that affect them on a broader and more intimate scale. While adaption at new schools following relocation is expected and can serve as a sociological mechanism to stimulate emotional and psychological development of military-connected students, these students are also affected by the fundamental interaction that transpire between their military communities, their schools and their social-ecological environment (Astor et al., 2013). Thus, many researchers posited that schools serve as more than educational institutions; instead, they serve as social frameworks in which emotional and psychological development are nurtured and complex relationships are formed (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al., 2014; Astor et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Brendel et al., 2014; Castillo et al., 2017; Cederbaum et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Gase et al., 2017; Gilreath et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016; Mmari et al., 2010; Stites, 2016).

In addition to school, the family structure is another aspect of the social context in which the military-connected student operates. Military-connected students depend on the social resources embedded in the “context of diverse family structures” (Arnold et al., 2017) to acquire social support and assistance with adjustments during all phases of the deployment cycle. In addition to drawing strength from physical accessibility during stressful periods or events such as deployments or relocations, military-connected students also depend on the family structure to provide emotional support because such periods or events can trigger feelings of unhappiness or confusion (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al., 2017; Skomorovsky et al., 2016). Moreover, researchers have consistently found the family structure to be a major factor influencing academic performance of youth and the state of their mental health (Arnold et al., 2017).

As for shaping of a child’s worldview, researchers have found that members of the military family structure assume major roles in fostering “positive traits” (Castillo et al., 2017, p. 1) in their military-connected students (Meadows et al., 2017). These traits are often displayed in the educational environment or the community environment where many military-connected students volunteer their time assisting others (Arnold et al., 2014; Easterbrooks et al., 2013). These traits can also be cultivated and overtime pay significant benefits when the family faces adversity. The more experience that families have with deployment, for example, the more they are able to cope with future deployments (Meadows et al., 2016). Other aspects of the social context that are assimilated through the family structure medium are a heightened sense of community and support for diversity and integration (Smrekar & Owens, 2003). The family structure is so influential to the military-connected students’ worldview formation that one researcher purported that, “child outcomes cannot be adequately understood outside of the broader family environment” (Alfano, 2016, p. 19).

Susceptibility to Psychological, Emotional, and Behavioral Challenges

While research conducted in connection with negative psychological effects are common, research regarding the link between deployment requirements and negative behavior among military-connected students tends to be less definitive. Numerous studies have suggested military-connected students are engaging in negative behaviors or that they tend to exhibit them in relation to the military mobility requirements (Alfano et al., 2016; Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016; Stites, 2016). In such cases, observers often described these outbursts of negative behavior as a form of acting out or asking for help (De Pedro et al., 2014). Still, some researchers posited that military-connected students' behaviors were no different from those of their civilian counterparts (Meadows et al., 2016; Stites, 2016).

Contrary to these studies, another study investigating suicidal ideation among both military-connected students and non-military-connected students found that “24 % of military-connected youth reported seriously considering suicide compared to 18.1 % of non-military-connected youth” (Gilreath et al., 2016). Researchers conclude that the military-connected students' population possess a higher risk of suicidal ideations (Castillo et al., 2017; Cederbaum et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016; Richardson, Mallette, O'Neal, & Mancini, 2016; Trautmann et al., 2015). Perhaps a more appropriate way of summarizing the varying findings regarding behavior is to acknowledge that many of these research studies were limited in scope or simply examined the number of incidents but failed to consider the effects of key contextual factors underlying the observed behavior (De Pedro et al., 2014; Meadows et al., 2016;). Hence, it is difficult to comprehend the true complexity of military-connected students' behaviors outside of the

“broader family environment” (Alfano et al., 2016, p. 19).

Another one of the overwhelming findings that a number of studies addressed pertained to the psychological stress many military-connected students experience during a deployment cycle. One common finding among researchers who examined the negative effects of parental separation on children’s behavior at various stages of development (e.g., mid-childhood, adolescence) was the level of impact of family separation on younger children was far greater than that on adolescence (Alfano et al., 2016; Averdijk, Malti, Eisner & Ribeaud, 2012; Meadows et al., 2016). In fact, stressors associated with military-related transitions alone have been shown to place military-connected-children at risk of experiencing academic challenges, depression, or anger (Arnold et al., 2017; Skomorovsky et al., 2016). In a review of medical records for the entire population of military children, researchers examining trends during parental deployments, found an increase of prescriptions written for psychotic drugs in children ages 5 to 17 years old (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017, p. 25). Moreover, when examining the types of drugs that correlated to various age ranges, researchers found substantial increases in prescriptions filled for antidepressant medication for children below the age of 12 and significant increases in prescriptions filled for anxiety medications for children ages 12 to 17 (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017).

Depending on the researcher, the definition of negative effects in behavior included maladaptive behaviors, stress, anxiety, and social or psychological problems. However, as one researcher noted, parental separation as it pertains to military-connected students has received “inadequate attention” (Alfano, 2016, p. 18). Of the limited number of studies that examined separation and its apparent effects on military-connected students, a strong familial support system was the one factor that significantly contributed to the buffering of adverse behaviors

(e.g., poor academic performance, illegal drug use) among adolescent military-connected students (Arnold et al, 2017; Lucier-Greer et al., 2014; Skomorovsky et al., 2016; Stites, 2016).

However, just as a strong familial support system can offer significant advantages to military-connected students, the lack or destruction of such systems (e.g., divorce) can also lead to significant psychological challenges. When compared to their civilian counterparts, military family divorce rates are not necessarily higher; however, due to deployments and greater frequency of deployments, military families are susceptible to increased risks of experiencing familial dissolution (Arnold et al., 2017). Such findings are significant when addressing marital structure in the context of military families, because research suggest that the strong family structure relationship is linked to lower levels of depression, increased academic performance and a greater capacity to confront difficult life challenges (Arnold et al., 2017; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016; Sun & Li, (2009).

Some researchers purported that military families viewed peacetime deployments as similar to wartime deployments in terms of length of separations; however, these families acknowledged additional stress because wartime deployments are comprised of an extra sense of danger coupled with a greater risk that a service member may suffer death or injury (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017). A currently ever-increasing body of literature suggests that when military parents deploy, the children are placed at a significantly “higher risk for psychosocial problems than their civilian counterparts” (Brendel et al., 2014, p. 649). Some researchers posited that stress generated by frequent relocation requirements, constant worrying about deployed family members or the possibility of them being deployed, and other stressors associated with lengthy wars could lead to increased suicide ideation or risk of suicide among military-connected children (Gilreath et al., 2016). Moreover, the high number of military-

related relocations often do not provide opportunities for educators and psychological support professionals to identify military-connected students who need help (De Pedro et al., 2014).

Still, regardless of deployment status, numerous researchers have purported that an inextricable link exists between children's and parents' psychosocial abilities to function, and some studies underscored the significant correlation between high stress levels among many military-connected students and the high levels of stress that various family members experienced (Arnold et al., 2014; Conforte et al., 2017; De Pedro et al., 2014; Lester et al., 2013; Skomorovsky et al., 2016). Hence, when studies find that spouses and partners of deployed service members experience increases in the level of "stress, anxiety, and symptoms of depression" (Alfano, 2016, p. 19) during deployments, military-connected students living in these families, undoubtedly, are at increased risk of experiencing similar effects. As the Department of Defense leaders at all levels examine ways to bolster efforts geared toward increasing family resilience, some studies have suggested that community psychosocial support systems that have been implemented for children, and have shown significant decreases in maladaptive behavior and increases in military-connected students' academic performance, can possibly be tailored to incorporate parents (Conforte et al., 2017).

Challenges Establishing and Maintaining Social Networks and Forming Relationships

Activities that appear to offer significant benefits to the well-being of military-connected students and their families are the establishment of key networks and the cultivation of social relationships. Research tends to converge in agreement on the active pursuit and engagement in development of social connections as the key attributes that contribute to successful adaption to idiosyncrasies of life as a military family member (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al., 2014; Astor et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Brendel et al., 2014; Castillo et al., 2017; Cederbaum et al.,

2014; De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012; Gase et al., 2017; Gilreath et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016; Mmari et al., 2010; Stites, 2016; Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013). For example, in some studies, researchers purported that there is an inextricable link between the level of interaction and praxis at key transition points that affect learning outcomes and the creation of critical learning relationships (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2013).

Other researchers also contend that formation of relationships with adults lead to more effective performance in school (Arnold et al., 2014; Wilcox, 2013; Wilcox, Angelis, Baker, & Lawson, 2014; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Unfortunately, some teachers have difficulty differentiating military-connected students from other students—partly due to the perceived private nature of some military-connected students; thus, the supportive relationship that is required for successful adaption never takes shape (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Parents of military-connected students, however, have been known to serve as advocates for their children by communicating with teachers and conveying the specific areas of need (e.g., academic shortcoming areas, emotional needs) for their children (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Hence, the current study presents an excellent opportunity to examine such relationships and gain insights from the perspective of military-connected students.

While researchers may highlight the benefits of establishing key relationships, some researchers underscore the negative implications when military-connected students fail to successfully develop such relationships. For example, some researchers cited how military requirements to frequently relocate often compel military-connected students to terminate relationships with friends at a prior location and to initiate new friendships at the new school location (De Pedro et al., 2014; Lester & Flake, 2013; Nguyen-Hoang et al., 2014; Ruff & Keim,

2014; Skomorovsky et al., 2016). In cases involving base closures and realignment requirements, school systems experience turmoil and negative effects on graduation rates when base closures generate a mass exodus of military-connected students from the school system. Some military-connected students who remain with family members, who are responsible for final closure requirements, suffer significant negative effects including psychological disturbances related to the loss of relations or connectivity to other students who have transitioned (Nguyen-Hoang et al, 2014).

Unfortunately, many military-connected students are unsuccessful at making new friends because either their peers or their teachers (or both) are often unaware of the military lifestyle and ensuing military culture (Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro et al., 2016; Esqueda et al., 2012; Knobloch, Pusateri, Ebata, & McGlaughlin, 2015; Lester & Flake, 2013). When military-connected students are unsuccessful at making friends, some researchers have found that “depressive symptoms can manifest in several areas of their lives, including physical symptoms, personal thoughts, and interpersonal relationships” (Okafor et al., 2016, p. 135). Similarly, one study suggested that frequent relocations appear to have a negative effect on the number of “affectional ties” (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016, p. 429) that late adolescents are able to form and the number of human resources they can depend on and trust for support (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016).

Moreover, Arnold et al. (2014) revealed how student-teacher relationships are often eroded when military families are not familiar with the new schools curricular or operational procedures; as a result, expectations of one party do not align with the expectations of the other. The resulting relationship suffers because some teachers demand that parents or military-connected students perform certain actions in accordance with school policies and procedures. Yet, when members of military families question policies and procedures or express frustrations

regarding the way they are implemented, some teachers lack empathy or fail to acknowledge the frustrations due to lack of awareness of the military culture and lifestyle (Arnold et al. 2014).

Still, there is a sinister facet of challenges related to relationships in schools that military-connected students often encounter—*victimization* (De Pedro et al., 2016; Gilreath et al., 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth et al, 2017). Researchers conducting empirical studies examining victimization of military-connected students found that this subgroup of students was more likely than their civilian counterparts to experience peer victimization in a school environment (De Pedro et al., 2016; Gilreath et al., 2016). Similar to these findings, one study examining overall civilian school climate of 121 Los Angeles County, California schools during the 2014-2015 school year determined that, “violence perpetration and victimization were not uncommon, with the average student perpetrating just under 1 (mean 0.72, SD 1.31) and experiencing just over 1 (mean 1.54, SD 1.75) acts of violence in the past year” (Gase et al, 2017).

Moreover, many researchers posited that multiple school relocations correlated with an increased probability of being victimized, carrying weapons on school property, or engaging in drug use or physical altercations (De Pedro et al., 2016; Gilreath et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2016). The cause for such behavior appears to stem from some military-connected students’ inability to properly cope with some of the military-generated stressors of life (Brendel et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2016). These stressors often include arduous challenges in forming peer and teacher relationships, adjusting to changes following a relocation, adhering to a new schools’ policies and procedures, or meeting the demands of an academic curriculum that differs from a previous school’s curriculum (De Pedro et al., 2016; Lester & Flake 2013; Meadows et al., 2016; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

Relationships with parents are sometimes damaged due to numerous transitions or

deployments. While researchers frequently purport how the family structure is an integral part of ensuring a military-connected student's well-being (e.g., Arnold et al., 2017), threats to this structure (e.g., divorce, marital stress due to lengthy deployments or frequent relocations) could also have a significant negative effect on their well-being and lead to increased withdrawal from parents or difficulty making new friends (Skomorovsky et al., 2016). Some researchers state that the general stress of long deployments or other military related stressors can also have long-term effects for military-connected students and possibly impede their emotional development (Rossiter et al., 2016).

Military-connected students could also inadvertently damage already strained relationships between parents. In such cases, emotional sequelae such as exhibiting a need for over reliance on a parent or abnormal clinging to a parent, coupled with spells of inappropriate behavior and outbursts could exacerbate extant marital tensions, attenuate the relationship between parents, and possibly serve as a major factor in dissolution of the marriage (Rossiter et al., 2016). In families that experience deployment, researchers found that the longer the deployment period extended, the more military-connected students experienced emotional problems (Meadows et al., 201).

Challenges on the “Homefront”

Before military-connected students enter classrooms, they must leave the unique military environment where the challenges encountered on the home front often set the stage for learning in the academic environment. Military-connected students experience a number of stressors at home similar to those encountered by their non-military peers, in addition to the unparalleled context unique to the military experience (Arnold et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016). Some of these stressors include the reality of enduring prolonged absences from parents or the

requirement to adapt to new environments due to frequent relocations (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al., 2017; Castillo et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Okafor et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2016; Skomorovsky et al., 2016; Stites, 2016).

Another stressor that is unique to many military-connected students is the idea of constantly contemplating the possibility of a love one suffering an injury or death related to military requirements (Alfano et al., 2016; Gilreath et al., 2016; Lester et al., 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017). Military-unique stress factors affect military families where members do not deploy similar to those that do deploy because they too experience frequent relocations, volatility in maintaining strong friendship relationships, turmoil among spouses regarding employment, and the stress associated with variable curricula in the area of academics for military-connected students (Meadows et al., 2016). Regardless of the stressor or the overall impact on military family members, research appears to suggest that the military-connected children are more susceptible to the harmful effects of these stressors (Rossiter et al., 2016).

Some military-connected students are also at risk of suffering maltreatment from their parents in association with deployment requirements (Alfano et al., 2016; Strane et al., 2017). Moreover, one study suggested that such maltreatment is associated with various stages of the deployment cycle. That is, researchers purported an increased risk of maltreatment to military-connected children of female military parents during the first six months prior to a deployment and an increased risk of maltreatment to military-connected children of male parents within the first six months of returning from deployment (Strane et al., 2017). To mitigate the risk of maltreatment, researchers have repeatedly identified official military support systems, informal systems such as those networks formed through social circles and sound family support networks that function using compassion and understanding as key elements to address the issues related

to maltreatment (Strong & Weiss, 2017). Hence, understanding the various stages of deployment and the associated risk could facilitate identification of military-connected students needing assistance or alignment of critical resources to support military-connected students (Meadows et al., 2016; Strane et al., 2017).

Still, one major stressor appears to revolve around the changing of roles that military-connected students experience during various stages of the deployment cycle or relocation requirements. For example, military-connected students often take on additional responsibilities taking care of siblings or accepting additional chore responsibilities (e.g., babysitting, parenting responsibilities for younger siblings, preparing meals, house cleaning, grocery shopping) to support the family (Skomorovsky et al., 2016). Other stressors include disruption of typical family routines and responsibilities (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al., 2017; Astor et al., 2013; Lester et al., 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016). The most significant stressors related to the various stages of the deployment cycle stem from preparing for a deployment, coping with periods of long separation during deployment, and uncertainty revolving around reintegration once the service member has returned (Meadows et al., 2016). Regardless of the stressors that military-connected students experience, every military-connected student's family is unique and, therefore, they may experience these stressors differently or at different points along the deployment cycle continuum (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016; Strane et al., 2017; Strong & Weiss, 2017).

Even When It Is Over, It Is Not Over

Perhaps one of the greatest misconceptions regarding challenges faced by military-connected students is the belief that once family members return from deployment, students will experience less challenges and, consequently, less negative influences that affect academic

performance; unfortunately, numerous studies have suggested otherwise. To begin with, service members relocate frequently for a number of reasons besides deployment. Some relocate to fulfill military shortages or duty requirements or seek to capitalize on potential opportunities for advancement in grade contingent upon relocating to certain geographical locations, and some succumb to the proverbial desire to improve the quality of life for themselves or other family members (e.g., attend school, proximity to large job market for spousal opportunities) (Leatherman, 2015; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). One longitudinal study of military families found that family cohesiveness, following deployment of one parent, weakened and the quality of a teen's relationship with the parent who is a spouse of the returning service member appeared to attenuate at a far greater degree than the relationship of other teens of non-deployed parents (Meadows et al., 2016).

For families that experience deployment of a family member, the reintegration process following a return often comes with its own unique stressors (Jensen, Lewis, & Xenakis, 1986). For example, once service members return from deployment, often family members, including military-connected students, continue to worry about the possibility of another deployment or the overall well-being of the returning service member (Lester et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016; Wykes, 2015). In addition to worrying, many military-connected students exhibit behavioral or academic problems and some form of anxiety (Strong & Weiss, 2017). Some children exhibit behaviors along the full continuum of adjustment. That is, some military-connected students tend to withdraw from the returning parent at times, and at other times, motivated by anxiety surrounding the possibility of another separation, they appear to long for connectivity or a strong sense of attachment to the returning parent (Skomorovsky et al., 2016).

Researchers attribute some of the challenges to uncertainty surrounding the possibility of relinquishing the new roles that the family members assumed during the pre-deployment and deployment phases of the deployment cycle (Anderson et al., 2012; Arnold et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2014; Jensen et al., 1986; Lester & Flake 2013; Skomorovsky et al., 2016). That is, some military-connected students assumed roles of greater authority in the home during the deployment phase and may display some degree of anger or resist regressing to a more submissive role once the deployed parent has returned (Skomorovsky et al., 2016, p. 30). The stressors can become exacerbated and possibly strain military-connected students' psychological and coping mechanisms if a deployed parent returns suffering from either physical or psychological wounds (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder) and requires care from family members (De Predo et al., 2016; Lester et al., 2016; Lester & Flake, 2013; Meadows et al., 2016; Wykes, 2015).

Adolescent Development

No study of high school military-connected students can be considered complete without reviewing the literature pertaining to youth or adolescent development. While some may find the works of Piaget or Freud apt for understanding various aspects of development for this unique group of students, perhaps the works of Erik Erikson is more appropriate. In fact, Erikson did not abandon the works of Freud but expanded upon them. Specifically, Erikson (1970) viewed the psychosexual concepts of Freud from an epigenetic perspective. A review of the origin and etymology of the term epigenetic reveals that it is a derivative of the word *epigenesis*, which is derived from the combination of the Greek words *epi*, meaning *on* or *upon*, and *genesis*, meaning *origin* or *emerging into being* (Merriam-Webster, 2018; Miller, 2011). Erikson (1970) insisted that he was not replacing the study of psychosexuality's earlier stages of

development but, in accordance with the epigenetic principle, the stages were being absorbed into a hierarchal system of progressive discrimination. Hence, Erikson's stages of development did not simply regurgitate the idea of succession of stages; rather, it investigated deeper into the concepts and sought to epigenetically underscore the complex relationships that branched out from corresponding parts (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Erikson postulated that human beings encounter a number of internally generated conflicts, or crises, as they advance in life (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Svetina, 2014). If a person successfully negotiates and resolves the crises in the particular stage of development that he or she is in, the person can then transition to the next stage of development. Erikson initially purported eight stages of development in life; however, after living into his 80s and encountering challenges he deemed unique to this age group, Erikson and Erikson (1997) contemplated the inclusion of a ninth stage of life. Erikson expressed the original eight stages using one-word *strength* nomenclatures that he believed emerged from the struggles of the corresponding "syntonic and dystonic tendencies" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 64) in the following manner: (a) *Hope* (Basic Trust Versus Basic Mistrust), (b) *Will* (Autonomy Versus Shame), (c) *Purpose* (Initiative Versus Guilt), (d) *Competence* (Industry Versus Inferiority), (e) *Fidelity* (Identity Versus Identity Confusion), (f) *Love* (Intimacy Versus Isolation), (g) *Care* (Generativity Versus Stagnation), and (h) *Wisdom* (Integrity Versus Despair) (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Erikson and Erikson (1997) purported that the strength of fidelity that emerges from the epigenetic duel between identity and identity confusion coincides with the adolescence stage of development; hence, the fifth stage (fidelity) is most applicable to the population of high school military-connected students for this study. According to Erikson and Erikson, one of the most important characteristics manifested in this stage is the need for leadership and direction from

parental representatives, mentors, or other leaders. Erikson and Erikson's view is predicated on their claim that adolescents are seeking to solidify their identity in this fifth stage of development (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). According to Erikson and Erikson, adolescents often wrestle with the idea of donning the proper role in life, which requires both the identification of that role and the compliance with the expectation of such a role. When the role is opaque or does not align with some of the values solidified in earlier stages of life, the adolescent experiences conflict (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Moreover, Erikson (1959/1980) noted that at times, adolescents can become neurotically preoccupied with their image as viewed by others as compared to what they perceive themselves to be. In an effort to cognitively ensure continuity, some adolescents often spend time oppugning previous connections and roles successfully navigated in earlier stages of development (Erikson, 1980). Successfully perceiving previous roles and successful resolutions of previous crises and integrating those successes with the successful resolution of current crises allow adolescents to achieve a sense of psychological balance that Erikson coined "ego synthesis" (p. 94). As children develop, Erikson (1959/1980) postulated that it is this sense of balance that generates confidence in their perception that they are demonstrating proficiency at tackling experiences and resolving crises successfully and in accordance with the mores of those around them. The resulting solidification of their identities, therefore, is predicated upon the consistent acknowledgement and accumulation of several achievements that are considered noteworthy in the culture in which they reside (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Some researchers contend that developmental maturation can account for the decreased effect of separation on adolescent problem behaviors as opposed to younger children (Alfano et al., 2016; Arnold et al., 2017; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Meadows et al., 2016). For example, one

study suggested that, to avoid undue stress related to taking on too many responsibilities, caregivers should assign military-connected children tasks that are reflective of “age-appropriate responsibilities” (Knobloch et al., 2015, p. 338). That is, to take on tasks that are beyond a child’s level of maturity may cause additional stress (Knobloch et al., 2015). In an earlier study sponsored by the Department of Defense, Bradshaw et al. (2010) found that some military-connected students assumed roles as adults during deployments and appeared to reflect corresponding adult emotions in some situations.

This apparent role reversal and taking on adult responsibilities, also termed “parentification” (Bradshaw et al., 2010, p. 96), often led to adjustment sequelae later in life (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Castillo et al., 2017). In fact, one study underscored how the mere manner in which a child responds to various military related stressors is “heavily influenced by development” (Alfano et al., 2016, p. 27). One group of researchers described the role of maturation from the perspective of adolescents in the following manner:

Adolescence is a challenging life stage for most individuals because of the various physical, social, and emotional changes and transitions that are normative during this time period. In addition to these “normative” risk factors that are part of the adolescent life stage, the presence of additional risk factors or vulnerabilities, both internal and external to the family, may lead to additional negative consequences for their developmental outcomes. (Richardson et al., 2016, p. 1765)

Hence, understanding how the assumption of various roles and responsibilities at different stages of maturation can affect future developmental outcomes is an important issue worthy of additional research.

There are some mixed results regarding the effects of military lifestyle on various age groups along the maturation continuum. That is, earlier studies appeared to suggest that middle school aged military-connected students may be more vulnerable to the military related stressors of life or the manner in which they convey their coping strategies may be predicated upon their specific maturation needs (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Similarly, more recent studies, suggested that preschoolers, may be more susceptible to the stressors of military life (Alfano et al., 2016; Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). While pre-school aged children may recognize the absence of a deployed parent, for example, they lack the cognitive ability to properly process the situation, or they are unable to develop befitting questions regarding the absent parent; hence, in many cases, cognitive frustration, anxiety and behavioral problems often ensue (Alfano et al., 2016).

Alfano et al. (2016) purported that adolescents, on the other hand, “are better able to comprehend the nature and range of potential risks associated with deployment” (p. 18); hence, they are able to cope with various stressors in an appropriate manner. However, Alfano et al. qualified their view by noting that unexplained absences or the level of uncertainty associated with the deployment timeline could engender an adverse effect on the adolescent’s ability to cope with the associated stressors of deployment. On the other hand, Chandra et al. (2010) purported that adolescent and youths can comprehend, to a certain degree, the stressors associated with deployment and, consequently, must cope with the situation; hence, they are more susceptible to the negative effects of deployment and the military environment as a whole. Similarly, Lucier-Greer et al. (2016) noted that late adolescents who relocated frequently reported an inability to develop affectionate relationships, but also higher levels of independence and optimism than early adolescent military-connected children did.

Despite these findings, most of these empirical studies used data from earlier periods or used representative samples or snapshots of specific times in the children's development; hence, it is difficult to infer any definitive conclusions (Meadows et al., 2016; Trautmann et al., 2015). Instead, Meadows et al. (2016) recommended that researchers conduct studies using a longitudinal approach and greater sample sizes, because such studies are "critical to improve understanding of how children adjust to parental deployment, and what parental, family, and child characteristics may pose risks for, or protect against, the potential negative impact of deployment on children" (p. 196).

Resilience

Without examining the issue of resilience among military-connected high school students, any review of the literature regarding the academic challenges they encounter when relocating to different states could be viewed as less than erudite or lacking in integrity. To do so, as one researcher noted, would portray military-connected students as victims and practically negate the extraordinary displays of resilience exhibited by them or fail to acknowledge and appreciate their efforts to succeed despite facing immense obstacles (Wykes, 2015). "Resilience is sustained competence or positive adjustment in the face of adversity" (Easterbrooks et al., 2013, p. 100). Despite the long list of negative behavioral and psychological symptoms often associated with military-connected students' experiences within the military milieu, a number of military-connected students do not display any such symptoms or they exhibit great resilience in the face of numerous challenges (Astor et al., 2013; Brendel et al., 2014; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Wykes, 2015). Such findings, therefore, highlight why it is imperative to investigate not only the risks, but the resilience of this unique group of students to understand what factors

mitigate or prevent the onset of negative behavioral or psychological effects (Conforte et al., 2017; Gilreath et al., 2014; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017).

In the wake of the prolonged conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, researchers purported that the majority of military families, as a whole, are resilient (De Pedro et al., 2016; De Pedro et al., 2014; Lester & Flake 2013; Wykes, 2015). Still, some researchers highlighted that the level of resilience attenuates as the deployment timeline extends (Chandra et al., 2010). The most recent longitudinal study, for example, acknowledged that the military is comprised of experienced families and those with little or no experience; however, the more experienced families can increase the level of resilience among all families by assisting “those who may be less successful at adapting and adjusting to the unique demands associated with military life (Meadows et al., 2016, p. xxix).

Although a number of researchers have underscored the resilience of military-connected students, there appear to be only a few major factors that contribute to its constitution. On one end of the spectrum, the Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1342.22: Military Family Readiness (DOD, 2012) outlined guidance for the implementation of both *informal* and *formal* networks to foster resilience as a means to improve military families’ readiness posture (Conforte et al., 2017; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017). According to DODI 1342.22 (2012), informal networks refer to, “The associations, interactions, exchanges, and connections that people and families make in everyday life, including group associations and less organized networks of personal and collective relationships” (p. 31). Research suggests that interactions in the informal network, including community involvement, have led to decreased behavioral problems, including a decline in illegal drug use, and increased academic performance levels (Conforte et al., 2017).

On the other hand, a formal network is “a network that reflects the policies and systems operating under military or civilian authority as instruments of socialization and support” (DOD, 2012, p. 30). An example of a formal network that researchers cited as having a positive effect on improving psychological health and resilience among military families is “Families Overcoming Under Stress (FOCUS), a program developed by University of California, Los Angeles, and Harvard Medical School [and] offered at 18 U.S. military installations” (Brendel et al., 2014, p. 651). While both types of networks are frequently publicized, researchers have noted that the sources are often unorganized, overlap one another, or is difficult to access, especially if the service member is a member of the National Guard or Reserve or leaves active service (Brendel et al., 2014; Clever & Segal, 2013; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017).

Another key source responsible for resilience among many military-connected students is the ever-improving coping mechanism that they acquire over time. Apparently, the need for coping skills in a military environment spawns at an early age and military-connected students develop such skills due to their constant interaction with a volatile environment (Strong & Weiss, 2017). Several researchers have purported that, despite experiencing numerous transitions and, in many cases, prolonged periods of separation, military-connected students develop robust coping mechanisms (Astor et al., 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2016; Strong & Weiss, 2017).

Another important source for fostering resilience is a supportive family (Arnold et al., 2017; Lester et al., 2013). Both teachers, and parents are the “primary mechanism[s] for promoting resilience” (Okafor et al., 2016, p. 141) in military-connected students. In fact, many researchers have cited the military family element as the key factor in generating resilience, promoting psychological well-being among military-connected students, and mitigating risks

associated with various stages of the deployment cycle (Lester et al., 2013). Like teachers, parents interact with military-connected students regularly and, therefore, are more likely to be sensitive to the needs of the students and can identify when the military-connected student is experiencing difficulties (Okafor et al., 2016). Some researchers purport that, while military families may experience disruption of the family structure that is comparable to non-military families, the most recent trend of prolonged deployments in support of lengthy conflicts place military families at greater risk of experiencing dissolution (Arnold et al., 2017). Hence, the current level of resilience among military-connected students could decrease concomitantly with the increased risk of dissolution to the military family structure. As Arnold et al (2017) noted, “The relationship between the family and military youths’ outcomes is acutely relevant as those who have experienced parental deployment and multiple transitions, are already at risk for higher rates of depression ... and lower academic achievement” (p. 862).

Researchers have also cited supportive school climate as a major source to bolster resilience among military-connected students (Astor et al., 2013; Brendel et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2014; Gilreath et al., 2014). “Research has suggested that a school’s climate—which includes social relationships, a sense of belonging, and feelings of safety—moderates the potential effects of external risk factors on a variety of risky behaviors known to adversely affect academic functioning” (Esqueda et al., 2012, p. 69). Many researchers have underscored how many teachers view military-connected students as a major asset to facilitate learning in the classroom by highlighting their unparalleled experiences and endeavors (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

In addition, some researchers noted that military-connected students have exceptional abilities to adapt and make friends easily and that teachers can cultivate resilience among

military-connected students and facilitate learning by “planning curriculum and professional development” (Stites, 2016, p. 116) around these strengths (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Stites, 2016). Hence, it is imperative that educational leaders bolster efforts to increase awareness regarding the presence of military-connected students within civilian schools (i.e. non-DODEA schools) so that such relationships can be formed and maintained to increase resilience (De Pedro et al., 2016). Understanding the variables that link a positive school climate to increased levels of resilience among military-connected students and the understanding of various contextual factors and the impact of relationships on military-connected students/ experiences are critical gaps in the literature that must be addressed in future studies (De Pedro et al., 2016).

While the school is often cited as a major source for cultivating resilience among military-connected students, researchers have repeatedly underscored the dearth of school-based research in the area of fostering resilience or elevating awareness of the military-connected student subgroup in school environments (Brendel et al., 2014; Conforte et al., 2017; Esqueda et al., 2012). Moreover, with the lengths of operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), some would think there would be a plethora of information addressing the challenges of military life. However, after completing one of the most recent longitudinal studies commissioned by the Department of Defense, Meadows et al. (2016) documented “the relative paucity of data adequate to support evidence-based policy on most issues of concern to OIF and OEF populations” (p. 2). Despite such dearth of research, Meadows et al. purported that the following key factors were integral factors in determining resilience among military families as a whole: (a) actively participating in deployment cycle activities, (b) conducting frequent communication with deployed family members during

deployment, and (c) understanding the deployment characteristics so that family members can adjust accordingly.

Summary

Military-connected students are indeed an uncommon corps of students and the literature clearly indicates there is an overall lack of awareness of the unique characteristics innate to the students in this group. While educators may convey a set of espoused values to assist students in their sphere of influence, the act of complying with such values is far more difficult to attain if educators are unaware of the military-connected students' culture and experiences. From understanding the various sources of stress that military-connected students encounter to comprehending the potential emotional and psychological effects these forces can generate, educators must invest more time and effort into understanding military-connected students. Various theories regarding both family stress and resilience frameworks have been used in prior studies to address the concerns of military-connected students. Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory, however, offers an excellent framework for truly examining the various aspects of thought formation and consciousness to help students adapt and cope with leaving one school in a given state and adapting to a new school in a different state. In addition, Schlossberg's (2011) theory of transition for adults offer a unique and insightful perspective to examine transition as a process. Using Schlossberg's transition model, military-connected high school students and their stakeholders could categorize and examine the transition process to gain an understanding of not only *what* is transpiring in the process but also *where* in the process a military-connected high school student might be. With such an understanding, stakeholders can build supportive relationships, and devise, tailor, and implement solutions to help guide students through the transition process.

In short, literature pertaining to military-connected students highlights a number of challenges and suggests a number of areas where additional research should proceed. The literature identifies several sources of stress that affects military-connected students including stress from home related to past deployments, potential deployments, and ongoing deployments. There are also studies that describe the emotional or psychological stress that military-connected students encounter in connection with transitions. This study takes a transcendental phenomenological approach and seeks to elucidate how students perceive their challenges of transitioning to a new school and adapting to the new environment. This study seeks to address various elements of transition and uses a theoretical framework to facilitate the discussion. Many of the academic challenges, according to some researchers, stem from a lack of awareness on the part of teachers and school administrators. This study could add to this area of scholarly dialogue, as it has the potential to convey insights from the perspective of the military-connected student regarding how best to form such supportive teacher-student relationships.

Currently, scholarly dialogue is taking place without the views or input from one of the key participants—the military-connected students. This study can serve as a medium for military-connected students to provide their perceptions of their experiences and, consequently, add their voices to the scholarly dialogue. The following chapter, Chapter Three, will address the methodology for the current study and delineate the procedures and present and substantiate the selection of the research design. In addition, Chapter Three will discuss the analysis for the study and outline the details of what I believe will occur during execution of the research. The primary purpose of Chapter Three will be to outline the methodology in such a manner and in such detail that the current study could be repeated by other researchers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to give voice to military-connected high school students and to describe the academic experiences they encounter as they transition from state to state. This study incorporates key aspects of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory and Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) transitional theory to guide the research. This chapter addresses the methodology and my rationale for deciding to conduct a qualitative study. Next, I delineate my primary research questions, which seek to reveal the essence of the military-connected high school students' academic experiences as they transition to new schools in different states and cope with new academic standards. I then discuss the various characteristics associated with the selection of sites and participants, my rationale for selection, and I substantiate why the sites serve as a good basis for examining the aforementioned problem. Using the works of Creswell (2018), Husserl (1931/2012), and Moustakas (1994) to guide my design selection, phenomenological data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures, I outline how I will proceed, and I underscore my overall role as the researcher. I address key aspects of the data collection process, my rationale for choosing to employ a purposeful sampling technique to acquire participants, and underscore some of the key tools and processes suggested by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (e.g., horizontalization, clustering and theme identification, rich descriptions). I then illustrate how I plan to conduct data analysis accordingly. My rationale for addressing these aspects of the study is to provide a basis for future researchers to repeat or expand the study effectively. Next, I address how I intend to ensure trustworthiness throughout the study using updated concepts that have emerged as strong tenets of scientific rigor and reflect the ever-evolving nature of qualitative research. Finally, I

will address how I will incorporate ethical considerations in all phases of the study, especially since this study seeks to examine school age students.

Design

Rationale for Using a Qualitative Approach

I conducted this study using a qualitative approach, because the functions and attributes of qualitative research makes this type of research apt for studying the academic challenges that military-connected students encounter. According to Creswell (2018), when researchers seek to explore an opaque issue or phenomenon, qualitative research allows the exploration to assist in the identification of obscured variables or give voices to those who are silent or lack the ability to articulate their plight. Besides the exploratory nature of qualitative research, Creswell also underscored how this type of research helps researchers understand the various contextual aspects or settings in which participants experience a given phenomenon. Without such an understanding, critical information relevant to the explanation of subsequently obtained results may be lost. In fact, renowned quantitative research experts Thomas D. Cook and Donald Thomas Campbell (1979) expressed a similar perspective when they suggested the inclusion of qualitative research in all field experimentation to inform and reveal the conditions and contextual environment in which the researcher operates. Moreover, they noted, “these efforts often may uncover important site-specific threats to validity and contribute to valid explanations of experimental results in general and perplexing or unexpected outcomes in particular” (p. 93).

Another attribute that bolsters the rationale for using a qualitative approach for this study pertains to the researcher’s need to acquire a complex and thorough comprehension of the subject being investigated (Creswell, 2018). Military-connected students share a number of similar qualities, yet they are quite different from each other and face a multitude of different

challenges (Clever & Segal, 2013; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013; MacDermid Wadsworth, Bailey, & Coppola, 2017). Still, researchers can obtain the level of detail necessary to understand phenomenon by conducting research in a non-laboratory setting and by taking time to listen to participants' stories (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, qualitative research possesses the unique capability of grasping various complex social concepts and issues that quantitative tools simply cannot address—such as the susceptibility of some variables to differences in ethnic origin, gender, or socio-economic status (Creswell, 2018). In such cases, some researchers have been known to improperly use quantitative tools and, with a sense of imperviable dogmatism, viewed the subsequently derived results as definitive proof (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Because of their somewhat callous approach to science, Cook and Campbell (1979) described such researchers as “naïve social quantifiers” (p. 93) and rebuked their efforts for failing to recognize and acknowledge “the presumptive, qualitatively judgmental nature of *all* science” (p. 93). Hence, Cook and Campbell appeared to suggest that before any group of objects can be quantitatively defined, researchers must first apply a qualitative determinant to identify the group.

Still another reason why I selected a qualitative approach for this study was predicated on my intent to understand the phenomenon within the “contexts or settings” (Creswell, 2018, p. 45) in which the military-connected students experienced transitions to different states. To deepen the level of understanding, the qualitative approach afforded me, the researcher, with an opportunity to endue military-connected students with the authority to partake in efforts to describe their experiences so that they too may hear their own voices (Creswell, 2018). Such attributes are innate to a qualitative study and served as elements of a unique framework that

allowed me to derive at the most intricate comprehension of key issues and challenges that military-connected students encountered (Creswell, 2018).

Why Phenomenology is an Appropriate General Design

Phenomenology is the appropriate design for the study as its primary purpose is to reduce an individual's experience with the phenomenon of interest to a description of its most indispensable qualities and attributes or essence (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology transcends the narrative qualitative approach, which sheds light on the accounts of experiences of an individual (Creswell, 2018). In addition, phenomenology provides a description of the ordinary meaning for a collection of individuals of their "*lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2018, p. 74). It is important to note that the concept of an experience involves some form of reflection. Specifically, Husserl (1931/1967) suggested, "it is the intrinsic nature of an experience to be perceivable through reflexion" (p. 129).

In qualitative research, researchers are both the recorder and conveyer of experiences. Hence, they serve as the nexus between the participants' articulation of their experiences and the meanings inferred by the readers or reviewers of the study. It is imperative that researchers conduct self-reflection and understand their role. After all, qualitative researchers, according to Denzin (2001), are not detached, objective, distant observers of experiences and cultures, because through their writing, they bring culture into existence and convey experiences in such a manner that they, in essence, indelibly etch them into society. Similarly, Creswell (2018) underscored how researchers must be aware of how their personal backgrounds and experiences shaped their perspectives of the world, and they must acknowledge how their positions or ways of viewing data and formulating information emanate from concrete experiences, cultural frameworks and personal and historical perspectives.

The primary rationale behind the selection of a transcendental phenomenological design for this study revolves around the concept of listening to the participants so that reviewers hear the participants' genuine voices at the end of the study (Creswell, 2018). To accomplish this feat, a transcendental phenomenological study requires the researcher to set aside and suspend preconceived judgments or presuppositions regarding the phenomenon of interest (Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). Given a number of researchers have conducted studies pertaining to military-connected students from the perspectives of teachers, counselors, parents, and other stakeholders (e.g., Arnold, Garner, & Nunnery, 2014; Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014; De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty & Berkowitz, 2016; De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, & Astor, 2014; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Esqueda, Astor, & Tunac De Pedro, 2012; Harris, 2016; Mittelberg, 2014; Murphy & Fairbank, 2013), a transcendental phenomenological study enables a researcher to examine the phenomenon from a fresh perspective that is free of preconceptions, tainted worldviews, or a priori knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). The precise meaning of a military-connected student's experience, therefore, could become obscured when described from the perspective of stakeholders other than the military-connected students. That is, when researchers attempt to convey military-connected high school students' experiences through the filtered processing mediums of the receipt-process-transmission cycle of communication—reminiscent of the childhood game of *pass the message*—policymakers or other stakeholders could potentially offer views that do not reflect the authentic views of military-connected students.

Another important objective of a transcendental phenomenological study is to provide an *accurate description* that axiomatically depicts the essences manifested within the experience of

the phenomenon being investigated—as opposed to an attempt to *explain* the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). That is, unlike a narrative analysis that centers on “life stories and the construction of narratives of meaning” (Creely, 2018, p. 106), a transcendental phenomenological approach focuses on the “analysis of elemental objects or structures of consciousness” (Creely, 2018, p. 106). By selecting and employing a phenomenological approach, I, as the researcher, would seek to provide an account of the experience that accurately reflects that of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Rationale for Research Design and Implementation and Linkage to Procedures

There are two primary reasons for selecting a phenomenological design and more specifically, transcendental phenomenology. First, phenomenology offers researchers the scholarly tools to explore the social contexts, including cultural, language, community, and family social context in which military-connected students experience academic challenges related to their military relocations across state boundaries (Creswell, 2018). Phenomenology gathers the collective experiences of a group of individuals and provides a common meaning of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2018; van Manen, 2016). This process often requires the researcher to interpret various experiences as part of implementing phenomenological procedures (Creswell, 2018).

Transcendental phenomenology, however, places less emphasis on interpretation and focuses more on the researcher’s descriptions of the participants’ experiences and the corresponding phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). To implement the transcendental phenomenological design and achieve its corresponding goals, researchers must execute a technique designed to remove biases or preconceptions known as bracketing or *epoché* (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). Because of

this desire to both identify and isolate biases and prejudgments, it is imperative that researchers include as part of their research an essay addressing their presuppositions (Creswell, 2018). This process is necessary in transcendental phenomenology, according to Moustakas (1994), because it allows the researcher to initiate the study with an open mind and, from a state of naivety, listen to the participants as they describe their experiences. Another important aspect of data collection in transcendental phenomenology is the high level of focus given to mental imagery and creative thinking (Moustakas, 1994). That is, as researchers attempt to paint a complete picture of various experiences, they simultaneously wrestle with the task of accounting for the underlying dynamics, which help to define the various emotions and cognitive processes tethered to the experience (e.g., envy, happiness, rage) (Moustakas, 1994).

Besides the aforementioned rationales supporting my selection of a phenomenological qualitative design for the current study, I also considered the manner in which the purpose of my research links effortlessly with the features and benefits embedded in the transcendental phenomenology conceptual framework. That is, one of the key factors that impelled me to pursue researching the academic experiences of military-connected students who conduct interstate relocations due to military relocation requirements was the paucity of information regarding this topic and the lack of voice of the military-connected students in the few studies that did examine the phenomenon. Phenomenology is a qualitative design that, like many other qualitative designs, adds to the literature of a given phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, it offers opportunities to “give voice to underrepresented groups” (Creswell, 2018, p. 130) and opportunities to explore a deeper understanding of the primary phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2018).

In this process of giving voice to the participants and gaining a deeper understanding, one of the purported benefits of phenomenology is the idea of capturing “the essence of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2018, p. 130). It is this focus on the essence of the phenomenon that makes transcendental phenomenology a uniquely apt framework in which to examine the phenomenon related to military-connected students. According to Husserl (1931/2012), transcendental phenomenology is an eidetic science formed for the sole purpose of establishing “‘knowledge of essence’ (*Wesenserkenntnisse*) and absolutely ‘no facts’” (p. 3). In other words, Husserl (1931/2012) explained, the transcendental reduction that evolves from the psychological aspects of the phenomenon and transforms into the “pure ‘essence’” (p. 4) is an “‘eidetic’ Reduction” (p. 4). It is cloaked in a theory of “essential Being” (p. 4) that embraces not the real, but the non-real as a transcendental reduction of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931/2012). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) purported that the meaning and wisdom of reflection requires an innate, yet inalienable, understanding of the unique combination of the concrete and intangible facets of an object by revealing its essence in an epistemic expression of understanding. I used recorded interviews and self-reporting tools as part of my data collection procedures. These tools provided an opportunity to capture the participants’ experiences verbatim as they reflected on the phenomenon being investigated.

The transcendental phenomenological design also facilitates conveyance of my underlying ontological philosophical assumptions and the integration of a social constructivism framework. That is, according to Creswell (2018), qualitative studies allow for the researcher with an opportunity to embrace “the idea of multiple realities” (p. 19). Creswell posited that the ontological philosophical assumption relates to the “nature of reality” and “addresses the question: When is something real?” (p. 325). In answering the aforementioned question, I as a

qualitative researcher, attempted to highlight and distinguish the objective aspects of an experience, that which is real, and the cognitive constructs of perception, which some view as unreal. Husserl (1931/2012) described this distinction of features as they relate to reality as follows: “Essence provides on the one side a knowledge of the essential nature of the Real, on the other, in respect of the domain left over, knowledge of the essential nature of the non-real (irreal)” (p. 4). I believe that military students offer unique insights into both the ‘real’ and ‘irreal’ worlds of how inconsistent state-to-state academic standards affect military-connected students.

The social cognitive and transitional theoretical frameworks also provide an ontological basis for addressing the concept of multiple realities. For instance, the manner in which military-connected students perceive their transition to a new school and the challenges associated with it can be quite different. In fact, Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) purported that “A transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s own perception of the change. . . a transition is a transition only if it is so defined by the person experiencing it” (p. 40). Similarly, Bandura (2001) underscored how consciousness is comprised of deliberate and purposeful processes that influence a person’s decisions on how to act. In both theories, the theorists contend that it is the unique composition of each individual’s perceptual processing model, which makes a given experience unique in itself.

Moustakas (1994) used Husserl’s concept of horizons to describe how researchers can view experiences from several different angles and underscored how every perception is important and add significance to the experience in the process of horizontalization. What makes the experience important, according to Bandura is the position that people are active agents of a phenomena and not simply objects that are acted upon. The various bodily systems such as the

sensory and cerebral systems serve as tools that people use to execute various tasks and attain goals that provide direction, significance and gratification in their lives. (Bandura, 2001).

Transcendental phenomenology allowed me as the researcher, therefore, to investigate the purest meanings of the military-connected students' experiences without clouding the meaning with my preconceived ideas or judgments. Bandura (2001) claimed that the ideas of experiences, perception and thought are not mere physical activities or "constituent elements" (p. 4) of the brain; rather, these "cognitive process are emergent brain activities that exert determinative influence" (p. 4). It is these 'emergent' attributes, Bandura contended, that are qualitatively different from the constituent ones, and thus proscribes one from reducing these emergent properties to constituent ones (p. 4).

This view is similar to the view Husserl (1931/1967) expressed in his classic work, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. According to Husserl, the "act of cognition" (p. 46) makes an experience real in "*individual form*" (p. 46). Hence, one cannot deduce an experience to mere physical and spatial parameters of an event, but must conceive and act intentionally upon within it to experience a phenomenon. Bandura (2001) elaborated on the concept of *intentionality* as it pertains to bringing about an event due to one's own actions. That is, Bandura stated that both intentionality and agency addresses "the fundamental question of how people bring about activities over which they command personal control that activate the subpersonal neurophysiological events for realizing particular intentions and aspirations" (p. 5). Bandura rejected the idea of people existing as inanimate objects in a given situation; rather, Bandura viewed people as "purposive beings" (p. 5) capable of deliberately "acting," (p. 5) to bring about possible solutions using their "subpersonal structures" (p. 5). Similarly, Moustakas (1994) noted that, "the derivation of meaning is an essential function of intentionality" (p. 31).

While the theoretical framework seeks to encapsulate the study within certain theoretical boundaries, it is imperative to underscore how the central theory will guide this study and how the interpretive framework supports the goal of the central theory. That is, if the theory is used appropriately, it “has the potential to strengthen the rigor of qualitative research, but only if embedded in a broad understanding of qualitative research and data analysis” (Bradbury-Jones, Taylor, & Herber, 2014, p. 140). References to certain strengths exhibited in the qualitative framework are noted throughout this theoretical framework section to reflect the conscious effort of ensuring that the theory is guiding the study throughout its execution.

Defining Transcendental Phenomenology and a Synopsis of its History

The specific approach within the phenomenology design for this study is *transcendental phenomenology*. It is the aforementioned concept of reflection combined with the understanding of the concept of the phenomenon being engendered in the consciousness, which make transcendental phenomenology an appropriate design and approach for my study. That is, embedded in the goal to describe the military-connected student’s experience is the idea that the phenomena is immanent in the consciousness of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Coinciding with this idea, phenomenology centers on the noetic act of exhibiting or revealing the phenomenon in consciousness (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl & Cohen, 2016).

Employing a transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach, therefore, provides an opportunity to account for “the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and the objects that exist in the material world” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 43). The concept of transcendental is also appropriate for the current study because “it adheres to what can be discovered through reflection on subjective acts and their objective correlates” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). The act of reflecting does not apply solely to the participants in a

transcendental phenomenology study, but it also applies to me as the researcher. Thus, as a researcher, I must also be cognizant of my own perceptions because it is through my own lenses that I view the perceptions of others. More clearly stated, Moustakas (1994) noted:

This is that everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experiences. My lived experiences of you are constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity with your lived experiences, to which they are intentionally related. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 38)

Being aware of my worldview including my biases require the execution of a process known as “*Epoche*” (Husserl, 1931/1967, p. 12) or bracketing. *Epoche* is a “Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). According to Moustakas (1994), this process requires me as the researcher to do my best to eliminate presuppositions in an effort to clear my mind and see things the way they actually appear. In other words, I must first expound upon my own intentions and consciousness via the transcendental process before I can comprehend something or the perspectives of others (Moustakas, 1994).

To fully understand and comply with this guideline, I must revisit one of the original sources contributing to the concept of *epoche* or bracketing—Edmund Husserl. Husserl (1931/2012) was a mathematician who received a doctoral degree in differential calculus after studying mathematics under the tutelage of the esteemed mathematician Karl Weierstrass. Undoubtedly, Husserl’s mathematical education and training greatly affected the formation of the logic-making systems and the communicatory systems that he used to convey abstract or complex concepts and ideas. In his efforts to explain the concept of *epoche*, for example, Husserl appeared to invoke various aspects of the algebraic concept of bracketing. In mathematics, brackets are often depicted as two vertically separated semi-circles or squares

facing each other—i.e., () or []. Mathematicians often use brackets signify a grouping of any number of members and the brackets symbolize this collection of members (Sarukkai, 2016). Although they are symbolic, brackets are not similar to numbers but serve a unique function more reflective of mathematical operations—though unlike multiplication or addition (Sarukkai, 2016, p. 240). That is, numbers convey the magnitude of an element and multiplication, addition, subtraction and other mathematical operations directs the user to perform a transformational operation or function on a given element.

However, as Sarukkai (2016) noted, brackets “do not do something to the objects on which the operation is performed” (p. 240). Similarly, Husserl (1931/2012) described how bracketing in phenomenology does not seek to influence the object, thesis or a priori idea in question. Instead, Husserl (1931/2012) described the effects of bracketing as follows:

We do not abandon the thesis we have adopted, we make no change in our conviction, which remains in itself what it is so long as we do not introduce new motives or judgment, which we precisely refrain from doing. And yet the thesis undergoes a modification—whilst remaining in itself what it is, **we set it as it were ‘out of action’, we ‘disconnect it’, ‘bracket it’**. It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket, like the disconnected outside the connexional system. (p. 57)

It is within this bracketing process that I, as the researcher, “‘invalidate,’ ‘inhibit,’ ‘disqualify,’ all commitments (*Stellungnahmen*) with reference to experienced objects; I ‘bracket the objective world’” (Schmitt, 1959, p. 239).

Without delving into Husserl’s works more deeply and inferring how he used the bracketing concept, a reader might assume that Husserl, like many mathematicians, would view practically all of his work from a mathematical perspective. Some researchers, such as Richard

Schmitt (1959), suggested that brackets have a significant or transformational effect on objects and, thus, incorrectly interpret Husserl's (1931/1967) use of such terms. However, mathematicians such as Michele Friend (2014) noted, "There is insufficient evidence to think that there is an absolute perspective that is best either philosophically or mathematically" (p. 25). Similarly, Husserl (1931/2012) posited that transcendental phenomenologist should execute research while refraining from using a mathematical perspective. Specifically, he noted the following:

For if we may take for granted that the inquiry of phenomenology into Pure Consciousness sets itself and needs set itself no other task than that of making such descriptive analyses as can be resolved into pure intuition, the theoretical framework of the mathematical disciplines and all the theorems which develop within it cannot be of any service. Where the formation of concepts and judgments do not proceed constructively, where no systems of mediated deductions are built up, the formal theory of deductive systems generally, as we have it in mathematics, cannot function as the instrument of material research. (pp. 114-115)

Hence, Husserl (1931/2012) asserted that phenomenology is a "*pure descriptive* discipline" (p. 115) that uses "*pure intuition*" (p. 115) in its study of pure transcendental consciousness. As a result, even when transcendental phenomenology requires the use of formal logic or other mathematical type reasoning, the researcher should refer to the domain of the data to acquire such examples and not rely on the mathematical precepts (Husserl, 1931/2012, p. 115).

Still, in a rather clever twist, Husserl (1931/2012), the adroit mathematician, used a mathematical symbol and several corresponding concepts to underscore his point that true transcendental phenomenology does not fall under the aegis of mathematical theorems and

precepts. Husserl (1931/2012) reminded researchers that we can “therefore expressly include formal logic and the entire field of Matheis generally in our disconnecting ἐποχή. . . . To claim nothing that we cannot make essentially transparent to ourselves by reference to Consciousness and on purely immanent lines” (p. 115). Through the process of bracketing, transcendental phenomenologists are able to perform what Husserl (1931/2012) termed “*phenomenological reductions*” (Husserl, 1931/2012, p. 63). These reductions lead to the revelation of the residuals of the phenomenon that will remain for investigation once the bracketed parts are disconnected. According to Moustakas (1994), it is through the transcendental phenomenology reduction that we develop a textural description of essences and meanings emanating from the phenomenon. Moreover, any descriptions that a phenomenologist generate prior to conducting reduction cannot be considered as phenomenological (Schmitt, 1959).

Research Questions

RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?

RQ2: What coping resources do military-connected high school students use to adapt to the inconsistent state standards?

RQ3: How does a military-connected high school student’s perception of his or her level of resilience coupled with his or her outlook of the future affect academic achievement?

Setting

The setting for this study was comprised of counties in proximity to military installations located in the northern and eastern sectors of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Deployment requirements for the United States Armed Forces has had an uneven distribution on children of military-connected students because approximately half of all Continental United States active

duty military service members are stationed at installations in four states: California, Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017). As of March 31, 2019, the United States Armed Services was comprised of approximately 2,000,000 Selected Reserves service members (i.e., Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve) and Active Duty service members (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2019). Of the United States Armed Forces' nearly 2,000,000 service members, 1,172,328 Active Duty service members and 779,651 Selected Reserve service members were stationed at installations throughout the United States (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2019). Of the combined 1,951,979 United States Armed Services service members stationed throughout the United States, 155,046, or 7.94%, were stationed in Virginia (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2019). As of March 31, 2019, Virginia's 129,399 Active Duty service members and 25,647 Selected Reservists were the third highest combined population of Active Duty and Selected Reserve service members in the United States—behind California (159,894 Active Duty service members and 56,782 Selected Reservists) and Texas (122,455 Active Duty service members and 54,421 Selected Reservists) (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2019). As of September 30, 2017, nearly 19,989,799 veterans accounted for 6.6% of the of the nation's adult population, and 725,028 of those veterans accounted for approximately 11.25% of Virginia's adult population (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

Although Virginia is home to a large number of military personnel, and military-connected students attend schools in every school district of Virginia, the vast majority of the military installations are located in the eastern section of Virginia (Luchau, 2014). To facilitate maximum variation of military-connected students associated with the various armed service branches, the primary installations used for this study were located along—what is frequently

referred to as—the Interstate 95 and Interstate 64 Corridor (see Figure 3) (Luchau, 2014).

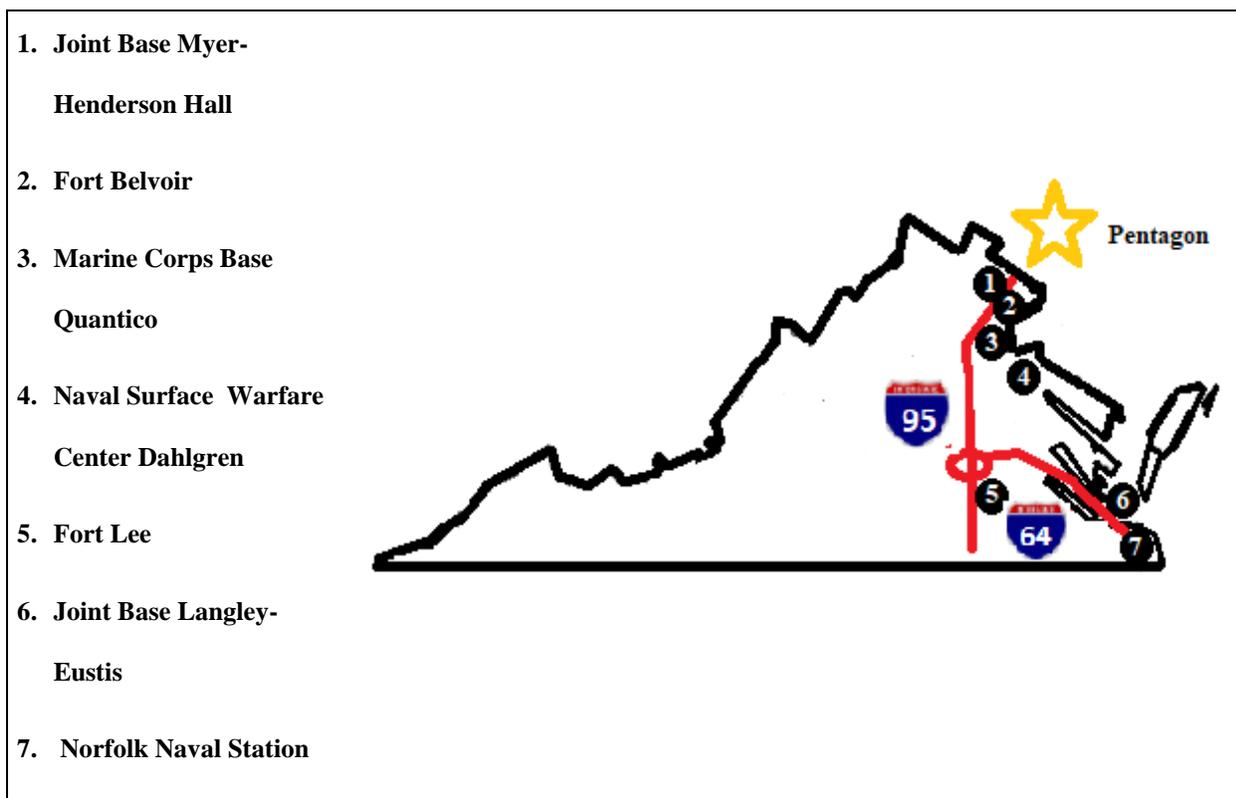


Figure 3. Major military installations along the Interstate 95 and Interstate 64 corridor.

I recruited co-researchers in the vicinity of one of the eastern Virginia military installations—Fort Freedom. I purposefully selected the aforementioned installations because they are easily accessible from the Interstate 95 and Interstate 64 (I95/I64) corridors. Due to potential operation security concerns, I did not use official Department of Defense statistics and data that reflect Fort Freedom’s current composition. Instead, I gathered data from publicly available information provided by Military OneSource (2018), an affiliate organization under the auspices of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community & Family Policy. Military OneSource provides data for each military installation approximately one year after the end of a given fiscal year (e.g., data generated in 2016 became available on or about 1 October 2017). Although many of the cities supporting military installations along the I95/I64 Corridor

are undergoing significant changes due to Department of Defense's Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) efforts, the Military OneSource data are far more accurate than data reflected on many of the other public sites, which use the 2010 Census data. One exception to the outdated data claim is the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Demographics Research Group. As part of its methodology, this organization uses the latest U.S. Census Bureau data from 2010 as part of its overall population analysis efforts to provide an estimate of current populations and projections of future populations in Virginia counties and independent cities (University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Demographics Research Group, 2017).

Fort Freedom, Virginia:

Fort Freedom is a uniquely functional military installation serving a variety of the Department of Defense needs. For example, Fort Freedom supports Active Duty commands and elements of the National Guard and Reserve Components (Military OneSource, 2018). The total population of Fort Freedom at the end of 2017 was 13,113 of which 4,430 were classified as sponsors and 8,683, were classified as dependents (Department of Defense, 2018, p. 184). The population composition at Fort Freedom is comprised of approximately one-third military sponsors and approximately two-thirds dependents or family members. Fort Freedom is located in one of Virginia's largest counties, which has an estimated population of in excess of 750,000 as of July 2017 (University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service Demographics Research Group, 2017). There are no DODEA schools operating on Fort Freedom; therefore, the county's public schools serve as the primary providers of education for K-12 educational requirements, and the Virginia Department of Education classified the school district as a suburban school district (School Division Locale Descriptions, 2009). The standard of learning

results in the areas of English (Reading), English (Writing), History, & Social Sciences, Mathematics, and Science are depicted in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 1
Virginia Department of Education 2014-2017 SOL Pass Rates (County)

Division	Subject	Subgroup	2014-2015 Pass Rate	2015-2016 Pass Rate	2016- 2017 Pass Rate
County	English: Reading	All Students	Mid 80s	Mid 80s	Mid 80s
County	English: Writing	All Students	Mid 80s	Mid 80s	Mid 80s
County	History & Social Sciences	All Students	Low 90s	Low 90s	Low 90s
County	Mathematics	All Students	Low 80s	Low 80s	Low 80s
County	Science	All Students	Mid 80s	Mid 80s	Mid 80s

(Virginia Board of Education, 2017)

Participants

Before an in-depth discussion of the various tenets regarding the selection of participants can ensue, it is imperative to address how the concept of sampling in the qualitative realm of research is characterized and how corresponding guidance and insights have emerged over time following the implementation of sampling procedures. The term sampling refers to the process or techniques used to select a sample of interest for the purpose of research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015). A more precise definition of sampling, according to Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013) denoted that sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of items from a defined population for inclusion into a study. Similarly, Flick (2010) broadly defined sampling as the “selection of cases or materials for the study from a larger population or variety of possibilities” (p. 473). Embedded in the aforementioned definitions, however, is one major

point that differentiates qualitative research from its quantitative counterpart—*the purpose for conducting the sampling*. In quantitative research, researchers take representative samples to determine generalizations across populations (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At the root of conventional or postpositivism tradition is the concept of *causation*—also haphazardly referred to at times as “*cause and effect*” (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 10). One of the axioms of causation, “constant conjunction” (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 10), postulates that the cause of an occurrence must be present in order for the effect to transpire (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Due to the desire to forecast the occurrence of an event accurately, presenting proof of the proposition is a compelling force and practically serves as the Holy Grail to many quantitative researchers. On the other hand, as Creswell (2018) sagely explained, “postpositivists do not believe in strict cause and effect but rather recognize that all cause and effect is a probability that may or may not occur” (p. 23). Hence, even in an instance where strong correlation between two variables is present, causation may not exist. As a result, quantitative researchers often rely on random sampling techniques as a way of ensuring that each participant, object or issue (e.g., disease, defect on an assembly line) being examined has an equal opportunity of being selected for the study (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Creswell, 2018).

The purpose of qualitative research, on the other hand, is to address the level of significance or importance a group or an individual attributes to a societal or human matter of interest (Creswell, 2018). One aspect of qualitative research that is apparent in its purpose is that qualitative research pertains to human beings—not animals, plants, or lifeless artifacts. Unlike postpositivists who use sampling techniques as tools to equip themselves with the ability to find generalizations that can be transferred to other populations, qualitative researchers seek to use

purposeful sampling that will deliberately sample a group of individuals who can best enlighten the researcher about the problem being investigated (Creswell, 2018). With this perspective in mind, the goal of purposeful sampling in the current study is to increase the level of variety information deemed relevant and important to the study during the collection of data (Moon Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) underscored how the qualitative researcher's use of sampling is to "maximize information, not facilitate generalization" (p. 202). On the other hand, the conventional researcher may begin the sampling process using a random sample from a population of interest. Lincoln and Guba denoted how greater levels of inferences can be gained when the population is segregated into uniform strata. To accomplish such strata, data must be divided into subunits that are *contextually* more similar (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because context is a primary focus of phenomenologists, researchers begin with the assumption that selecting participants and settings that provide such contexts is paramount to the type of sampling strategy that is eventually implemented (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After acknowledging the preceding sets of concepts, it is imperative to illustrate how the selection of the phenomenological theoretical framework also guided my decisions regarding selection of participants and eventual sample size. For instance, the purpose of the current study is to examine and describe the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who relocate across state boundaries due to military mobility requirements. Such a purpose, coupled with the corresponding research questions, serve as the propelling forces to conduct numerous interviews until the point that only small amounts of new information is forthcoming (Kvale, 2007). The forces serving as the determining factors for the final sample size are different from those involved in conventional research because they depend on the fluid nature of

the information received as the study proceeds instead of some preconceived considerations decided upon before the study began (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ranney et al., 2015). Although the phenomenology design does not encourage the researcher to state with certainty the number of participants who will engage in the study at the outset, due to various Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, I initially submitted documentation to study 20 military-connected students for this study. This decision allowed me to proceed with the study without being overly concerned about submitting change of protocol documentation to increase the number of participants, and based on initial research, I confidently assumed that this number would be sufficient to conduct a transcendental phenomenological study. That is, the rationale for selecting this number was based on scholarly insights suggesting that a sample size for a phenomenological study could vary from “3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” (Creswell, 2018, p. 76) individuals or from “5 [to] 15” (Willigens et al., 2016, p. 2389).

Although neither Creswell (2018) nor Willigens et al. (2016) provided a rationale for suggesting these numbers, I will attempt to provide some level of transparency regarding my final sample size decision as part of the upcoming discussion regarding saturation. For example, my level of experience as a qualitative interviewer has prompted me to exceed the Liberty University minimum number of 10 participants. That is, it is possible for an experienced researcher to examine a topic with a very focused perspective and attain excellent feedback after interviewing only a few participants; on the other hand, an unskilled person, or one who is less familiar with interview techniques or a theory being employed, may have a similar focus but require a much larger sample size to uncover something new about a given phenomenon (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). While I have experience conducting interviews, my

familiarity with the likes of Husserl (1931/1967) and Moustakas (1994) is limited and may have required additional time to grasp key concepts purported by these renowned phenomenologists.

At this point of development of the design, many researchers declare that they will rely on theoretical saturation to guide their actions regarding the establishment of the final number of participants (Creswell, 2018; Flick, 2010). However, this form of saturation was originally developed and intended for the grounded theory form of qualitative research (Creswell, 2018; Gentles et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The purpose of grounded theory is to devise a theory that explains various social process and interactions that take place in a given environment (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Rowlands, Waddell, & McKenna, 2015). As a result, a grounded theorist may use the term theoretical saturation to convey that key concepts have been sufficiently identified and aggregated, and that any salient points or correlative relationships have been explained to such a degree that the resulting information could generate a theory (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

Many qualitative researchers (e.g., Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010; Gabarre & Gabarre, 2016; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010; Wilcox, 2013) have begun to use the terms theoretical saturation, thematic saturation, or data saturation without offering definitions or explanations that define the terms (Malterud et al., 2016; Nelson, 2017, O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). However, without clearly defining what the terms mean, current usage could erode trust in the study due to the lack of transparency, generate confusion, or appear opaque or misleading (Elo et al., 2014; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Some researchers have chosen to define saturation as a point where no new data are forthcoming (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Meyer & Ward, 2014).

For the purposes of this study, I used the term *data saturation* and defined it as the point at which I ceased collection of data because *very few new patterns of data* emerged (Gentles et al., 2015; Kvale, 2007; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I qualified my definition by stressing the terms '*very few new patterns of data*' because key aspects of my methodology, theoretical framework, and design, coupled with the corresponding philosophical assumptions manifested in these elements, served as my rationale for defining data saturation in the aforementioned manner. That is, there was always a probability of some form of reality or another data point existing; hence, to continue collection beyond the point of only a few new patterns of data emerging would have been both inefficient and unwise.

My initial hesitation to refrain from stating a definitive or a priori sample size stems from an amalgamation of theory, methodology and approach. As part of a transcendental phenomenological approach, my goal was to describe the meanings that participants conveyed regarding a phenomenon that they experienced (Creswell, 2018). To attain this goal, I executed a process of reduction until the very essence of an experience could be illuminated (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). Hence, the proper execution of this transcendental methodology revolved around the goal of deriving at the essence of the experience and, therefore, could not be defined by a predetermined number of participants before the reduction process began.

While the overall goal of determining an adequate sample size before beginning research is often a critical part of quantitative research, some researchers have sought to calculate the *adequacy* of a qualitative sample size using quantitative methods. For example, researchers designed one study to provide HIV researchers and intervention professionals with information to capture better self-reporting information from participants regarding measures of sexual-

behavior (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Using purposeful sampling and subsequently open-ended, semi-structured interviews to collect data, the study examined how 36 women from two neighboring countries communicated about sex and investigated how these women viewed self-reported behavior accuracy (Guest et al., 2006). After collecting data, the researchers analyzed the data in sets of six interviews each. At the conclusion of the coding process, researchers determined that of the total 109 content-driven codes derived from the interviews, 80 of these codes, or 73%, were reflected in the first six sets of transcripts (Guest et al., 2006). At the conclusion of coding the second set of transcripts, 100 of the codes, or 92%, were captured in the data and the remaining 9 codes were revealed less frequently as the coding progressed through the remainder of the interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Another study used a qualitative data analysis tool, Leximancer, and sought to quantify saturation. The researchers determined that neither the interview order nor the size of the corresponding documents serve as the primary indicator of data saturation (Rowlands et al., 2015). The researchers found numerous new concepts in the first iteration of data analysis of interviews and less during each subsequent iteration (Rowlands et al., 2015). The researchers suggested that if they could depict the results from the analysis of an infinite number of findings, the resulting illustration would reflect an ever-decreasing asymptote shaped figure with higher iterations near the origin and decreasing numbers along the right side of the x-axis (Rowlands et al., 2015).

Such an empirical view of phenomenological data, however, is precisely the view that renowned phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) cautioned against. Specifically, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) addressed this issue in the following manner:

A purely linguistic examination of the texts in question would yield no proof [emphasis added]; we find in texts only what we put into them, and if ever any kind of history has

suggested the interpretations which should be put on it, it is the history of philosophy.

We shall find in ourselves, and nowhere else, the unity and true meaning of phenomenology. It is less a question of counting up quotations than of determining and expressing in concrete form this *phenomenology for ourselves*.... (p. viii)

Hence, computer software generated data are nothing more than tools to help us reach our goal and not the goal itself. Moreover, it is improper—videlicet, if not outright ludicrous—to believe that data saturation, in the purest sense, could ever be achieved. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (p. xv). Therefore, when using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the probability of finding something new is endless.

Having a thorough understanding of the theoretical and philosophical facets of selecting a sample, I selected 11 military-connected high school students to participate in the study. The sample was comprised of six females and five males. Ethnic diversity was also sought as evident by the fact that seven of the participants were of African American descent, one participant was of Asian descent, and three participants were of Caucasian descent. While ethnic diversity was sought, it was also imperative that a variety of participants from different branches of Service were also reflected in the sample. As a result, participants were recruited from three branches of Service (i.e., Army, Navy, and Coast Guard). In addition, variations in participant sponsor’s rank structures (i.e., three officers and eight enlisted) were also included as a criterion for selection of participants. A table reflecting the demographics of participants that have been noted thus far is provided in Table 2. Additional demographic information, including information about the sponsors’ duty status and current deployment status, are depicted in **Error! Reference source not found..**

Table 2

Participant Demographics Matrix

Ethnicity	Enlisted /Officer	USA		USN		USAF		USMC		USCG		OVER ALL		Sub total	Total
		<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>										
African American	Enlisted	1	2	2						1	1	4	3	7	7
	Officer											0	0	0	
Asian	Enlisted											0	0	0	1
	Officer		1									0	1	1	
Caucasian	Enlisted	1										1	0	1	3
	Officer		2									0	2	2	
Other	Enlisted											0	0	0	0
	Officer											0	0	0	
TOTAL	Enlisted	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	3	8	11
	Officer	0	3	0	3	3									
												5	6	11	Total

Notes: The abbreviations noted within the table are defined as follows: (a) USA is the United States Army; (b) USN stands for the United States Navy; (c) USAF stands for the United States Air Force; (d) USMC stands for the United States Marine Corps; (e) USCG stands for the United States Coast Guard; (f) M stands for Male; and (g) F stands for Female.

Table 3

Participant Demographics (Additional Information)

Category	Sub-category	Male	Female	Subtotal	Total
Deployment Status	Deployed	4	5	9	11
	Nondeployed	1	1	2	
Currently in Hostile Area	Yes	1	0	1	11
	No	4	6	10	
When Relocated	7TH/8TH	2	2	4	11
	HS	3	4	7	
	Active Duty	3	4	7	
Status	Reserve	0	0	0	11
	Veteran	2	2	4	
Age	Adult	3	2	5	11
	Child	2	4	6	

Procedures

In this section, I delineate the steps that I used to execute the current study. While the steps and various stages of the methodology are outlined in logical order, it is imperative to acknowledge that the overall order of the steps used to conduct this study are not immutable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That is, some steps may be substituted for others while some steps may be omitted in their entirety (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, Moustakas (1994) posited that when researchers study human beings, every methodology employed is “open ended” (p. 104) and underscored the view that there are no “definite or exclusive requirements” (p. 104). Despite acknowledging the fluidity of the process, Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that emphasis should not be placed on the order of the process but rather on the extent or range of “coverage” (p. 320).

For this study, key steps at the macro level were followed and approval was secured before proceeding. First, all ethical training related to protection of human subjects were completed in accordance with Liberty University guidelines and the Office of the Under

Secretary of Defense (OUSD). Before seeking approval from either oversight organization, I completed training via the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training Program. It is important to note that Liberty University requires the completion of CITI Training corresponding to *Social & Behavioral Researchers*. OUSD, however, requires completion of a similar module entitled *Social and Behavioral Investigators and Research Study Team*, and two additional sets of modules—*Research Subjects* and *Responsible Conduct of Research*. Although the OUSD requirement to complete training related to stem cell research and the use of animal subjects are not applicable to the current study, completion of all OUSD directed topics is a prerequisite for all studies conducted within the Department of Defense. Since I was studying dependents of military personnel, I, of my own volition, completed such training as an extra measure to ensure the current research is conducted at the highest levels of integrity and ethical acumen.

Upon receiving approval, I shifted my efforts to acquiring participants for the study. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedures. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted one of the major differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches to sampling—*rationale for selection of the sample*. Despite presenting formidable arguments underscoring the restrictive nature of conventional sampling, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported that quantitative researchers should seek to select a sample that is representative of the population so that any findings discovered during the course of the study can be generalized across the population of interest. Still, the most important aspect in qualitative research is the ability of the researcher to select a purposeful sample population that can best inform the researcher about the problem or phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2018; Elo et al., 2014). Homogeneity among the population, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the

concept that leads to the creation of fractional units that are similar in *context*. As a result, I employed the specific type of purposeful sampling known as “criterion sampling” (Creswell, 2018, p. 368). In phenomenological studies, criterion sampling refers to a researcher’s efforts to select participants who meet some prerequisite criterion (Creswell, 2018). Chief among the sampling selection criteria is the criterion that requires the participant to have experienced the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). It is the idea of gaining understanding from the context upon which the foundation of purposeful sampling stands, and it is within the proper context in which greater understanding of a given phenomenon emerges (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, purposeful sampling requires the researcher to intentionally, or purposefully, seek out cases that are considered “*information-rich*” (Patton, 2002, p. 273) and require in-depth study (Patton, 2002). This term refers to research cases where people can acquire significant knowledge and insights about various aspects of a given phenomenon that stakeholders deem important (Patton, 2002). It is this quest for in-depth understanding, as opposed to generalizations derived from observations and experiments, which distinguishes the qualitative researcher from the quantitative researcher (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling also has a potentially ancillary benefit of adding to the overall level of trust manifested in the study. That is, when using this type of sampling technique, researchers can incorporate open-ended questions, build rapport and generate a collaborative relationship with participants, which often elicit more insightful and personally revealing descriptions of experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2016; Willgens et al., 2016).

Besides attempting to capture comprehensive perspectives originating from the variety of participants’ experiences, this purposive selection also facilitated the acquisition of a greater understanding of the various contextual aspects in which these ‘information-rich’ experiences

took place; thus, I, the researcher, could execute detailed descriptions of the experiences (De Pedro et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Willgens et al., 2016). That is, while some sources have highlighted above average performance on Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) examination for English and math in Virginia's Fairfax County and Virginia Beach school districts, some sources have also underscored poor performance in other school districts such as Norfolk City Public Schools and Hampton City Schools operating in the Hampton Roads area (Mesecar & Soifer, 2017).

In the end, it is this desire to gain greater understanding of the phenomenon, and not generalizations, which distinguishes the qualitative researcher from the quantitative researcher (Patton, 2002). Given that I sought to give voice to military-connected high school students, it was imperative that those selected to participate in the study possessed knowledge of the phenomenon and were able to articulate their experiences accordingly. For this study, I did not include teachers and administrators as part of the sample; instead, I focused on obtaining information regarding the phenomenon from the military-connected high school students themselves. In addition, I restricted the focus of the study to high school military-connected students in grades 9 through 12 and those who have completed high school no more than four years prior. The latter qualification ensured that I also captured experiences from those who have experienced the phenomenon in its entirety and added value to the level of understanding derived from reflections regarding academic outlooks and the subsequent realities. Although I excluded younger military-connected students, I believe this delimitation will add to the understanding of the phenomenon for this younger age group. That is, Anderson et al. (2012) alleged that age is possibly a determining factor that has an effect on individual reactions to transitional events. Axiomatically, the older students should be able to articulate their

perspectives in a much clearer manner than the younger adolescent students and subsequently add to the overall understanding of the phenomenon. Similarly, Creswell's (2018) appeared to suggest that researchers consider this assumption regarding the participants' ability to articulate the more complex facets of phenomena by noting that researchers should determine whether participants can "articulate the forces that interrupt, suppress, or oppress them" (p. 174).

This concept of acknowledging differences among adolescents along the maturity continuum due to the possession of a cognitive capacity similar to that of adults is also reflected in the use of assent forms for high school students that are similar to permission forms used for the parents or guardians. That is, regulatory guidance and ethical principles regarding research involving children require researchers to consider the ages of children when formulating provisions for soliciting assent from children (45 CFR 46.405). Moreover, as part of its *Frequently Asked Questions* guidance to researchers, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) outlined how variations in assent procedures for adolescents whose cognitive capacity resembled that of an adult, could resemble adult consent procedures or adult permission granting procedures. On the other hand, where research involves adolescents who do not possess the cognitive capacity similar to that of adults, different procedures must be employed to ensure the participants fully understand what they are assenting to (Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Thus, the rationale for delimiting the scope of participants for the current study is rooted in both theoretical and ethical research principles.

By narrowing the range of students, I was able to overlay some of the theoretical aspects of the phenomenon that are applicable for the range of ages of students selected. For instance, Anderson et al. (2012) defined autonomy as "independence or self-directed freedom" (p. 109) and contended that overall "life satisfaction depends on the perception (emphasis added) of

autonomy” (p. 109). Anderson et al. also highlighted how individuals develop along a chronological timeline. That is, as the child matures, he or she depends on the parents to provide all of its nurturing needs (Anderson et al., 2012). During this maturation process, a period of “counterdependence” (Anderson et al., 2012, p.110) develops in which the child displays a sense of rebellion as “individuation and autonomy” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 110) begins to take root. Following this rebellious period, a period of “independence” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 110) commences in which the person begins or attempts to begin a separate and unique life. It is at this point, that many people discontinue their growth (Anderson et al., 2012). However, a subsequent stage of maturation, “interdependence” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 110), can develop in which the person experiences or engages in various connections or recognizes commonalities that Carol Gilligan (2009) noted in her works, which addressed the quest for autonomy from the perspective of psychological theories and human development (Anderson et al., 2012). When discussing human development from a theoretical perspective, for example, researchers should exercise caution when employing the definition of autonomy or discussions of attaining full autonomy when such a concept is intermingled with other variables such as gender, ethics and the role of intimacy (Gilligan, 2009). After all, she noted, many of the well-known theoretical frameworks regarding human development were devised by men and often postulate views from the perspective of men (Gilligan, 2009). If other factors (e.g., gender, social economic status) have significant effects on attainment of autonomy, then such factors should also be accounted for on an individual level. As a result, I sought to obtain participants that fall across a broad spectrum of the military (e.g., variety in gender, branch of Service, sponsor’s rank, deployment status, and ethnic background). Again, my personal decision to exclude the younger military-connected students does not discount the insights such sources could provide; rather, it provides

a viable platform for obtaining clarity regarding the particular focus for the current study.

To help guide the overall breadth and depth of participants I sought for this study, I executed a purposeful sampling strategy based on key criteria that is critical for the understanding of the phenomenon. For example, at the “site level,” (Creswell, 2018, p. 158) it was imperative that I selected locations that reflect a broad range of the Department of Defense branches of Service. I sought participants whose parents or guardians were either actively serving, veterans or in the Reserve components of various armed service branches (i.e., Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, or Coast Guard). Veterans were specifically included because some studies have purported that the veteran population is comprised of a number of former Active Duty or Reserve service members who chose to retire or remain in a given location to provide stability to their military-connected student(s) once the student(s) began attending high school (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Leatherman, 2015).

At the participant level, my primary focus was to ensure that I selected military-connected high school students who have experienced the phenomenon of transitioning from a school from another state and that the move took place after attending elementary school. This criteria is significant in Virginia for two primary reasons. First, many of the decisions regarding a student’s high school curriculum is predicated upon the courses the student enrolled in and successfully completed during middle school—7th and 8th grades. Second, it was imperative that the students experienced the move during high school or shortly before attending high school to extract lived experiences that addressed early stages of the transition process such as impending high school preparation concerns. As noted earlier, I also included those military-connected students who graduated high school no more than four years ago. In the current study, I selected military-connected students who have transitioned and who are planning to transition. The

primary rationale supporting this decision comes from Anderson et al. (2012) who suggested that transition occurs in various “stages” (p. 48) and along a continuum of time. Anderson et al. used this time-related premise to facilitate understanding of a person’s perception of an experience and concluded that, “reactions continually change” (p. 48). As a result, I sought to understand the military-connected students’ perceptions as they look forward to the transition, and those who have transitioned at various periods up to four years after graduating from high school.

I employed a specific type of purposeful sampling—“maximum variation” (Creswell, 2018, p. 158). This type of sampling requires researchers to develop discerning criteria to highlight differences in places or participants and proceed to select such sites or participants based upon the criteria developed (Creswell, 2018). Maximum variation also offers an opportunity to ensure heterogeneity within a small sample size (Narayan & Olsson, 2013; Patton, 1990). The use of maximum variation also presents another opportunity to reflect the integration of methodology and theoretical framework because, as Patton (1990) purported, “any common patterns or convergence that emerge from great demographic and other variations are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a phenomenon” (Patton, 1990, p. 3). As a result, in the current study, the branch of military service (i.e. Army, Navy, and Coast Guard) in which the military-connected students’ parents or guardians serve functioned as a criterion to differentiate among the participants. Moreover, given that my qualitative approach incorporated the use of a small sample size and sought to capture the essence of a given phenomenon, the maximum variation methodology enhanced the value of uncovered commonalities among the diverse sample population (Narayan & Olsson, 2013).

The sampling procedures for the current study involved two phases. The initial phase

commenced after receiving approval to proceed from Liberty University IRB (see Appendix A). I disseminated information regarding the study to students using word of mouth through interaction with students and canvassing the neighborhood. Such actions included attending military children advocacy group meetings such as the Military Child Education Coalition's (MCEC) National Training Seminar in Washington, DC; attending key meetings or events where potential participants would be such as the American Legion's Boys State informational meetings hosted at the local library. In addition, I used word-of-mouth techniques via my own military-connected high school and recently graduated high school children. They were able to garner support for the study. These sources were used to help quell potential anxieties about the study or corresponding one-on-one interviews with participants and, potentially, galvanized members of the community to support the study. Efforts were taken to convey to the community that the current study was a legitimate study that sought to gain insights from military-connected students. As I interacted with members of the community, I simultaneously, began to tailor the potential participant pool to coincide with my participant demographic data collection matrix (see Table 2 and **Error! Reference source not found.**).

The Researcher's Role

Positioning of the Human Instrument

While quantitative studies are replete with various types of research tools used to measure their respective variables, I served as a human instrument in this qualitative inquiry. Such a position does not suggest that no other type of instruments (e.g., surveys, questionnaires) were used; rather, as Creswell (2018) noted, I as the researcher served as the "key instrument" (p. 43). In this role, I still collected data using Moustakas's (1994) rigorous data collection procedures; however, in line with the distinctive features that Creswell (2018) highlighted, I

designed other instruments using open-ended questions and did not depend upon or use instruments, such as surveys or questionnaire, developed by other researchers.

While the Data Analysis section delineates several qualitative tools or processes (e.g., horizontalization, clustering and theme identification, rich descriptions) that were used to conduct data analysis, by no means does the application of these tools, processes, or steps proposed by Moustakas (1994) suggest a robotic adherence to some form of a prerequisite qualitative format (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Lincoln & Guba 1985). Instead, it was my unique and proper use of these tools as the researcher, within the guidelines provided by the particular theoretical framework, which allowed me to investigate the problem in question and eventually arrive at the essence of the experience. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) noted, “Phenomenology is accessible only through a phenomenological method” (p. vii).

To comply with this guidance, I positioned or “orient[ed]” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60) myself in a manner that allowed me to engage in “looking before judging” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). According to Creswell (2018), positioning oneself is performed via recognizing one’s “‘positionality’ in relation to the context and setting of the research” (p. 21). Hence, in the current study, I described my social position, personal experiences, professional views and any biases that may have existed or could have emerged as the study progressed. I then reflected on my former service as a military officer and remembered the challenges my family encountered during our numerous moves in nearly 22 years of service. I also informed the participants that I was a veteran, a father of four, and served in combat prior to having children. To relate to the participants and their families, I also noted that I rapidly deployed in support of contingency operational requirements and described how, on one occasion, my children were in school during one of my rapid departures. The sudden departure without providing proper notification to the

children undoubtedly generated stress for the family. It is these experiences that I intentionally reflected upon and shared with my participants in an effort to gain rapport. I also informed the participants that I serve as a volunteer math tutor at a local high school that services military families.

Another aspect of positioning is manifested in the specific type of bracketing that I employed—*descriptive (eidetic)* (Gearing, 2004; Husserl, 1931/2012). That is, one of the key elements of bracketing is the researcher's standpoint, which is comprised of both the ontological and epistemological perspectives (Gearing, 2004). Husserl (1931/2012) purported that researchers should not construe pure transcendental phenomenology as the type of science that is “Ideal of ‘mathimatization’” (p. 19), but rather as an “eidetic science . . . intrinsically independent of all science of fact” (p. 19). In other words, transcendental phenomenologists, unlike the positivists who use “Ideal (Philosophical) bracketing” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1436), do not rely on facts and fall short of the rigid nature of the realism orientation standpoint (Gearing, 2004). Instead, transcendental phenomenologists employ a more flexible approach when conducting research and bracketing, and this orientation standpoint falls between critical realism and relativism on the orientation standpoint continuum (Gearing, 2004). Thus, while I as a researcher sought to set aside my personal presuppositions as part of the bracketing process, it was also imperative that I recognized and acknowledged that I may not always be able to remain completely void of my thoughts and assumptions (Creswell, 2018; Gearing, 2004; Husserl, 1931/2012).

Social position. My social position is relevant to the context of the current research study. To begin with, I am an African American male positioned at the terminal end of the Baby Boomer generation. While I did not see any obstacles relating to the participants or the

environment in which the research would occur, I did foresee potential chasms developing due to the generational gap between me and the participants—high school to college age military-connected students. That is, I was infinitely aware that I may view an interview process as a perfectly normal activity. Likewise, I was cognizant of the younger generation’s current mode of communication and recognized that they often communicate via mobile phones or computers. As a result, I realized that I could potentially misinterpret subtle facial expressions or overall body language, because the younger generation often do not use these means of conveying information as a primary mode of communication. Moreover, as a researcher executing a transcendental phenomenological study, my intent was to give voice to the military-connected student. Hence, my interaction with these students served as a mean to foster good communication skills and provide emotional support as the students underwent opportunities to hear their own voices (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017). Such interactions lead to improvement of constructive and supportive relationship building skills and fostered positive involvement in learning (Greenberg et al., 2017).

Inclusion and Examination of Own Views

While quantitative researchers focus on remaining objective and keeping themselves out of a study, qualitative researchers are an integral part of the study. In the case of a transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher’s goal is to focus on the participant and elicit key meanings that help describe how the participant experience a given phenomenon under investigation. Still, it is imperative that the researcher “consciously and systematically” (Creswell, 2018, p. 28) include their own views.

As the human instrument in this qualitative inquiry, it was imperative for me to position myself and acknowledge my background including the various cultural aspects that could affect

my interpretation of the participants' input (Creswell, 2018, p. 24). Growing up as an African American male, for example, I lived in a socially economically depressed area of Savannah, Georgia all my life until I went to college in New York. As a result, my worldview regarding military mobility academic experiences as a high school student is nonexistent. On the other hand, both my wife and I served full careers as officers in the United States Army. During our service to the nation, we also functioned as parents and at one point, we moved five times in 10 years. It is during this transient phase of parenting we witnessed some of the more complex challenges military-connected students experienced. As parents, we constantly sought resources to assist our children with adapting to new school environments, academic standards and policies. Although I deployed to fulfill assignments in combat zones prior to becoming a parent, I only traveled to temporary duty assignments in hostile areas (e.g., Combined Joint Task Force Secure Tomorrow in Haiti following the swift ousting of former Haitian President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in a coup d'état) once I became a parent. While these assignments ranged from weeks to months, our young children often perceived the time apart in measurements of years. Little did I realize that despite our best efforts as parents to make everything appear normal at home, any extended period apart often-manifested itself in the form of our children's divergent academic performance. That is, at times, the children would delve into their academic assignments as a way to escape the thoughts associated with a parent being away. At other times, behavioral problems would arise. Moreover, following our retirements, we settled in an area in proximity to a military installation and often provided tutoring services to military-connected students. There we witnessed a similar pattern.

In light of my own experiences, it was imperative that I did not coningle my experiences with those of my co-researchers. That is, the transcendental phenomenological approach seeks

to focus on the participants; thus, my role as a researcher also influenced my selection of an appropriate data analysis methodology (Creswell, 2018; Gearing, 2004; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggested a blend of several data analysis strategies; however, that blend called for the researchers to incorporate their experience with the phenomenon being investigated along with other co-researchers. This suggested data analysis method was not appropriate for the current study.

Besides being aware of my worldview, I also attempted to make sense of the military-connected high school students' meaning of the world they live in (Creswell, 2018). Because I elected to conduct a transcendental phenomenological study, it was imperative that my communication was used to convey the views of the co-researchers. That is, while Moustakas (1994) explicitly stated that a hermeneutical design and methodology requires interpretation of a participant's experiences, Moustakas (1994) claimed that the hermeneutical process relies on the "interrelationship of science, art and history" (p. 9). Hence, additional influences that the researchers believe helped to shape the co-researcher's experiences are addressed as part of interpreting the experiences. On the other hand, the transcendental phenomenological approach seeks to describe the experiences of a co-researcher. According to Moustakas (1994), "Only the co-researchers' experiences with the phenomenon are considered, not how history, art, politics, or other human enterprises account for and explain the meanings of the experience" (p. 19). A transcendental design and methodology does not require me, as the researcher, to avoid all interpretation of the co-researchers' experience. In fact, Creswell (2018) underscored that the very nature of qualitative research is often referred to as "interpretive research" (p. 24). Creswell purported that "researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from

their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (p. 24). Hence, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the course of this study as a way to heighten awareness of my background and the potential influences it may have on my interpretation of data.

Although I followed Creswell’s (2013/2018) guidance, I relied on various training aspects of my past to facilitate connecting with the participants in a way to solicit truthful and profound responses. For instance, my education in the area of leadership and college student development offered unique insights about the academic requirements to prepare for college and the intrinsic qualities that corresponds to such preparation. Similarly, if any of the military-connected students exhibited signs of severe stress or lack of an ability to cope with the transition or the associated academic standards, I was prepared to report such findings to the appropriate authorities immediately.

Data Collection

Though many researchers may possess a narrow view of the data collection process—focusing primarily upon the actions involved in collecting the data—the process is quite rich and requires a great deal of forethought to execute it effectively. To begin with, Creswell (2018) delineated several steps that are critical to the qualitative research data collection process. The eight key steps of the process are as follows: (a) locating the research site or individuals, (b) gaining access to such sites and developing rapport among the participants, (c) conducting purposeful sampling, (d) collecting the data, (e) recording the information, (f) minimizing field issues, (g) storing data in a secure manner, and, (h) conduct all of the preceding activities while simultaneously considering and addressing ethical concerns (Creswell, 2018).

While Creswell’s (2018), steps may appear as a logical procession of how to conduct data collection, in essence, the process can begin at multiple points depending on the phenomenon

being investigated and the qualitative approach selected to execute the study (Creswell, 2018). For example, to initiate the current study of military-connected high school students, I initially addressed ethical concerns related to studying children. As a result, completing key training related to human subjects in accordance with both Liberty University and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense were part of my initial steps to execute the study.

Besides simply reviewing the steps, Creswell (2018) underscored the importance of integrating the particular qualitative approach, the desired outcomes, and the methodology used to acquire such outcomes. In the current study, I used a transcendental phenomenological approach; as a result, I purposefully sought out participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, my attempt to reflect heterogeneity in the projected small sample size guided my decisions regarding the variety of rank structures and the mixture of branches of Service from which I selected my participants. Although I am conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, which requires the researcher to set aside any presuppositions during the study, I used my prior experience as a military officer to enhance rapport with the participants and their parents. This epistemic action provided an opportunity to acquire resources to facilitate gaining access to the military-connected support agencies. The type of information that I collected required the participants to provide their recollections of the phenomenon under investigation. Hence, the use of interviews, self-recordings regarding experiencing of the phenomenon under investigation, creative writing assignments, and field notes served as my primary collection tools. I used digital recording devices to capture some data; hence, the need to securely store the data coupled with the need to maintain confidentiality were two major ethical concerns that were intertwined throughout the study. Moreover, Creswell (2018) challenged researchers to use data collection

methods that transcend the emblematic process of conducting interviews or observing participants. As a result, one of the tools that I used was a self-recording digital device to allow students to provide their reflections of their experiences, absent of the interviewer. The tenets of the transcendental phenomenological approach, designed to facilitate extraction of meaning of the phenomenon from the participants, served as the primary rationale for selecting this tool.

Interviews

The interview is one of the most important data collection tools that I employed because it “provide[d] an important description of conscious experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p 10). According to Creswell 2013), unstructured interviews might relinquish “considerable control over the interview process” (p. 152) to the participants. However, unstructured interview formats require the interviewer to constantly adjust and adapt to “the respondent’s perceived state of mind” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 246). Initially, this type of interview format would appear apt for a transcendental phenomenological approach. However, Gall et al. (2007) offered other interview formats specifically designed for qualitative researchers and I considered three of these formats for the current study: (a) informal conversational interview, (b) general interview guide approach, and (c) standardized open-ended interview. Although I decided to use the general interview guide approach, in essence, I used some of the characteristics from the three aforementioned formats. That is, the informal conversational interview relies heavily upon “the spontaneous generation of question in a natural interaction” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 247). These questions are generated “in the moment experiences” (Turner, 2010, p. 755), and seek to add clarity to what is being experienced (Turner, 2010).

This informal format places the interviewee at ease and all parties appear to take on a conversational demeanor (Gall et al., 2007; Turner, 2010). Such advantages to this informal

interviewing style coincide with the goals of the transcendental phenomenologist. Likewise, the standardized open-ended interview format exhibits a number of characteristics or attributes that facilitate attainment of transcendental phenomenological outcomes. Neither the strict adherence to structure nor the asking of the same series of questions to each participant bodes well with the tenets of transcendental phenomenology (Gall et al., 2007; Turner, 2010). Still, the idea of asking open-ended questions to elicit responses coupled with probing questions to follow-up initial responses are precisely the type of questions that transcendental phenomenologists use to help uncover the essence of an experience. The general interview guide, on the other hand, offers a bit more structure than the informal conversational interview format and far greater flexibility than the standardized open-ended interview format. However, according to Gall et al. (2007), a set of standardized questions are not written prior to the execution of the interview.

Although I decided to employ a general interview guide approach for the current study, I executed an interview format that reflected a fusion of all three of the aforementioned formats. That is, I asked at least two open-ended questions to elicit the responses that I needed to examine the phenomenon being investigated and I followed these questions with reflective questions and probing questions. While much guidance has been offered regarding the manner in which to conduct interviews, many of these sources have not been developed with uniquely phenomenological concepts and standards as a forethought (Englander, 2012). Hence, the coalesced formats are reflective of the integral relationships between the theoretical framework and the underlying assumptions and the collection of data and the analysis of that data processes and procedures that are embedded in transcendental phenomenology (Englander, 2012). The willingness to forgo a significant amount of structure and control also provided an opportunity to maintain control of the interview while simultaneously equalizing the “power” (Creswell, 2018,

p. 173) and reducing the “resistance” (Creswell, 2018, p. 173) that researchers, often unknowingly, embed in the formal interview process (Creswell, 2018).

The interview process is also one that depends greatly upon the theoretical framework that I employed for the current study and, as such, a discussion of the interview in terms of the theoretical orientation is appropriate (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). By employing a “paradigm-driven approach to qualitative interviews” (Wolgemuth et al., 2015), I, as a researcher, used the interviewing tool in a manner that was consistent with the epistemic and theoretical assumptions corresponding to the specific phenomenological approach that I used and generated the type of knowledge that was consistent with my approach (Wolgemuth et al., 2015). For example, my approach was a constructive one where knowledge about the world was based on the constructions that the interviewee forms; hence, as part of the interview process, I sought to form a collaborative relationship with the interviewee and the fulcrum of the interview revolved around the interviewee (Creswell, 2018; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). Moreover, in this transcendental phenomenological approach, the interview was used to capture the description of the experience from the interviewee who had experienced the given phenomenon first hand (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 1931/2012; Moustakas, 1994). However, in this approach, the reflexive interview transcended the concept of a mere data collection tool; instead, it took on the form of a scholarly language used to communicate with those in a “moral community” (Denzin, 2001, p. 24). As a result, I as a researcher could not move forward with the information conveyed in the interview as if it were my personal possession. It is the interviewer that transforms the description of the interviewee’s shared experience into the information that the reviewers of the research rely on for understanding of the phenomenon (Denzin, 2001). Thus, it was imperative that I conveyed such information with truth, integrity, and transparency. As part

of the consent form, I ensured that students were cognizant of the fact that I would record the interviews via digital means. Moreover, I sought to build rapport by explaining to the participants that they were co-researchers and reiterate how I provided opportunities for them to review transcripts and provided input regarding the accuracy of what was recorded.

The transcendental interview also requires unique aspects to achieve the goals of the qualitative approach. The one major aspect that differentiates a transcendental phenomenological interview from others is the idea of bracketing oneself or the execution of the Epoche process (Moustakas, 1994). To remain receptive to the co-researcher, Moustakas (1994) posited that the investigating researcher must be “naïve in listening to and hearing the research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Hence, qualitative interviewers must reject the idea of entering interviews with pre-developed categories or pre-interpreted strategies and instead conduct interviews that are void of obstructions, reflect patency and are receptive to new or unanticipated phenomena (Kvale, 2007). According to Kvale (2007), it is this “qualified naïveté and a bracketing of presuppositions” (p. 4) that suggest a sense of openness to novel and unanticipated phenomena. Hence, during a transcendental phenomenology interview, it is imperative that I, as the researcher, refrain from introducing biases or previous experiences to steer the interview (Moustakas, 1994). Instead, I asked the initial question to help the participant address the phenomenon being investigated, but followed the participant’s answer with a reflexive question or parroted back what was said. Similarly, Kvale (2007) suggested that it is imperative for researchers to “listen to the explicit descriptions and to the meanings expressed, as well as to what is ‘said between the lines’” (p. 3).

Some researchers describe such questioning techniques as probing questions and highlight how the short questions provide opportunities for researchers to “delve deeper into

what the study participant is saying (e.g., “Who did this? How did you feel?”) (Ranney et al., 2015, p. 1105). By implementing such a technique, I would seek to allow the participant’s responses to lead the interview and using probing questions or reflective questions, stimulate additional discussion surrounding the experience or encourage the participant to expound on the phenomenon being discussed (Buser, Parkins, Gelin, Buser & Kearney, 2016; Ranney et al., 2015). Maintaining an inquisitive nature, coupled with sensitivity to what is being said and not being said, are critical attributes that I as a transcendental phenomenologist must incorporate into my manner of conducting interviews (Kvale, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, this aspect of capturing what participants did not say during the interview process also highlights Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/1962) rejection of a researcher’s total dependence upon the inferences drawn from post-interview transcript analyses to develop the complete mosaic of participants’ meanings. That is, Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) underscored that researchers should not rely totally on the analysis of the verbal and subsequently produced written transcripts because the words alone do not produce any definitive proof.

While the transcendental interview is designed to allow maximum freedom and informational flow from the perspective of the participant, there are some structural parameters that can be implemented to help ensure that qualitative design outcomes are attained. For example, the length of the interview is an aspect that requires significant consideration. Since the aim of the transcendental phenomenological approach is to obtain a full description of the participant’s experience of the phenomenon being investigated, it is imperative to allow enough time for the participant to feel comfortable enough to reveal such information and to ensure the researcher has enough time to guide the participant to deeper levels of descriptions of the experience. Buser et al. (2016), for example, conducted interviews, using a transcendental

phenomenological design, ranging from “22 to 50 min[utes]” (p. 331), but found that the “shorter interviews did not sufficiently inquire into the depth of participant experiences” (p. 331). Other researchers have suggested allowing between two to three hours in an effort to ensure that “participants are not rushed” (Henriques, 2014, p. 463). However, given the ages of the participants, I implemented a boundary between 45 and 90 minutes, as suggested by Ranney et al. (2015), because prolonged sessions beyond this limit could “become stressful for participants and may affect the later data quality” (p. 105). I also used an interview guide with my primary questions revolving around my research questions and only follow-up questions to prevent steering the interview away from the co-researcher’s focus (Crewell, 2018; Turner, 2010; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). See Table 4 and Appendix B, which depict how research questions and the interview questions align with key literature pertaining to the topic respective areas of inquiry. Finally, given that I was working with a highly mobile or transient population sample, I also incorporated interviews via *Google Hangouts*, as an option (Jones & Woolley, 2015).

Table 4

Interview Guide and Relevant Literature Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	1. When was the last move that you experienced that relocated you here to Virginia and from where did you relocate from? [For students who relocated from Virginia to another state: Where did you relocate to after leaving Virginia?]	1. Opening Question a. Chief among the sampling selection criteria is the criterion that requires the participant to have experienced the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). b. “The relationship between the family and military youths’ outcomes is acutely relevant as those who have experienced parental deployment and multiple transitions, are already at risk for higher rates of depression ... and lower academic achievement” (Arnold et al., p. 862). <i>Determine if points revolving around multiple transitions and lower academic achievement are corroborated.</i>
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	2. You noted that you relocated from XXXX. Describe your experience regarding the academic challenges you encountered from the time	2. Researchers should rely on the participant’s first-hand description of the experience (Creswell, 2018; Husserl (2012); Moustakas, 1994). In addition, the participants is guided to reflect and provide a more in-depth description of what occurred and can later add to extraction of textural and structural descriptions and result in capturing of thick descriptions to help describe and convey the phenomenon to reviewers (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 14; Patton, 2002).
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	3. So you appear to describe [XXX a particular event XXX] as important or significant event, what made this aspect of the transition important?	3. Transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state is defined as “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg, 2012, p. 39). Anderson et al., 2012.

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	4. So, what I hear you saying is, [parroting]. Is that right? Tell me a little more about this?	4. This study uses a transcendental phenomenological approach; therefore, reflective, probing, leading questions are more apt to generate the type of data and rich descriptions required of this approach. (Buser, Parkins, Gelin, Buser & Kearney, 2016; Ramney et al., 2015).
RQ1	5. What is different about your academic experiences in Virginia when compared to your previous school system [or subsequent school system?	5. Same as above
RQ1	6. What, if anything, is different about military relocation and transitions when it comes to academic experiences?	6. This is a probing question similar to 4 and 5 above, but seeks to highlight how military relocations, specifically, are unique.
RQ 2: What coping resources do military-connected students use and how are they employed to adapt to various academic challenges related to military mobility and relocation requirements?	1. When faced with a requirement to relocate, how do you view the requirement to move as it pertains to academics?	1. This question addresses how the participant views the transition itself (e.g., negative, positive, stressful) (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 64-66). Also, opportunities exist to address nonevents if an anticipated event did not occur (Anderson et al., p. 105, 2012).
RQ2	2. What factors exist that, over time, may cause you to change your initial feelings about relocating and attending another school?	2. <i>Examine factors that influencing change:</i> “People have changed little genetically over recent decades, but they have changed markedly through rapid cultural and technological evolution in their beliefs, mores, social roles, and styles of behavior” (Bandura, 2001, p. 3).

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ 2: What coping resources do military-connected students use and how are they employed to adapt to various academic challenges related to military mobility and relocation requirements?	3. So, you noted that you consider [XXXXXX] as a factor(s) that can affect your perception of the requirement to relocate and attend another school. How would you describe the thought processes you use to derive at your final decision about how to review the requirement to relocate and attend another school?	3. Examine meaning making processes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. This question seeks to gain insights regarding the participant’s meaning making/ cognitive processes used to make sense of the world (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 67). b. “A functional consciousness involves purposive accessing and deliberative processing of information for selecting, constructing, regulating, and evaluating courses of action” (Bandura, 2001, p. 3).
RQ2	4. Do you believe anything can be done about the requirement to relocate to different states and attending school elsewhere for military-connected students?	4. This question seeks to determine if the participant’s view of structural and psychological use of coping resources (Anderson et al. (2012, p. 65).
RQ2	5. How do you cope with that?	5. This question seeks to address the participant’s view regarding control—a perception that is, according to Anderson et al. (2012), is “critical in to success in managing transition” (p. 105).
RQ2	6. How does your link with the military allow you to cope with various academic experiences when you relocate to another state?	6. Seeks to gain insights about the participant’s worldview and determine how it influences selection of various coping strategies.

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ2	<p>7. Starting with you and expanding outward, describe the types of support systems that you use to navigate academic challenges?</p> <p>a. This coping strategy allowed you to [XXXXXX]. Why was it important for you to [XXXXXX]?</p> <p>b. Tell me more about how you developed the coping strategy of [XXXX]?</p> <p>c. So what you are saying is ...</p>	<p>7. Seeks to gain insights about each participant's perception of the significance of resources available to cope specifically with academic challenges (Anderson et al., 2012).</p>
RQ 3: How do military-connected students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook?	<p>1. How do you currently perceive your level of resilience as it pertains to your future academic outlook?</p>	<p>1. Inquiries about the participant's outlook and how optimistic or pessimistic views affects resilience. The findings taken as a whole show that the stronger the perceived collective efficacy, the higher the groups' aspirations and motivational investment in their undertakings, the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments and setbacks, the higher their morale and resilience to stressors, and the greater their performance accomplishments. (Bandura, 2001, p. 14).</p>
RQ3	<p>2. How does your organizing skills influence your academic experiences as it relates to relocation? How does flexibility play a part in adjusting to academic experiences?</p>	<p>2. Organizational skills and flexibility have been linked to increased resilience (Anderson et al., p. 83 2012).</p>

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
<p>RQ 3: How do military-connected students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook?</p>	<p>3. What do you believe your overall purpose is when it comes to academics?</p> <p>a. How committed are you to achieving this purpose?</p> <p>b. Do you believe you can control your purpose when you relocate often?</p>	<p>3. Three attitudinal theoretical factors (i.e. control, commitment, and challenge) that result in increased resilience or "hardness" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 87). Understanding what the participant perceives as his or her purpose and how he or she pursues achieving that purpose can help to elucidate positions regarding levels of resilience.</p> <p>a. Resilience has been found to be strongly correlated with an "individual's belief and confidence that things in life would work out well" (Svetina, 2014, p. 394).</p> <p>b. Resilience also addresses both "positive and negative psychosocial outcomes such as maladjustment, post-traumatic stress disorder, health, school performance, well-being, and overall quality of life" (Svetina, 2014, p. 394).</p> <p>c. "Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions." (Bandura, 2001, p. 10)</p>
<p>RQ3</p>	<p>4. You stated that your overall purpose as it pertains to academics was [XXXXX], describe how you would pursue this purpose if you viewed it as challenging to achieve.</p>	<p>4. This question allows the researcher to gain insights into the participant's sense of self-direction (Anderson et al., p. 107, 2012).</p>

Individual Self-Recordings

Another type of data collection tool that can be used in place of or in conjunction with interviews is the diary. In the traditional sense, a diary or journal is a tool that participants can use to record their innermost thoughts and feelings. According to Creswell (2018), besides spending considerable time with participants, researchers should explore various ways and tools to gather information regarding participants' life experiences. One of the modes of collecting such information, according to Creswell, is the technique of self-recording of stories and experiences using a diary or journal. In the case of the current study, the military-connected high school students were always in some form of transition (i.e., anticipating and awaiting orders to move, preparing to move after receiving orders, or completion of move and attempting to adjust to the new environment). As a result, a diary served as an excellent source to record the military-connected students' thoughts and corresponding emotions as they experience them.

One of the key advantages to using the diary format was that the participants recorded their lived experiences as they transpired and practically forewent the researcher's need to depend on the participants ability to recall experiences—thus reducing the effects of biases associated with individual recollections (Narayan & Olsson, 2013). To some degree, participants still engaged in some form of a reflective action since, according to van Manen (2016), lived experiences can never be fully understood in the present moment but only after reflecting on the past. However, the self-recording diary tool offered an opportunity to combine the immediate apprehension aspects of a lived experience with a component of reflection (Narayan & Olsson, 2013).

Some researchers incorporate recording devices as part of their interviewing and data collection process, but they are oblivious to the possibility that some participants may express a

level of discomfort with either the interviewer or the presence of a recording device (Nordstrom, 2015). As a result, I provided each participant with a recording device (i.e., 16GB Digital Voice Activated Recorder for Lectures - Eztecpro 580 hours sound audio recorder dictaphone voice activated recorder recording device with playback, MP3 player, password, variable speed) following the initial interview, to capture their lived experiences in the privacy of their own home. In some cases, participants spent time reflecting on the requirement and, while in a room by themselves, completed the recording before leaving the interview site. In others instances, I allowed some students who were off site to record their interviews via telephone. That is, the participant coordinated with me to conduct the self-reflection portion of the interview via telephone. I started the recorder, asked for a few seconds to exit the room, and allowed the student to conduct the recording. When the student completed the recording, he or she would simply end the call. When the call ended, the phone would emit a loud beeping noise after it detected no activity on the line approximately one minute after the call was completed. I would then re-enter the room, and end the recording.

Lived experiences are active and ever-changing phenomena and can form when interacting with others or during periods of individual activity or inactivity or any combination thereof. (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Narayan & Olsson, 2013; van Manen, 2016). Hence, I attempted to capture some of these lived experiences while participants were experiencing them or have participants reflect on their experiences and record their thoughts without the presence of the researcher. This exclusion of the researcher possibly reduced some of the anxiety, including lack of focus, a participant may have experienced when providing their innermost thoughts as part of the research data collection process (Patton, 2002; Tourangeau & Smith, 1996). In addition, since the current study could possibly lead to participants providing

sensitive information regarding how they cope with the stress of academic challenges during transitions, the added privacy could potentially add greater integrity to input or reduce the propensity of participants to provide socially acceptable answers due to the presence of the researcher (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).

Letters to Policymakers and Educators

Another source of data collection that augmented the understanding of participants' meanings was a *creative letter writing* assignment. Using creativity and imagination, participants were asked to construct a single, fictitious letter to the Governor of Virginia and the Virginia Board of Education that expressed what they would like to see transpire in the realm of academic policy changes to facilitate smooth transitions for military-connected students. Participants were instructed to consider some of the issues that they believed were important for political leaders, policy makers and other key stakeholders to know as these stakeholders wrestled with the idea of how best to support military families and their children when conducting educational transitions to and from the Commonwealth of Virginia

While the interviews and self-reflection collection steps required verbal methods of communication, the creative letter writing technique was a nonverbal form of communication and required the military-connected students to express their experiences using their imagination. It was this use of the military-connected students' imagination that, according to Husserl (1931/2012), would reveal another source of data, or more precisely stated, "new data, [that is] 'eidetic' in nature" (p. 35). Here, I sought to capture the students' views regarding information they would like for policymakers and other stakeholders to be cognizant of as it pertains to their academic experiences related to military interstate relocation requirements.

The requirement placed participants in a position where they had to reflect, and in the process of preparing to convey their ideas, formulate meanings about perhaps, some of the more salient aspects of their experiences. The creative writing assignment, therefore, served as another tool to gain a deeper understanding of how military-connected high school students think and construct meaning about their experiences. It is important to note that Husserl (1931/2012) also cautioned researchers to be mindful of the fact that the imaginary data are not the essence of the lived experience, but rather the experience of imagining is a lived experience within itself (p. 42). Instead, what imagination does—and what researchers should be focused on understanding—is reveal the *key relationships* between those same “fiction-constructing consciousness” (Husserl, 2012, p. 43) processes required to generate the imaginative experience and those cognitive processes that generate meaning to actual lived experiences. As a result, the imaginative form serves as a primordial datum.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a very abstract and in-depth process involving organization of data, classification of data, development of themes and other complex facets that many researchers may have difficulty comprehending (Creswell, 2018; Meyer & Ward, 2014). For instance, the various definitions of qualitative data analysis often reflect a level of complexity associated with this term. Flick (2014) defined qualitative data analysis as “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (Box 1.1). Flick’s definition underscores the organizational and categorization aspects of data analysis and the overall intent to understand the meanings of an experience. Similarly, van Manen (2016) purported that the purpose of qualitative data analysis is to, “try to grasp the essential meaning of

something” (Location 1626). Still another source defined qualitative data analysis in the following manner:

Qualitative data analysis is the process of moving from textual data, or raw data, to evidence-based interpretations. Unlike quantitative data analysis that does not begin until all data are collected, qualitative researchers begin an initial analysis as soon as they begin to collect data. Whereas *analysis* involves labeling and breaking down raw data to find patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions, *interpretation* involves giving meaning to those patterns, themes, concepts, and propositions. (Allen, 2017, paragraph 8)

This definition highlights the immanent processes in data analysis that transforms shards of data into a meaning-filled compendium of information. This definition also provides the basis for including field notes as another source of data collection in which at least a tenuous form of interpretation would be acceptable. This point is key, considering that this study is a transcendental phenomenological study and focuses on the participants’ descriptions of the phenomenon. In the past, field notes may have been viewed as an interviewer’s insignificant scribbles; however, as researchers began to examine these notes more thoroughly, they began to discover an additional source of analyzable data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Creswell (2018) purported that qualitative research was an activity that positioned researchers in the world they examine “situated activity that locates the researcher in the world” (p. 7). Moreover, Creswell posited, that the world becomes visible and that through various qualitative interpretive materials and practices, researchers alter or convert the world into groups of representative exhibits such as interviews, observations, field notes, conversations and notes to self. In other words, these representations become the embodiment of the world being examined.

Field notes facilitate the visualization of this world by capturing and conveying those idiosyncrasies that may otherwise go unnoticed. By capturing key aspects of an interview (e.g. body language, feelings, textural contexts of the setting), field notes facilitate the palatability of Merleau-Ponty's (1968) purported view that the essence of the meaning of an experience, transcends "*purely linguistic examination of the texts in question*" (p. viii). In some cases, field notes can provide researchers with the flexibility to align recursive actions with the purposeful nature of qualitative research. For example, if a military-connected student expressed a strong view about a specific educational policy, I, as the researcher, could capture such information during the interview and record specific aspects about the interview thereafter. In addition I could recover the specific policy at a later time and revisit notes to add context to what was said earlier or compare details to ensure accuracy or measure comments against a common standard (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Although the current transcendental phenomenological study required me to temporarily bracket various presuppositions, there were some aspects of field notes that required forethought and was considered for inclusion. That is, I documented standard information such as my principal investigator's information, the time period in which the study was taking place (e.g., during the school year, at the beginning or conclusion of an academic school year) and other relevant information such as holidays, that were relevant to the study (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). In addition, geographical information, demographical information and information about the appearance of the participants were included in the field notes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Finally, it was imperative that I also included my own feelings and thoughts within the field notes because they too were considered as data (Moustakas, 1994;

Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Specifically, I noted various communication cues that were apparent or possible to be conveyed via a verbatim transcript.

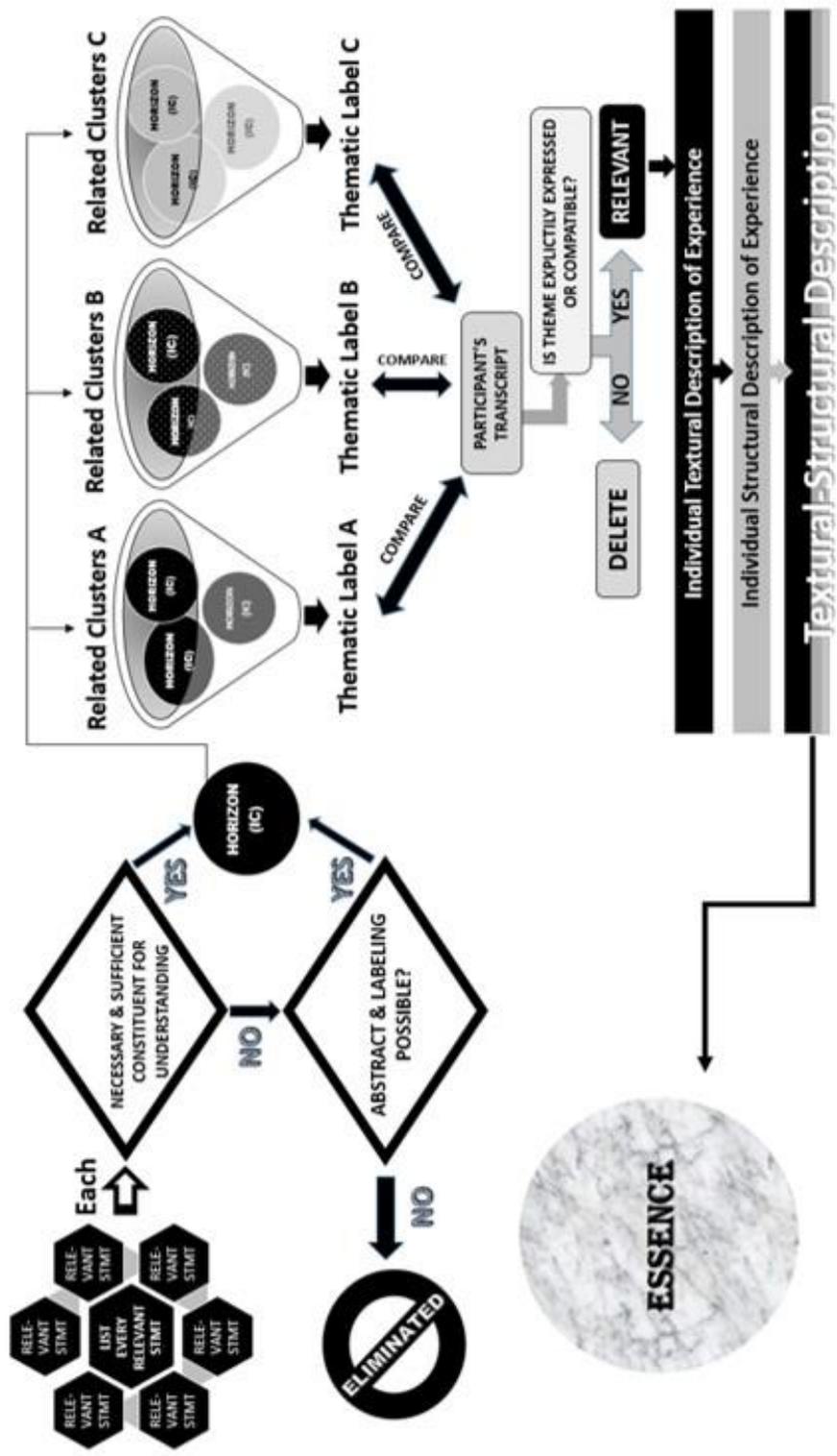
Finally, many researchers also stressed that qualitative data analysis, reflective of the qualitative process itself, is an iterative process (Creswell, 2018; Levitt et al., 2017; Meyer & Ward, 2014; Stake, 1995). The definitions also introduce one of the more debatable aspects of data analysis—*determining when it begins*. That is, some researchers believe that data analysis begins “following the commencement of data collection” (Meyer & Ward, 2014, p. 531). Creswell (2018) depicted the qualitative data analysis process in the form of a “data analysis spiral” to illustrate various components of the process, and his illustration showed the spiral beginning with data collection process. Still, others contended that investigators should not make a priori assumptions regarding the commencement point of qualitative data analysis (Stake, 1995). Instead, Stake (1995) purported that “analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). He also added that the dissecting mechanism manifested in the data analysis process does not pertain to the temporal or spatial parts (i.e. start, middle, end) of the impression or observation in question, but rather it pertains to “the parts that are important to us” (p. 71).

Moustakas (1994) provided detailed guidance regarding data analysis to researchers employing a transcendental phenomenological approach to research. To begin with, Moustakas purported that it is imperative for researchers to deliberately engage in the process of setting aside preconceived judgments or preconceptions regarding the phenomenon they are studying (p. 22). Husserl (1931/1967) described this concept as “epokhe [epoche]—abstention” or “bracketing” (p. 99). Moreover, Husserl (1931/1967) highlighted the rationale behind the use of this process. That is, Husserl (1931/1967) purported that if a person has a preconceived idea or

judgment about a phenomenon, then they view such a concept as “*unshaken and unshakable because [of] self-evidencing conviction of Truth* [italics in original]” (pp. 98-99). Hence, the preconceived ideas are the basis for the researchers real-world view and could possibly hinder the researcher from viewing any other view as a real-world view. As a result, researchers must become aware of such views and set such views aside or bracket such views to properly receive the participant’s view as the real world that he or she may perceive.

Keeping in mind Husserl’s view requiring the focus of transcendental phenomenological research to be placed on the participant’s meaning of an experience and not the researcher’s interpretation of that meaning, I used the Modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data that Moustakas (1994) suggested qualitative researchers use to guide the data analysis procedures for the current study. Although Moustakas (1994) provided various data analysis templates for qualitative researchers to follow, Creswell (2018) specifically stated that transcendental phenomenological studies rely on the “data analysis procedures of Van Kaam (1966) and Colaizzi (1978)” (p. 78). Creswell’s position appears to be predicated on the fact that Moustakas’s (1994) blended version of several data analysis methods incorporates facets of the researcher’s experience (e.g., researcher’s significant statement descriptions, researcher determined “relevant statements” (p. 121), reflection of researcher’s “textural descriptions” (p. 121), researcher’s synthesized structural descriptions) as part of the data analysis process. Such inclusion of the researcher’s experience, especially when the researcher’s characteristics do not align with the criteria used to select participants, would undoubtedly taint the final data analysis outcomes or detract from the voices of the participants. To facilitate both comprehension and flow of the process, I devised an illustration of the process (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Modification of the Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994)



IC – Invariant Constituents

Figure 4. My original depiction of Moustakas’s modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data.

After developing questions to initially align the interviews with the objective of the study, I collected the interviews via digital means, and then transcribed the data and conducted member checking to ensure accuracy. During this validation checking, I allowed students to address issues that require additional clarification or those they may have considered following the initial interview. I also conducted the following steps in accordance to the procedures that Moustakas (1994) outlined.

Using the Phenomenological Approach on the Researcher's Description of the Phenomenon

According to Moustakas (1994), the first step of the analysis pertains to the researcher's ability to use the phenomenological approach to address his or her personal experiences. Besides seeking oversight assistance to bolster credibility and dependability, I also used a process Moustakas (1994) coined as "transcendental phenomenological reduction" (p. 34). While a closer inspection of the terms reduction, epoche and bracketing may highlight some subtle philosophical differences, "in research these terms are generally considered interchangeable or synonymous" (Gearing, 2004, p. 1430). In Husserl's (1931/2012) printed edition of *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, translator Gibson, via a foreword written by Dermot Moran, also acknowledged that Husserl (1931/2012) used the terms interchangeably but noted that "reduction begins with . . . philosophical epoche or bracketing" (Forward, p. xxii). According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher uses this process to view each participant's experience in its "singularity," (p. 34) uses this information to develop a complete description of the experience, and eventually derives at a "textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon," (p. 34) which exists in the consciousness of the participant. Hence, validity for transcendental phenomenological research generated via the researcher and not through the computation of formulas or use of other quantitative procedures.

Listing and Preliminary Grouping

According to Moustakas (1994), “every statement has equal value” (p. 125). By weighting each statement equally, the researcher can effectively engage in thematic linking of various themes that emerge. Moustakas referred to this method as “horizontalization” (p. 125). In this step of the process, Moustakas emphasized that researcher should focus on the relevance of the statements. Again, it is here that the concept of bracketing coupled with objectivity can be inferred. That is, to determine what is relevant to any phenomenological study, researchers must ensure they address this phase of analysis from the perspective of the participants that provided the information; otherwise, they could overlook what is truly relevant. Perhaps Freeman (2014) said it best when he addressed how a person’s mind can continually fabricate concepts based on a person’s own worldview and, in effect, obscure reality. Hence, Freeman stated, “Objectivity, therefore, has to do with our capacity to ‘unself’ ourselves, to resist our own egocentric fantasies and reveries and to thereby see what is really there, before us” (p. 121). Thus, the act of bracketing from a theoretical perspective aligns well with the data analysis methodology and infuses seeds of trustworthiness throughout the process.

Reduction and Elimination

To determine those characteristics that are immutable in nature, Moustakas (1994) suggested using a two-prong test. First, I must determine whether each relevant statement provided by the participant regarding the experience is a “necessary and sufficient constituent” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120) for comprehending the experience. According to Moustakas, if the statement meets this criterion, then the statement is classified as an “invariant constituent” (p. 120). If the statement does not meet the first criterion, then Moustakas suggested using a second criterion to determine if it is possible to consider developing a label from the statement. If so, then the statement could also be classified as an

invariant constituent. Otherwise, Moustakas (1994) recommended eliminating the statement from further consideration. I conducted this two-pronged test to determine each relevant statement using the participants' verbatim transcripts. Those statements that remained after undergoing this test were referred to as "horizons" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

Clustering and Developing Themes Using the Invariant Constituents

At the conclusion of the previous step, I clustered the horizons, also referred to as invariant constituents, which remained into related categories. Afterward, I assigned labels to the clusters of related horizons. According to Moustakas (1994), the resulting groups or clusters of labeled horizons serve as potential core themes to help describe the experience from the perspective of the participants.

Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application

After the creation of the initial themes using NVIVO software, Moustakas (1994) recommended validating the horizons and their corresponding themes against each of the participant's transcripts to determine if the groupings accurately reflect what is in the transcripts. To accomplish this task, Moustakas recommended addressing three key areas of concern. First, as the researcher, I determined whether the horizons were explicitly expressed in the entire transcript of the participants. If the theme or grouping of the horizons were not explicitly expressed in the transcripts, I then determined whether the theme or related horizons were compatible with what was recorded in the transcription. If the themes or related horizons failed to meet either of these criteria, the themes were deleted because, according to Moustakas, they were not relevant to the experience.

Construction of Individual Textural Descriptions

After validating the existence of the themes or groupings of the horizons in the transcripts, Moustakas (1994) recommended using these horizons and themes to construct individual textural descriptions of the experience. Creswell (2018) stated that the textural

descriptions addresses “what the participants experienced” (p. 78). To develop the textural descriptions, Moustakas (1994) recommended using the precise wording from the transcribed transcripts where possible.

Construction of Individual Structural Descriptions

After writing the textural descriptions for each participant, Moustakas (1994) recommended writing individual structural descriptions. These descriptions, according to Creswell (2018), convey how each participant experienced the phenomenon “in terms of conditions, situations, or context” (p. 78). Creswell also underscored how this phase of the analysis requires the researcher to examine all possible perspectives and meanings from a variety of reference points regarding the phenomenon.

Development a Composite of Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions

After both the individual textural descriptions and structural descriptions are completed, Moustakas’s (1994) modified Van Kaam method requires the researcher to construct a combined textural and structural description of the essence and meaning of the phenomenon for each participant. This phase of the analysis requires the researcher, in the words of Moustakas (1994), to “intuitively-reflectively integrate” (p. 181) the combined textural and structural descriptions of each individual participant.

Composite Textural-Structural Description for the Group

When the individual composite textural descriptions are completed, I executed the final phase of the analysis. This phase was to develop a composite textural and structural description for the group as a whole. In doing so, Moustakas (1994) noted that the essence of the phenomenon from the military-connected students’ perspective would be revealed in the final iteration of analysis.

Trustworthiness

Quantitative and qualitative scholars have frequently debated the concept of *trustworthiness* and its significance in qualitative research (Angen, 2000; Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, researchers can neither engage in the debates nor benefit from them without possessing a clear understanding of the term. Trustworthiness describes the level of confidence that either researchers or readers of a given study place in the idea that the study adequately addresses important aspects or relevant experiences related to a topic of their concern (Levitt et al., 2017). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) addressed the persuasive characteristic of trustworthiness and highlighted how the qualitative researcher's work should substantiate why the research is "worth paying attention to" (p. 290).

Many qualitative researchers often agree that the positivist's view regarding the criteria of *validity*, *reliability*, and *generalizability* as the basis of truth in scientific research is too narrow to capture the unique nature of qualitative research (Angen, 2000; Levitt et al., 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lub, 2015). That is, each of the aforementioned "trinity of truths" terms encompasses meanings among positivists that are somewhat restrictive when qualitative researchers attempt to apply them in qualitative studies (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In quantitative research approaches, researchers attempt to bolster validity via the strict "adherence to methodological rules and standards" (Angen, 2000, p. 379). From a positivistic perspective, validity can be defined as "the degree to which the indicators or variables of a research concept are made measurable, accurately represent that concept" (Lub, 2015, p. 2). In other words, validity illustrates how well the researcher measures precisely what he or she sets out to measure.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) dissected the concept of validity even further and underscored the differences between internal validity and external validity. According to Lincoln and Guba, "internal validity may be defined in conventional terms as the extent to

which variations in an outcome (dependent) variable can be attributed to controlled variation in an independent variable” (p. 290). External validity, according to Lincoln and Guba pertains to the generalizability of the findings from an experiment. Specifically, Cook and Campbell (1979) defined external validity as “the approximate validity with which conclusions are drawn about the generalizability of a causal relationship to and across populations of persons, settings, and times” (p. 39). Reliability, on the other hand, pertains to the “repeatability” (Angen, 2000, p. 381) of an experiment and generalizability seeks to establish how well the results of an experiment can be applied in “other circumstances or populations” (Angen, 2000, p. 381). Reliability, according to Lincoln and Guba is also a prerequisite for validity and without it, a researcher cannot consider any measurement that is unreliable as a valid measurement.

To make matters more obscured, some researchers have used terms interchangeably or have offered alternative meanings to the terms. Freeman (2014), for example, suggested using the terms “‘fidelity’ or ‘faithfulness’” to convey the concept of objectivity in qualitative studies (p. 121). Other researchers highlighted how qualitative researchers often insert language in their work, which describes their positions, and how positivists tend to view such an inclusion as a bias or an indicator of the erosion of validity. For instance, some researchers have highlighted the fact that in most qualitative works, the researcher addresses his or her position as an important facet of the interpretive process and illustrates how it “cannot be legitimately ignored” (Dennis, 2017, p. 1); however, the terminology regarding validity has been subject to various nomenclature and abstract constraints conceptualized by those who employ more traditional or conventional methods of research (Dennis, 2017).

Despite these valiant attempts to clarify the use of quantitative concepts in qualitative research, many were deemed confusing. According to Ely (1991), “the language of positivistic research is not congruent with or adequate to qualitative work” (p. 95); thus, when

qualitative researchers attempt to conduct research using quantitative terms it is often of an effort to evade criticisms regarding scientific rigor and only obscures the debate. Such views often prompted some researchers to practically forego any attempts to obtain objectivity in their research efforts (Freeman, 2014; Hadi & Closs, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), positivists possess an ontological assumption that suggests the existence of a “single tangible reality” (p. 28). Given that interpretive researchers such as Husserl (1931/2012) and social psychologists such as Bandura (2001) purport the existence of multiple realities, Lincoln and Guba concluded that “objectivity in its pure form is an unattainable state” (p. 108).

While the attainment of objectivity in its purest state may be impossible, Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that researchers should not forego efforts to attain balance and fairness even though full attainment may not transpire. Hence, despite the constant debate among qualitative and quantitative researchers, a need for some form of rigor is necessary and desired to maintain some form of legitimacy. To articulate this point—and admittedly with some trepidation of appearing to attempt to proselytize the reader—I would like to present a historical, yet similar, situation noted in the Bible. The debate regarding scholarly rigor among quantitative and qualitative scholars are reminiscent of debates that pioneers of the early Christian church engaged in regarding the concepts of *grace* and *the law*. That is, Paul sought to explain to Jewish leaders that through the death of Christ, all people—Jews and Gentiles—could receive salvation not solely through the tradition of obeying the law, but through grace. Such a view was so radical at that time, that it prompted Paul to ask and answer the following rhetorical questions: “What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6: 15, King James Version). Paul proceeded to articulated how followers of Christ were not to purposefully engage in sin, but were to resist sin constantly and vigorously. However, unlike the old covenant of the law,

grace provided a means of achieving salvation without assuming a definitive penalty for violating the law.

In a similar manner, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported that, as scientific researchers and scholars, qualitative researchers should seek to execute their research in a manner reflective of scientific prowess; yet, they acknowledged to accomplish such a feat required alternative terms and definitions to articulate the unique aspects of the qualitative framework. To demonstrate trustworthiness in qualitative studies, Lincoln and Guba introduced four terms and corresponding definitions tailored to reflect the unique characteristics of qualitative research: (a) credibility, (b) confirmability, (c) dependability, and (d) transferability (p. 300). An additional term, *authenticity*, was introduced and refined in later works to address the qualitative lacuna regarding the “quality of the hermeneutic/dialectic methodology and thus of the outcome of a constructivist inquiry” (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, Locations 938-939). Authenticity refers to the level of accuracy the researcher uses in describing and identifying people participating in the research (Elo et al., 2014).

Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that the compendium of terms manifested direct or comparable relationships to quantitative terms and noted that, “The four terms ‘credibility,’ ‘transferability,’ ‘dependability,’ and ‘confirmability’ are, then, the naturalist’s *equivalents* [emphasis added] for the conventional terms ‘internal validity,’ ‘external validity,’ ‘reliability,’ and ‘objectivity’ [respectively]” (p. 300). While the use of the term ‘equivalent’ may generate depictions of mirror images, a more accurate image to illustrate Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) concept could possibly be best conveyed using a *pentagonal prism* or *pentaprism*. Just as light shown through a prism is divided into different wavelengths and produces a spectrum of colors, so do the unique aspects of scientific rigor become apparent, from the qualitative perspective, when viewed using Lincoln and Guba’s (1985, 2016) trustworthiness criteria. Scientific rigor, therefore, when viewed using the five

evaluative questions—or sides—surrounding truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2016) allows an evaluator to infer the four trustworthiness concepts from the conventional positivists criteria. As a result, I propose a new graphic, see Figure 5 below, to illustrate this *qualitative refraction of scientific rigor* concept.

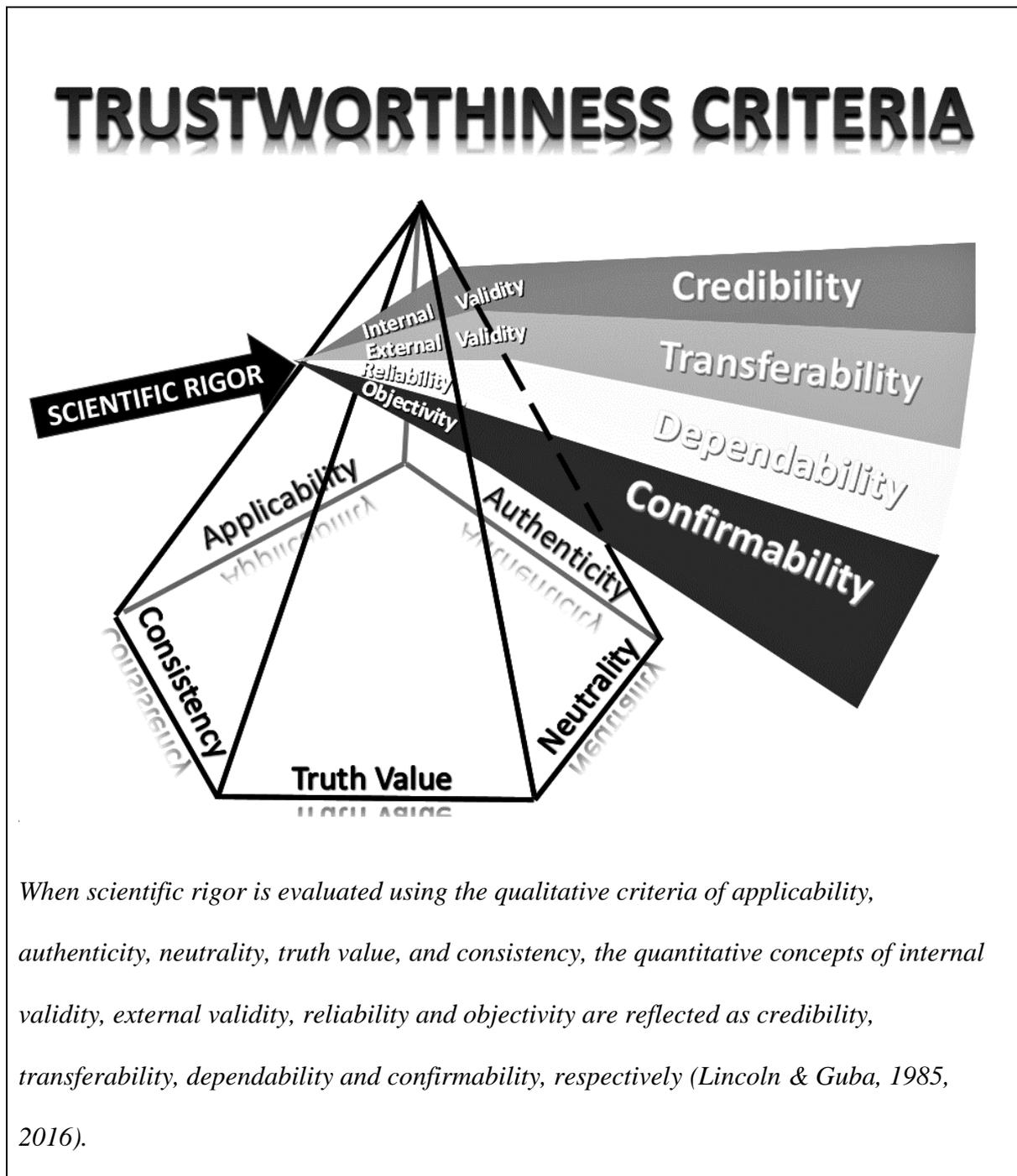


Figure 5. Trustworthiness criteria.

In the forthcoming sections, I discuss each of the qualitative terms in detail and illustrate how I incorporated the tenets of each term in the current study

Credibility

Credibility correlates to the internal validity criterion used by positivists and pertains to the level of confidence that both the researcher and reviewers of the research establish in the execution of processes and procedures that lead to credible findings and the analysis of data (Hadi & Closs, 2016, pp. 642-643; Lincoln & Guba, 2016, p. 104). To elicit a high level of confidence, it is imperative that the qualitative inquirer demonstrate that the research procedures, methodology, and resulting findings are credible. To ensure that a qualitative inquiry is credible, the inquirer must meet two key criteria. First, the researcher must conduct the inquiry in such a manner that greatly enhances the probability that the results or findings would be determined by others and the researcher to be credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). The second criterion requires the researcher to obtain the approval of “constructors of the multiple realities being studied” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). It is important to note, however, that the nature of qualitative inquiry is fluid and hinges on the assumption of multiple realities.

As a result, Denzin (1970) cautioned researchers to be cognizant of the following fact regarding seeking complete confidence in their research: “The act of doing research is an act of symbolic interaction. Each sociological method and, in fact, each sociologist generates different lines of action toward this object. Thus, complete agreement between methods and their users can never be expected” (p. 300). In other words, credibility revolves around confidence in the study and not complete agreement among all reviewers related to the content of the study or methodologies. To meet these criteria, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested several techniques or activities that are designed to ensure that “credible findings and interpretations will be produced” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Depending the issue

being studied, Lincoln and Guba (2016) suggested employing, as applicable, a combination of the following techniques: (a) triangulation, (b) persistent observation, (c) prolonged engagement, (d) methods, (e) theories, (f) peer debriefings, (g) multiple researchers, (h) negative case analysis, (i) referential adequacy, and (j) member checking (p. 104).

Triangulation. Chief among the suggested credibility bolstering techniques is an operational technique Lincoln and Guba (1985) termed *triangulation*. The term for this qualitative procedure derives from a surveying technique where surveyors, located at three separate points, measure an angle to a common point of interest. From a theoretical perspective, the resulting intersection of the angles reveals an accurate location to the common point of interest (Angen, 2000, p. 384). In qualitative research, triangulation is a process where qualitative inquirers base their findings on results from “different data sources” (Lub, 2015, p. 4). Although this definition underscores data sources, Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged that triangulation consists of various forms: (a) data sources, (b) methods, (c) investigators, and (d) theories (p. 305). Moreover, Denzin (1970) suggested a refinement of the “generic definition” (p. 301) of triangulation and sought to express how the concept involves “varieties of data, investigators, and theories, as well as methodologies” (p. 301). Denzin also addressed the validity aspect of triangulation by noting that, “methodological triangulation involves a complex process of playing each method off against the other so as to *maximize the validity* [emphasis added] of field efforts” (p. 310).

Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) appeared to point to Denzin as a primary source for touting the validity aspect of triangulation in qualitative inquiries, a more in-depth review of Denzin’s work appears to suggest that Lincoln and Guba misinterpreted what Denzin was trying to convey regarding the dual nature of triangulation—*validity* and *substance*. Now, before the Lincoln and Guba zealots begin gathering their intellectual pitchforks and igniting their scholarly flames of refutation, allow me an opportunity to substantiate my claim.

Lincoln and Guba clearly credited Denzin (1970) for identifying the existence of “four different modes of triangulation” (p. 305). Immediately afterward, Lincoln and Guba (1985) cited Diesing’s (1971) work and denoted his definition of *contextual validation* (pp. 305-306). According to Diesing, contextual validation has two primary forms, but the first form assesses the “the validity of a piece of evidence...by comparing it with other kinds of evidence on the same point” (p. 147). It is this first form of contextual validation that Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported was similar to how Denzin used the term (p. 306).

Denzin’s (1970) earlier work, by contrast, clearly reflects how he perceived the role of qualitative researchers and the corresponding human attributes that they introduce into the scientific process. Specifically, Denzin noted the following:

It is important, however, not to overlook the human-personalistic element in the scientific process. I have suggested that this element intrudes *into every step of the scientific process* [italics added]; from the selection of research methods to research problems flowing from a favored theory personal values and preferences shape decisions.... Triangulation, or the use of multiple methods, is a plan of action that will raise sociologists above the personalistic biases that stem from single methodologies.... In this respect triangulation of method, investigator, theory, and data remains the soundest strategy of theory construction. (p. 300)

Denzin, therefore, considered the researcher as an important human element or, more powerfully stated, the “key instrument” (Creswell, 2018, p. 43) in research. As a result, Denzin believed it was imperative that researchers incorporate rigor into their process and negate biases to elevate confidence in qualitative research. Denzin’s primary view, therefore, appears to suggest that triangulation serves less as a validity tool, and more as a tool capable of adding the in-depth rigor to the qualitative process, soundness to the researcher’s efforts, and eventually, greater and more robust understanding of the topic of study.

Views that suggest reducing the emphasis of triangulation as a validity tool and posit it more as a tool to enhance understanding of the issues under investigation are not isolated opinions. For example, in their discussion of the interrelationship of qualitative and quantitative data and the linkages between various forms of qualitative data, Fielding and Fielding (1986) vehemently criticized Denzin for apparently equating the multiple triangulation of methodologies and theories to the positivist's process of "'correlation' in data analysis" (p. 33). Moreover, Fielding and Fielding (1986) rejected the idea that triangulation either reduced bias or increased validity but purported that the triangulation of such methods and theories only added "range and depth, but not accuracy" (p. 33). In the end, Fielding and Fielding (1986) concluded that, researchers should prudently and decisively combine methodologies and theories with the primary purpose of bolstering range and profundity to their analysis, "but not for the purpose of pursuing 'objective' truth" (p. 33).

Similar to Fielding and Fielding's view regarding the primary purpose of triangulation, Flick (2017) described Denzin's more evolved view of triangulation as "a strategy on the road to a deeper understanding of an issue under study and thus as a step to more knowledge and less toward validity and objectivity in interpretation" (Flick, 2017, p. 53). Moreover, as early as 2012, Denzin also published his more evolved view in a scholarly article entitled, *Triangulation 2.0*. Within this work, Denzin (2012) specifically stated that, "The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 82). Hence, triangulation is a tool in the qualitative researcher's scholarly repertoire that helps corroborate validity; however, it is *not the primary tool* for ensuring "objective truth" (Flick, 2017). Instead, qualitative inquirers should primarily use triangulation to assist with increasing the robustness of their research efforts and to cultivate their ever-increasing understanding of the issues they investigate (Denzin, 2012; Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Flick, 2017; Mathison, 1988).

To ensure that credibility is manifested throughout the study, I triangulated data sources and methodologies (Creswell, 2018) and methods of capturing and recording the experiences of military-connected students (Denzin, 2001). As alluded to earlier, triangulation is a technique used in qualitative research that requires multiple data sources that are related, various data collection methods or research investigators and seeks to reduce immanent biases normally associated with the use of a single method, source or researcher investigator (Hadi & Closs, 2016). In the case of the current study, I conducted triangulation of the semi-structured student interviews, self-recorded reflective feedback, and creative writing assignments.

I also conducted systematic triangulation of perspectives. This form of triangulation according to Flick (2017), illustrates how, “different perspectives can become concrete not only in analyzing knowledge (with interviews) and practices (with conversation analysis or observations) but also in analyzing subjective experiences” (p. 54). Triangulation via the use of multiple participants from various military branches and locations will more than likely help to depict an accurate view of the phenomenon as it pertains to military-connected students (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). I elicited various perspectives via the use of different data collection such as semi-structured interviews, the self-recordings of individual reflections—thus, offering a perspective absent of researchers’ presence—and from the notes I recorded throughout the process (Bengtsson, 2016; Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). T

o reduce bias, I used a reflexive journal and execute the process of “bracketing” (Creswell, 2018, p. 78) as a way of remaining aware of my biases and position myself accordingly. The act of self-reflection provided an opportunity to address my position within the study and account for my personal worldview and personal experiences so that I minimized or mitigated the overall influence they have on the final research findings

(Creswell, 2018; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). The act of self-reflection also increases “credibility and conformability of research finding” (Hadi & Closs, 2016, p. 643). It is important to note, that via systematic triangulation of perspectives, I was not necessarily seeking confirmation of all results; rather, I was seeking to include “complementary” (individual experiences accompanying academic challenges), or “contradictory results” (Flick, 2017, p. 54) (information about versus practices concerning transitioning).

I also conducted peer debriefings throughout the process using a process known as “analytic triangulation” (Hadi & Closs, 2016, p. 643). This technique involves constant communication with peers regarding all aspects of the research (i.e., data collection, data analysis, coding and theme development, and interpretation of data) (Hadi & Closs, 2016, p. 643). I consulted with my chair who is a subject matter expert regarding research processes and procedures.

Another form of triangulation that I employed is one that received a significant amount of negative debate during the early developmental stages of qualitative research—*theoretical triangulation*. Early in the qualitative research journey, some researchers barely broached the subject of theoretical triangulation. Denzin (1970) for instance, identified four types of triangulation—(a) data, (b) investigator, (c) theory, and (d) methodology. While discussing theoretical triangulation, Denzin sheepishly acknowledged, “theoretical triangulation is an element that few investigations achieve” (p. 303). Despite discussing some of the advantages and challenges associated with attempting to employ theoretical triangulation, some researchers, such as Mathison (1988), suggested that Denzin only “seriously suggested three types of triangulations since the notion of theoretical triangulation is problematic at best and likely impossible in reality” (p. 14). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested any information gleaned from the triangulation of multiple theories that allowed a researcher to confirm a given finding was due primarily to the similarity of the

theories and not necessarily due to the significance of the finding itself (p. 307). To support their view, Lincoln and Guba cited how various concepts embedded in Newtonian theory pertaining to gravity are analogous, and therefore, reflected in theories pertaining to relativity. As a result, Lincoln and Guba concluded that triangulation using multiple theories was “epistemologically unsound and empirically empty” (p. 307).

Despite receiving such harsh pushback in the early stages of development, the seeds for successful use of theoretical triangulation were planted, gently cultivated and, with the passage of time, the proof of its efficacy finally came to fruition. Denzin (1970), for example, began his discussion of theoretical triangulation by presenting a hypothetical research scenario where renowned behavioral theorists, Erving Goffman, Herbert Blumer and George Homans would approach a research project pertaining to the analysis of small-group behavior from different theoretical perspectives (pp. 303-307). Denzin then illustrated how various challenges would arise as each theorist sought to employ their unique perspective to a given problem, but Denzin concluded that the solution to these challenges was to use all of the proposition from each theory and to examine which propositions proved to be applicable and which did not.

In the end, Denzin (1970) purported, a refined theoretical system would emerge that suggests several facets of each theory operate within a given phenomenon. Moreover, the resulting theory, according to Denzin (1970) would “reflect the discriminatory power of each perspective” (p. 307). Likewise, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) initial view refuting the effectiveness of theoretical triangulation was uttered in the somewhat nascent stages of qualitative research development and, following more than three decades of evolution in qualitative research, they modified their view regarding triangulation of theories. Lincoln and Guba (2016) noted that qualitative research has evolved greatly, and the use of multiple theories as a form of triangulation has gained greater acceptance among qualitative

researchers and scholars. They also acknowledged that many researchers now use the multi-theory triangulation technique and concluded that researchers can use such forms of triangulation to “ensure credibility” (Location 1502). In keeping with Lincoln and Guba’s (2016) updated and more enlightened view, I used a combination of Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory and Schlossberg’s (1981, 2011) adult transition theory and key theoretical aspects of Husserl’s (1931/2012) transcendental phenomenology to assist with gaining a greater understanding of the phenomenon being examined.

Member checking. Besides triangulation, I employed what Lincoln and Guba (1985) called “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314)—*member checking*. Member checking is the process of taking the transcribed notes or findings to the participant and obtaining feedback regarding the researcher’s accuracy of capturing the information provided by the participant (Angen, 2000; Hadi & Closs, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Willis et al., 2016). It is a technique that seeks to strengthen validity of a study by going back to the participant to refine the accuracy of the data collected (Bengtsson, 2016, p. 13). The acts of going back to the participants and soliciting their feedback help to ensure both descriptive validity (i.e., capturing the exact description rendered by the participant) and interpretive validity (i.e., accurately describing the meanings that participants conveyed regarding the phenomenon being examined) (Willis et al, 2016, pp. 1196-1197). While the member checking technique’s function of seeking to increase accuracy is frequently described as similar to triangulation, the distinctive feature revolves around the judgment aim of each technique’s process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a researcher executes the process of triangulation with “respect to *data*” (p. 315) and seeks to verify a single issue or datum against other sources; whereas, a researcher employs member checking with “respect to *constructions*” (pp. 315-316). Hence, the overall aim of member checking focuses on the

“judgment of overall credibility”, while judgement regarding the accuracy of a definitive item of data is the primary focus of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

After the development of themes, member checks offer the researcher opportunities to ensure that “both descriptive validity (the precise description conveyed by the participants) and interpretive validity (accurate description of the meanings participants give to the phenomenon)” (Willis et al., 2016, pp. 1196-1197) are manifested in the data analysis efforts. Member checking enhances the second tenet of Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) credibility criteria because it seeks to capture insight and approval from the “constructors of the multiple realities” (p. 296). Member checking also has an alternative function of allowing participants to reflect on the data collection process and become more aware of the issues being examined. In this respect, member checking can serve as a tool to enhance, what Lincoln and Guba (2016) termed, “*ontological authenticity*” (Location 941) because it allows the participants to “become more informed or sophisticated” (Location 941). In some cases, member checking could prompt participants to become more aware of concepts and because “the inquiry brought them from the tacit to the propositional level” (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, Location 941). Acknowledging the possibility of enlightenment after the initial interview, the participants are given an opportunity to ensure the accuracy and add integrity to the findings.

Conversely, critics of the member checking technique have often underscored how employing such a tool can lead to findings that contradict qualitative principles and goals. Some critics, for example, highlight one of the major shortcomings of member checking relates to an assumption about reality, which does not coincide with fundamental qualitative tenets—similar to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) purported charge of a flawed assumption of a “single, tangible reality” (p. 28) held by positivists. These critics purported that the act of seeking accuracy via member checking requires the belief of an assumption predicated on “a fixed truth or reality against which the account can be measured” (Angen, 2000, p. 383). If

researchers and participants were to execute member checking in accordance to these critic's the concept of trustworthiness would be severely damaged. In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985) addressed such a view in the following manner:

Under this ontological position, the constructed realities ought to match the tangible entities as closely as possible not, however, in order to create a derivative or reconstructed single reality (or fulfill the criterion of objectivity), but rather to represent the multiple constructions of individuals (or fulfill the criterion of fairness).
(p. 84)

Hence, in an effort to enhance trustworthiness, '*fairness*' should be one of the primary goals of member checking.

Besides possible conflicts with qualitative ontological positions, some critics have noted that not all of the data used in member checking is collected from the participants, but often include "field notes, the author's reflective journal and non-verbal signs which the respondents may not 'own as their personal views'" (Hadi & Closs, 2016, p. 643). In addition, some critics contend that, when it comes to participants assisting with determining the accuracy of the information, researchers risk losing sight of the fact that some of their findings are based on a synthesis of "data obtained from interviewing/observing a number of participants, making it difficult for individuals to recognize his/her own view" (Hadi & Closs, 2016, p. 643). Such a loss of focus or overreaching attempts to gain accuracy could lead to reduced credibility.

In addition, researchers must recognize that participants are human and could change their minds upon reviewing the initial data. In some cases, the participants may not agree with the researchers' interpretations of various responses and the disagreements could possibly generate moral dilemmas regarding whose interpretation should be recorded in the final reports (Angen, 2000, p. 383). Such disagreements could also stem from lack of

memory due to time elapsing between data collection and employment of member checking or, in some cases, the participants may have second thoughts about revealing some aspects of their behavior during the interview that were less than flattering (Bengtsson, 2016; Brit et al., 2016).

While a transcendental phenomenological study seeks to refrain from interpreting experiences and, instead, relies more on descriptions of an experience, the act of collecting data and extracting their meanings still requires some form of judgement on the part of the researcher. Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported that member checking is a tool to assess the “intentionality” (p. 314) of a respondent. After all, they added, any attempt to ensure fairness in the process must refrain from over simplifying a view or, even worse, creating an indistinct view that “represents *no one’s* reality” (p. 315). In an effort to maintain trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported the researchers are not required to “honor all of the criticisms that are mounted” (p. 315) but they are “bound to hear them and weigh their meaningfulness” (p. 315). To maintain credibility, and vis-à-vis trustworthiness, it was imperative for me, the researcher, to articulate why a particular interpretation remains as part of the final work. Disclosure of disagreement with participants as part of the member checking process could also enhance credibility by reflecting integrity throughout the process. Given the methodology for the current study is transcendental phenomenology, I employed member checking after the initial verbatim transcriptions were completed to “ensure both descriptive validity (the precise description conveyed by the participants) and interpretive validity (accurate description of the meanings participants give to the phenomenon) (Willis et al., 2016, pp. 1196-1197). I did not add my own interpretation, as this study was passed on the tenets of transcendental phenomenology; instead, I relied on the collective descriptions provided by all participants.

Being aware of the advantages and possible disadvantages of member checking requires additional consideration. For example, I ensured that member checking was an appropriate technique to employ for my research design (Birt et al., 2016, p. 1806). Since I was using a transcendental phenomenology design, it was imperative that I used member checking to ensure that I captured and conveyed the participants' views properly. While one may assume that the acts of executing an accurate and verbatim transcription are key to ensuring trustworthiness, such a view may, in actuality, reduce the level of trustworthiness of one's research. That is, Creswell (2018) cautioned researchers to consider the appropriate research lenses, i.e. "researchers, participants, readers, and reviewers" (p. 263), when deciding upon a "specific validation strategy" (p. 263). It is important to note that, "trustworthiness is gained when researchers show that their data were ethically and mindfully collected, analyzed, and reported" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1110). In fact, trustworthiness can be enhanced if researchers choose wisely among key member checking options—e.g., "alterations to transcribing, partial and interpreted transcript selections, and more information given up front" (Carlson, 2010, p. 1110). Understanding the aforementioned tenets of trustworthiness when using member checking, served as the basis for recording and reporting information related to the current study.

Dependability and Confirmability

The conventional evaluative criteria of dependability in qualitative research is reflective of the concept of reliability in quantitative research (Creswell, 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2016). Dependability focuses on the consistency of the process and addresses how a researcher's findings or outcomes emerge from such a process (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Just as reliability is determined in relationship to validity, dependability is assessed in "relation to credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 23). In other words, the techniques used to reveal findings or formulate outcomes, if performed in an open and

transparent manner, should reveal *similar* or “idiographic” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 38) results if performed by another researcher. Care is taken to refrain from suggesting that repeated performance of a given technique would reveal the *same* results or unveil some form of a definitive truth. This view is predicated upon several assumptions among qualitative researchers. First, even in its most conventional form, Cook and Campbell (1979) described validity as an “approximation to the truth or falsity of propositions” (p. 37) and purported that no one could ever know definitively “what is true” (p. 37). Hence, researchers should not attempt or expect arriving at the same results from a previously studied phenomenon because to do so would require the latter researcher to embrace the concept of “naïve realism” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Such a naïve reality is rooted in the ontological assumption that a constant or unchanging reality exists and facilitates the futile attempt of seeking to ascertain the positivist concepts of predictability, consistency and repeatability in the resulting findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2016).

Different individuals construct the definition of reality via the use of “some common referent term” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 84). The reality, therefore, is not formed or constructed collectively; instead, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported that the construction of realities often corresponds to concrete or palpable artifacts. Hence, the goals of the qualitative researcher is to possess a constructivist ontological position, which closely matches these concrete or palpable entities while simultaneously refraining from attempting to generate a definitive reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the researcher must seek to present results that are reflective of the multiple realities or constructions of the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To achieve these goals, the researcher must carefully document the research processes and procedures to ensure that dependability is apparent and inherent throughout the research process. Questions pertaining to methodological modifications could cause reviewers to

question the rationale for such changes; likewise, decisions regarding possible premature closure of a particular theme could generate concerns that question the researcher's motives or over reliance on preconceived ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the case of the current study, an audit technique was used to address the dependability evaluative criterion. This technique employed an independent representative examining the process and procedures used throughout the study (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2016; Phillips & de Wet, 2017). The dependability audit also highlights any changes to the current design and addresses the rationale for implementing such changes (Phillips & de Wet, 2017).

Another concept of trustworthiness that benefits from the use of an audit is *confirmability*. The confirmability criterion corresponds to the positivist's criterion of objectivity (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (2016) defined confirmability as the trustworthiness criterion that evaluates how well the outcomes and interpretations generated by the investigator corresponds to the consistent processes, procedures and data collection mechanisms employed by the researcher (Location 1463). The key difference between dependability and confirmability revolves around the understanding and assessing of the acceptability of the process employed during the study (dependability) versus the support of findings or outcomes based on the data and not the arbitrary or capricious decisions of the investigator (confirmability) (Creswell, 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In his earlier works, Guba (1981) used the term "neutrality" (p. 80) to convey the parallel positivist concept of objectivity and posed a question that, if answered within the confines of the study, one could easily develop mechanisms to address the concept of confirmability. Specifically, Guba suggested that researchers seek to answer the following question to address the concept of confirmability:

How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests, perspectives and so on of the inquirer? (p. 80)

The preceding question prompts researchers to contemplate how they will ensure confirmability, not from a post hoc position at the conclusion of generating data, but from an a priori or de novo position such that measures can be taken throughout the process to enhance confirmability. It is important to note here that the researcher's worldview coupled with the phenomenon under investigation will determine the philosophical position and the epistemic position of the research (Moon et al., 2016). Hence, to mitigate risks associated with biases and to increase confidence that the views of the participants are reflected in the findings, researchers must reflect on their worldview and corresponding philosophical assumptions and assiduously document their perspective throughout the research process (Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 2016; Moon et al, 2016; Noble & Smith, 2015). Despite the desire to attain confirmability, Creswell (2018) cautioned researchers about the silencing power of objective writing and noted that such objectivity writing has the potential of silencing the researcher, the participant and violating the very purpose of a qualitative study that seeks to give voice to the participant.

Unlike the quantitative researcher who focuses on the method used to ensure objectivity, I instead employed procedures to reflect integrity of the data by ensuring that the data can be traced back to their original sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For example, to comply with the aforementioned guidance pertaining to confirmability, I employed the concept of "reflexivity, i.e., a self-assessment of subjectivity" (Moon et al., 2016, p. 2) to aid in reducing bias during the study. I maintained a reflexive journal to help me to both remain aware my biases and reveal my biases throughout the propose study (Creswell, 2018; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 2016). This act of journaling helped me to address my epistemic

views and assumptions and simultaneously serve as a source for a confirmability audit to assess various decisions I make throughout the study (Creswell, 2018; Guba, 1981). Hence, in qualitative research, changes in instrumentation orientation (i.e., the human instrument), when well documented, explained rationally, and transparent, can help to increase dependability, confirmability, consistency and “stability” in a study and improve the level of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981).

Because confirmability pertains to the level of accuracy that the information provided is reflective of the information provided by the participants and not the investigator, it is imperative that I keep accurate journal notes to increase trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014). That is, because I was conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, I sought to describe accounts of the phenomenon being investigated from the perspective of the participants. Hence, any notes that I recorded relating to “latent content (noticing silence, sighs, laughter, posture etc.)” (Elo et al., 2014, p. 5), I exercised great care to ensure that the information recorded can be traced back to a specific event. Such detailed documentation were employed to reduce improper inferences on the part of reviewers regarding whose voice or perspective is reflected in the information. Electronically recorded copies of interviews and subsequent transcriptions were maintained to allow an auditor to review the “raw data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and make a determination regarding the integrity of the data use to generate themes and other points of interests.

While both confirmability and dependability require detailed recording of processes and procedures, there are still some aspects of qualitative research where researchers must determine which types of changes within the study are captured by the appropriate criterion. For example, in their earlier works, Guba and Lincoln (1989) underscored how changes that transpire due to “overt methodological decisions” (p. 242) on the part of evaluators, or those that can be attributed to “maturing reconstructions” (p. 242), are not captured as part of the

dependability criterion. Such changes can potentially serve as major sources of contention and generate much consternation among positivist reviewers regarding the reliability of the study. Despite this view, Guba and Lincoln purported that these changes are not only expected but also welcomed in the qualitative realm of research. The primary rationale for this conclusion is manifested in the idea that researchers should constantly seek to uncover “increasingly sophisticated constructs” (Guba, 1981, p. 242). According to Guba (1981), “Far from being threats to dependability, such changes and shifts are hallmarks of a maturing—and successful—inquiry” (p. 242). Lincoln and Guba (2016) described maturity as the ability of a person to actively listen, contemplate and, often in a non-faultfinding manner, reflect upon the mental synthesis—including the process of crystallization of ideas—of another person who hold views that may differ from one’s own views. While my desire to execute such nonjudgmental considerations (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 2016) may be noteworthy, Guba and Lincoln (1989) also underscored the need for researchers to track such revelations of more sophisticated constructs and changes to original goals in a manner that is traceable by external reviewers. In the current study, I did not seek to view variations of data retrieved from the participants as errant or unreliable; rather, I sought to determine whether my perception of the data is aligned with my understanding of the concept of maturity.

The concept of a construction is rooted in the very definition of ontology. That is, if people know what they know, then how do they know more than they do at a particular point in space and time (Lincoln & Guba, 2016)? Therefore, their present knowledge, or construct, is subject to a continuous barrage of change influences because new knowledge can only form as greater information becomes available and the level of sophistication to perceive and understand such information improves accordingly (Lincoln & Guba, 2016). Moreover, the degree of change can range from a small inclusion of additional information or

understanding, to a high level of sophistication or even a “complete paradigm shift” (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, Location 825). A dependability audit, therefore, would capture such information and afford a reviewer an opportunity to track, review and assess the rationale supporting any corresponding decisions that affect change throughout the study (e.g., methodology, design). Key aspects of the dependability audit include creation of the audit trail via the documentation of the interview notes coupled with the documentation of the overall process via a daily journal.

Naturalistic inquirers, on the other hand, are inclined to use themselves as the instruments, willingly trading off some objectivity and reliability (in the rationalistic sense) in order to gain greater flexibility and the opportunity to build upon tacit knowledge (a feature that paper-and-pencil or physical instruments can never have) (Guba, 1981). I conducted structural corroboration by using numerous types of data to validate or refute the conclusions regarding the essence of the data (Creswell, 2018). To ensure that the preponderance of evidence was persuasive, I also sought and obtained accordant substantiation or findings from subject matter experts in the field (Creswell, 2018). Specifically, I requested assistance from my chair. I sought advice prior to beginning of the study and during the analysis of the data. I also requested that the chair perform an audit trail to increase the level of dependability and confirmability embedded in the study (Creswell, 2018). The primary purpose of the external auditor was to determine whether the collected and analyzed data can support my findings, descriptions and subsequent conclusions (Creswell, 2013).

Transferability

Another concept that increases trustworthiness in qualitative inquiries is *transferability*. Transferability refers to the degree of applicability of the results to other groups or settings or to another context (Bengtsson, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morse, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (2016), transferability correlates to the

generalizability or “external validity criterion of positivism” (Location 1456). Despite the comparability of the terms, there is a significant difference in qualitative studies in that there is no definitive or “single correct or ‘true’ interpretation in the naturalistic paradigm” (Moon et al., 2016, p. 392). Although Lincoln and Guba (2016) purported such a correlation between the terms, they were clear to discern major differences between the two concepts. Moreover, they appeared to have suggested that qualitative inquirers understand the differences before attempting to make claims of transferability. Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted how the criterion of external validity and internal validity exist in a constant “trade-off” state (p. 296). Similarly, Campbell, Stanley, and Gage (1966) noted, the two criteria are “frequently at odds in that features increasing one may jeopardize the other” (p. 5). This dueling relationship between internal and external validity, according to Denzin (1970), is predicated on the concept of *causation*. Specifically, Denzin (1970) described the relationship in the following manner:

All research methods must provide answers to the problem of causal inference. A method must permit its user to gather data concerning time, order and covariance between variables, while allowing the discarding of rival causal factors. When it is claimed that one variable or process caused another, it must be shown that the causal variable occurs before that it is assumed to cause; that is, as the causal variable changes value, so too must the variable being caused. (p. 20)

According to Denzin (1970) the causal factors are better described as “rival causal factors” (p. 21) and traditionally are categorized as either internal or external, which correspond to internal validity and external validity, respectively (p. 21). Denzin also purported that these rival factors stem from “time and passage; the situation of observation; characteristics of those observed; characteristics of the observer; and interaction among any of the preceding four elements” (p. 21). Hence, the goal of the researcher and those

reviewing the research is to determine whether the “causal proposition” (Denzin, 1970, p. 21) that the researcher has developed accurately depicts the experience or phenomena being studied or whether procedures, methodology or processes used to observe the phenomena or experience affected the results (Denzin, 1970, p. 21).

From the qualitative perspective, transferability corresponds to external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 291). Hence, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purported that when researchers or users of the research attempt to determine the applicability of research between two contexts, they must rely on the degree of transferability to comprehend the “direct function of the similarity between the two contexts, what we shall call ‘fittingness’” (p. 124). To enhance understanding of the topic of scientific rigor from a qualitative perspective, Lincoln and Guba (1985) addressed one of the salient differences between transferability and generalizability. That is, they highlighted how it is not necessary for one to make a judgment regarding the generalizability between two contexts as long as the assumption regarding the origin of the two contexts stemming from the same population where the representative samples were drawn proved to be true. On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba noted that if a person desires to make a judgment regarding transferability, he or she must acquire information about “*both* contexts” (p. 124) to perform such judgment appropriately.

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) position pertaining to generalizability and sampling—while perhaps infuriating to some positivists—coincides with two of the most renowned researchers in the quantitative field of study—Thomas D. Cook and Donald T. Campbell. That is, Cook and Campbell (1979) employed great effort to discern the difference between *generalizing to* and *generalizing across* contexts (p. 72). Though highly touted among positivists, Cook and Campbell acknowledged that “formal random sampling for representativeness is rare in field research, so that strict generalizing to targets of external validity is rare” (p. 73). Instead, Cook and Campbell described the practice as “one of

generalizing across haphazard instances where similar-appearing treatment are implemented” (p. 73). Even in cases of formal generalization, Cook and Campbell argued that research success relies on the use of large population samples, which inevitably suffer from difficulty in administration of “treatment implementation and securing high-quality measurement” (p. 73) and attrition. Moreover, the final population, according to Cook and Campbell (1979), often does not reflect the characteristics of the original population upon which the research was initiated. This view coincided with Campbell et al.’s (1966) earlier work where they deemed both internal and external validity as “important,” (p. 5) and purported that internal validity in research was “sine qua non” (p. 5) while the question regarding “external validity, like the question of inductive inference, is never completely answerable” (p. 5). Without relinquishing the desire to “generalize research findings” (p. 73), Cook and Campbell (1979) concluded that “a case may be made, therefore, that external validity is enhanced more by a number of smaller studies with haphazard samples than by a single study with initially representative samples if the later could be implemented” (p. 73). Hence, this study’s current use of purposeful sampling—particularly maximum variation sampling—coincides with scientific rigor guidelines suggested by some of the most renowned positivists in the field of quantitative studies.

While transferability is desired, Denzin (1970) cautioned researchers about the potential deception that inheres in “some pseudo-regularity” (p. 125) or overgeneralizing “the conditions in which a regularity occurs” (p.125). In some instances, policymakers may over rely on the results of a single qualitative study or a few small studies and make decisions that often rely “on evidence from a range of contexts that can be different to the one in which applications will be made” (Moon et al., 2016, p. 17). To avoid the latter shortcoming or significantly reduce its effects, some researchers have suggested the use of a technique known as *thick description* to facilitate transferability in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2018;

Denzin, 2001; Levitt et al., 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tuckett, 2005). According to Denzin (2001), thick description is “the art” (Thick description, p. 2) of expressing an idea or “giving an account of something in words” (Thick description, p. 2). Thick descriptions go beyond the mere regurgitation of facts—a feat Denzin described as “thin description” (Thick description, p. 2)—and seek to provide the reader with “deep, dense, detailed accounts of problematic experiences” (Denzin, 2001, Thick description, p. 2). Denzin (2001) also described four tenets that are manifested in all thick descriptions:

- (a) It gives the context of an action, (b) it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action, (c) it traces the evolution and development of the action, and (d) it presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. (The interpretive point of view, p. 31).

These prominent characteristics of thick descriptions serve as the gatekeepers to legitimacy in the evaluation of transferability vis-a-vis trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Moreover, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted, “the naturalist cannot specify the external validity on an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). As a result, in qualitative studies, the user of the information is responsible for the generalization or transferability of the work and the writer must provide adequate detail to facilitate this judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316, 2016, location 1081; Tuckett, 2005, p. 39).

Although the number of participants in this study may be limited, the preponderance of literature regarding military-connected students purport there are several areas where insights revealed during studies were transferable (qualitative findings) or generalizable (quantitative). This study, although limited, could possibly be transferrable to numerous states where military-connected students attend schools. Moreover, the current study will

seek variation in branch of service, rank structure, gender, and ethnic background. While military-connected students possess characteristics and attributes of many groups, “they also share a common set of experiences that derive from the structure of their parents’ occupation” (Arnold et al., 2014, p. 9). The commonality of experiences, regardless of the sponsor’s branch of Service or location, binds military-connected students throughout the United States (Russo & Fallon, 2015).

Another important aspect that is also transferable is the awareness of the vexation military-connected students and their families experience related to the “differences in curriculum, standards, assessments, grading, and service delivery processes and policies from state to state and school to school” (Arnold et al., 2014, p. 12). To increase the level of transferability of this study, I ensured that the participants were reflective of as many branches of Service as possible. I also sought to reflect the diversity of the United States Armed Forces by purposefully selecting participants from different branches of Service, races, gender, and phases of transition. In addition, to ensure such areas of transferability are manifested in this study, I engaged in a detailed description capturing process that Denzin (2001) coined as “thick description” (Chapter 6, p. 2). I sought to obtain clear statements that addressed intentionality as well as in-depth descriptions of the time and place or settings where events or phenomena occur. According to Levitt et al. (2017), “Clear statements about setting, culture, and time period in relation to variations in the finding permit the appropriate transferability of findings across contexts and enable the understanding of how findings might answer related questions” (p. 15). By remaining culturally aware of the participants’ military milieu, I believe I was able to put the participants more at ease and create an environment where participants are willing and eager to provide high quality feedback.

Ethical Considerations

Obtaining Permission and Consent Related to Participants

One of the primary areas of ethical considerations for this study revolves around the use of school-age children as research participants. According to Subpart D of Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46, children are defined as “persons who have not attained the legal age for consent to treatments or procedures involved in the research, under the applicable law of the jurisdiction in which the research will be conducted” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). As such, the regulation classifies children as a special group of people who could become vulnerable when serving as participants in research studies; thus, the regulation establishes guidelines to ensure the protection of this particular group. One of these guidelines require researchers to obtain permission from parents to allow their children to become participants in research studies. Given that this study took place in Virginia and involved high school students, the age of many participants did not meet Virginia’s legal age of consent of 18. Hence, I exercised special care and consideration to comply with the regulation and obtain parental permission before involving the military-connected students in the study.

After I obtained informed consent from the parents, I engaged in another process of contacting military-connected students and sought to obtain their assent, or affirmed agreement, to participate in the study. It is important to underscore that this study sought to investigate the experiences of high school military-connected students and not Kindergarten through eighth grade students. Part of the rationale for implementing this delimitation was to ensure that I investigated students along the maturation continuum who were capable of both deciding and communicating their assent or dissent to participate in the study. Such a consideration regarding the decision-making capacity of the participants also supports my decision for structuring the assent form for these participants in a manner that is similar to that of the adults.

In a 2006 study of transition among military-connected students, for example, Bradshaw et al. (2010) used a combination of adults and school-age children. The school-age military-connected students ranged from 12 to 18 years of age (p. 87). While the authors of the study acknowledged the collection of consent from both parents and the military-connected students, the study failed to address whether the consent forms varied in terms of content or structure to account for the significant differences in maturity levels.

The consent and assent forms complied with several key considerations mandated in Title 45 CFR 46. To ensure compliance, I used the Liberty University Informed Consent form to address the following eight basic elements outlined in the regulation: (a) a statement conveying the overall purpose, duration and procedures of the research; (b) a description of any foreseeable risks and level of discomfort, if any, anticipated; (c) the corresponding benefits expected from the study; (d) a discussion of any alternative procedures or actions that may provide an advantage to the participant; (e) a statement addressing how confidentiality will be maintained; (f) if a risk exceeding the minimal risk is foreseeable, participants will be informed of medical options, if any, should they sustain injuries; (g) contact information of key personnel in case of injury related to the study or questions regarding participants' rights; and (h) a full explanation that participation was voluntary and an explanation addressing how participants could withdraw from the procedures if they chose to do so (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009), Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46, §116).

Privacy and Confidentiality

Given this study involved the use of personal interviews to collect data regarding military-connected students' experiences, the issues of privacy and confidentiality were special areas of ethical consideration that required a significant amount of forethought and planning. Prior to conducting the study, it was imperative to collect parental permission

forms for those students who were younger than 18 years of age and assent from the students themselves. Such data contain information that can identify parents and students on an individual level. Title 45 CFR Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects, defines private information in the following manner:

Private information includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place, and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual and which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (for example, a medical record). Private information must be individually identifiable (§46.102 Definitions)

Because Liberty University's IRB requires validation of receipt of consent from parents where applicable and assent from the military-connected students participating in the study, the information collected must be identifiable. Consequently, the data collected meets the definition of private information. In addition, when I collected interviews via digital recordings, I was able to reconnect with participants to conduct subsequent member checks and validate accurate documentation of the interview. While I used methods to conceal participants' identities during the recordings, I also had to implement measures to re-identify individuals for subsequent member checking procedures. These measures included a complex military style numbering methodology coupled with a double pseudonym naming scheme so names appearing in the final document did not match any names noted on the initial or subsequent data collection documents.

I took extra precautions to safeguard private information throughout the study. During the study, I respected the privacy of participants, and kept participants' identities confidential (e.g., via the use of pseudonyms or identification codes). I also secured all data using password protected software and stored information in a Government Services

Administration (GSA) Class 6 security safe fitted with an electromechanical safe lock (X-10™) that meets Federal Specification FF-L-2740B.

During this study, it was foreseeable that some military-connected students might express a potentially negative way of coping with stress related to their academic experience during transition to different schools. In cases where military-connected students might reveal information that suggested they may be a harm to themselves or others, I informed participants that I was obligated to report such information to the appropriate authorities and convey the information to parents, so that they could acquire the appropriate resources to address the issue. Thus, I notified participants and their parents of my obligation to report such information accordingly.

Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

The primary premises underlying this study suggest that military-connected students are unique due to the military culture in which they live. Moreover, one of the major shortcomings noted in numerous studies examining military-connected students is that often educators exhibit a lack of awareness when interacting with these students (Arnold et al., 2014; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Brendel, Maynard, Albright, & Bellomo, 2014). Although I used bracketing to minimize my personal worldview influences on the study, it was imperative that I used my past experience as a military officer and parent of four military-connected students to serve as a guide for understanding some of the sensitive cultural aspects of the military environment and culture. I attempted to form a relationship with the subjects by showing awareness of even the most subtle aspects of military life. In some cases, for example, I showed my awareness of the military culture by referring to the place where some military-connected students reside as either a base or a post depending on the branch of Service that operated the military installation. I also developed rapport with military-connected students by illustrating my understanding of the rank structure and

professional interactions among certain groups within the military.

Despite the desire to establish rapport through my understanding of military culture, I too had to remain vigilant of the shortcomings that were immanent in research when such connections were untempered. That is, Lincoln and Guba (1985) cautioned against the “over identification of the inquirer with the cultural values that characterize a group or situation being studied” (p. 177). Such acts often lead to errors in the study, because researchers tend to produce results that are favorable to the population or participants being studied (Creswell, 2013, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, failing to account for one’s biases also serves as an inimical force to trustworthiness. In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the act of a researcher who fails to either recognize or acknowledge intrinsic cultural values within the group being studied, that may differ from the his or her own cultural values, as “ethnocentrism” (p. 177). Hence, the act of self-examination on the part of the researcher is critical to the trustworthiness and ethical value of a study.

Throughout this study, I demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of the military-connected students (Creswell, 2013, p. 58). For example, because of various findings regarding potential psychological or emotional stressors that military-connected students experience, I ensured that I demonstrated sincere empathy and concern as part of the overall interview process. I also attempted to conduct a survey of potential participants and ensured that I include the selection of some military-connected students whose family members were currently deployed or have deployed in support of military operations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These participants assisted with my acquisition of knowledge concerning unique aspects of military life that contributed to military-connected high school students’ stress levels.

Unexpected Difficulties and Challenges and Corresponding Reporting Procedures

The Code of Federal Regulation (Title 45 CFR 46) underscores preparing for unexpected situations and the corresponding risks that may occur in the process of conducting research of human subjects and directs researchers to prepare action plans to mitigate such risks. According to the CFR researchers of human subjects must employ written procedures to report “unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others” (Title 45 CFR, Part 46 § 103b(5)). Although the term unanticipated problems is not defined in the CFR, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2007) issued additional guidance to clarify the aforementioned directive (p. 4). The guidance defines an unanticipated problem as an experience, incident or outcome that meets each of the following three unique criteria:

- (1) unexpected (in terms of nature, severity, or frequency) given (a) the research procedures that are described in the protocol-related documents, such as the IRB-approved research protocol and informed consent document; and (b) the characteristics of the subject population being studied;
 - (2) related or possibly related to participation in the research (in this guidance document, possibly related means there is a reasonable possibility that the incident, experience, or outcome may have been caused by the procedures involved in the research); and
 - (3) suggests that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm (including physical, psychological, economic, or social harm) than was previously known or recognized.
- (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007, p. 4)

Given this guidance, efforts regarding reporting of unanticipated problems revolve around a determination that the problem was unexpected, related to the study, and places the participants or others at a greater risk of harm.

The literature related to military-connected students provides some insights regarding possible problems that can arise during this study. For example, a number of researchers

investigating military-connected students suggest that some participants may experience some level of emotional or psychological harm during data collection procedures (e.g., interviews, focus groups) (Trautmann et al., 2015; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). In fact, some researchers purported that military-connected students experience greater “negative psychological, social, and emotional outcomes than their civilian peers,” (Astor et al., 2013, p. 233) but contend that schools can mitigate a significant level of negative impact by implementing a supportive environment focused on addressing the needs of military-connected students. The psychological effects that many military-connected students experience also appear to be heightened when at least one of the parents deploy (Creech et al, 2014, p. 4; Lucier-Greer et al., 2016;). Moreover, some researchers suggest that the negative psychological and emotional effects of deployment can be especially difficult for military-connected students of single-parent families (Skomorovsky et al., 2016).

Besides emotional and psychological stress, some military-connected students coping with the deployment of a parent during transition experience physical effects such as increased levels of stress, elevated blood pressure and rapid heart rates (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016, p. 2). If any unanticipated problem had occurred during this study, the problem would have been reported to the IRB immediately. The only exception to an immediate report would be execution of emergency actions on my part to prevent the occurrence of a major health or life-threatening situation. That is, if I had become aware of such a situation, I would have initially attempted to prevent the situation and I would have contacted the proper authorities (e.g., emergency medical personnel, first responders) to assist with prevention of harm to the participant or others. I would have then notify Liberty University in accordance with procedures outlined in the university’s IRB procedures.

To comply with the guidance outlined in 45 CFR 46, Subpart A pertaining to unanticipated problems, I initially sought to categorize situations and my corresponding

actions in a manner to either avoid unnecessary stoppages to research and unwarranted reporting of incidents to the IRB or execution of prompt reporting of incidents where appropriate. I decided to determine which incidents would be considered *adverse events* and sought to determine which adverse events, if any, would warrant reporting if the incidents met the definition of an unanticipated problem as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2007) guidance. According to the guidance, adverse events can be either physical or psychological in nature and are normally associated with biomedical research but can occasionally emerge in the performance of social behavioral research (p. 5).

Other Ethical Considerations

I also implemented a meaningful reciprocity mechanism to help participants feel that their input was worthwhile and important. For example, I provided each participant that completed all of the requirements with a digital recording device and an Army Air Force Exchange Store gift card valued at \$20. During data reporting, I also presented both positive and negative aspects of the study. Finally, I made all efforts to avoid any conflicts of interest.

Summary

In short, Chapter Three outlined a clear rationale substantiating why the selection of a qualitative design, specifically transcendental phenomenology, is an appropriate approach for capturing the voices of military-connected students describing the academic experiences they encounter when relocating across various states. Using the works of Creswell (2018), Husserl (1931/2012) and Moustakas (1994) to guide my design selection, phenomenological data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures, this chapter delineated the methodology of how the study proceeded and the role that I assumed as the researcher. Data were collected using purposeful sampling and participants were selected across a broad spectrum of Services, genders, ethnicities, and rand structures of sponsors, to ensure maximum variation. In addition to purposeful sampling techniques to acquire participants,

this chapter underscored some of the key data analysis tools and processes suggested by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (e.g., horizontalization, clustering and theme identification, rich descriptions). This chapter noted how these tools were used to help reveal the essence of the military-connected students' experiences. Moreover, the military-connected students were able to convey their experiences from their perspective.

In Chapter Four, the results of this research will be addressed in detailed. Specifically, I will present the data in the forms of charts and tables where applicable. Using the themes generated from the analysis procedures explicated in Chapter Three, I will also present data in a narrative format to correspond to the respective research questions. All data will be presented in the order of themes extracted from the research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and revolves around the findings of the study. To reiterate, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who transition to different states. Pursuant of this purpose, at the conclusion of the data collection and analysis phases of the investigation, several key themes emerged and are herein grouped, addressed and sequentially aligned with the research questions, which the themes seek to answer. With respect to describing the military-connected high school students' academic experiences, the following overarching theme emerged: *Help Me To Understand and Understand Me to Help*. In regards to the types of coping resources used and how they are employed, the following theme emerged: *Coping Resources Start With Me*. When describing their level of confidence pertaining to their future academic outlook, military-connected high school students' responses generated the following theme: *Be All You Can See*.

To prevent obfuscation, the content and organization of this chapter are presented in a manner to complement the procedures outlined in Chapter Three. That is, this chapter begins by taking the participant information that was presented in tabular form in Chapter Three and, through the use of rich descriptions, seeks to transform this information into palpable portraits of participants reflective of their respective cultures. Afterward, a discussion of the thematic development process ensues and underscores how the integration of various theoretical and phenomenological principles influenced the coding process and eventually led to the revelation of the resulting themes. Using these themes, derivatively formed subthemes, and direct quotes, this chapter then answers the respective research questions. Finally, a synopsis of the chapter's content is provided in the form of a succinct summary.

Participants

The participant pool was comprised of individuals with various characteristics to allow for maximum variation in many areas. One key variation highlighted in the participant composition pertains to the ages or maturity levels of the participants. Five of the participants were eighteen years of age or older and six were younger than the age of eighteen. Besides the ethnicity composition comprised of seven African Americans, one Asian, and three Caucasian participants, the participant pool also reflects variation in other important military categories. That is, of the 11 participants, nine noted that their military sponsors had deployed in the past, and one noted that his parent was currently deployed in a hostile area (i.e., Afghanistan). Seven of the 11 participants also noted that their military sponsors were currently serving on Active Duty and four noted that their military sponsors were veterans.

Dianna

Dianna is a military-connected high school student on the precipice of graduating. She relocated to Virginia during her eighth-grade year and later to a high school in the southern part of the country during her junior year. She is very positive in her demeanor but also appears to possess a protective barrier regarding her true inner feelings. That is, she is more than willing to share her experiences with another, but only after she establishes a certain level of trust with the person with whom she interacts. Although she is of Caucasian descent, she has many friends from various cultural backgrounds; thus, her most recent relocation to a school located in a rural, small town in the South has presented several challenges to her global-citizen worldview. Although she has experienced numerous relocations, she enjoys the traveling and meeting new people and aspects of the military experience. Her sponsor deployed multiple times during his military career and these deployments, Dianna deduced, are the primary source of psychological challenges that the

sponsor now faces. Moreover, Dianna's interactions with her sponsor and the concomitant experiences of living with a family member who suffers from psychological challenges have significantly affected how she views people who possess similar psychological challenges. Despite encountering a myriad of issues on the home front, Dianna has excelled in her academic endeavors and looks forward to graduating near the top of her class.

Sean

Sean is an African American who graduated from high school two years ago and is the oldest of three male siblings. He relocated during his freshman year of high school after being in one place for nearly five years. He is very articulate and possesses strong mathematical and artistic skills. Sean observed his sponsor deploy on numerous occasions and became more accepting of these absences as he gained insights about his sponsor's career and responsibilities. Despite performing extremely well in high school, Sean decided to seek employment and attend a community college while he contemplates future endeavors. As the oldest sibling, Sean takes time to encourage his younger siblings in the area of academics.

Felicia

Felicia graduated high school three years ago and is about to embark on her senior year in college. Despite the chasm in time between her eighth-grade relocation and now, she can vividly recall even the minutest details about her relocation from the Midwest to Virginia, because it was such a very traumatic event for her. Although Felicia is an African American military-connected student, she had been educated in predominantly Caucasian school systems since kindergarten due to her sponsor's unique military specialty. Shortly after leaving her small town school in the Midwest, she was astonished to enter a large high school that was extremely diverse and teeming with students who looked like her. Despite initial perturbations related to the relocation, Felicia reflected on how the academic environment allowed her to thrive as an individual and engage with people from various

cultural backgrounds. Felicia provided a profound understanding of the military-connected high school student's experience because she was able to reflect on her high school experience in its entirety. In addition, she provided insights that detailed how her perceptions pertaining to her academic outlook in high school were amiss from what she experienced in college.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a freshman in college but relocated to Virginia during her senior year of high school. Jennifer is of Caucasian descent, and she is the oldest sibling in her family. Unlike some military-connected high school students who relocate to Virginia from other states, Jennifer looked forward to leaving her old school located in the northern part of the country. In fact, she enthusiastically requested that the family relocate after initially learning that her sponsor had been given an opportunity to serve in a new assignment elsewhere. While her younger siblings and other family members wrestled with whether or not to accept the new assignment and weighed the pros and cons of potentially uprooting the family again, Jennifer continued her fervid campaign for executing the relocation. Little did the family know, that beneath the veil of exaggerated optimism, lie a little secret that was driving the push to relocate—*Jennifer was being bullied in school*. Jennifer's input offers intimate insights about a caustic academic environment and how it affects performance, provides unique views regarding possible victimization incidents involving military-connected high school students, and addresses how students can broach difficult subjects with family members or other trusted resources especially when such matters affect academic performance and self-esteem.

Vince

Vince is a physically large high school senior of Caucasian descent who moved to Virginia from the midwestern United States during his 11th-grade year and returned to the

Midwest for his senior year. His father, an Active Duty service member who is currently deployed in a hostile area overseas, is the primary reason Vince relocated twice during high school. Vince plays football and from appearance (i.e., easily appearing to possess more muscle than fat), he would seem to be a high school football coach's dream come true.

Unfortunately, Vince spent a significant amount of time during his junior and senior years of high school pleading with school administrators to make adjustments to his schedule to qualify for graduation or explaining to prospective college teams why he does not meet key academic eligibility requirements for potential incoming football players in accordance with the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I requirements. Although Vince is performing well in school, he often mulls over the lost opportunities he experienced due to military mobility relocation requirements.

Louise

Louise is a recently promoted senior in high school and relocated from the North to Virginia at the beginning of her seventh grade school year. Although she relocated frequently prior to her most recent move, over the past five years she has enjoyed making friends and spending her entire middle school and high school years in one location. She also started playing an instrument in elementary school and now, she is a top musician in the high school band. Because she is of Asian descent, she also enjoys participating in school-approved clubs and various social gatherings with other Asian Americans who attend her extremely diverse high school. Being in one area over the past five years has provided somewhat of a respite from the frequent moves she experienced in her earlier years; however, the specter of a potential military relocation has begun to haunt her. Moreover, this specter is not imperceptible but rather palpable, because Louise, who also has an older sibling, can recall the painful ordeal the family endured when it executed a military relocation during her brother's senior year of high school. While she admittedly has difficulty recalling much of

the discomfort from her earlier moves, the pain she believes she would endure, should the family receive orders to move now, would be almost insurmountable. As a result, Louise, together with her family, has devised alternative plans, which include living apart if necessary, to prevent experiencing such a painful event again. Louise's perspective sheds light on a reality that some military-connected high school students experience during an *anticipated event* as defined by Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012). It also negates possible degradation of data due to ex post facto memory recall discrepancies by providing insights from the perspective of her ongoing experiences.

Jacques

When first meeting Jacques, a thin African American with a Kobe Bryant like physique, the uneasy glances as he unsuccessfully attempts to look one in the eyes may prompt one to quickly characterize him as a bit diffident or abashed; however, such a description might significantly understate his true nature. As he becomes more comfortable with the person with whom he interacts and discusses topics about which he is passionate, his somewhat shy demeanor quickly gives way to exaggerated, and sometimes animated, body language that accents the main points of his conversation. Jacques is a high school junior and experienced a move between his 10th and 11th-grade years. Moreover, the most recent move appears to be devastating for Jacques.

Ritchie

Ritchie is a senior in high school and is looking forward to graduating. He is an African American and the middle sibling of three boys. He is a varsity athlete in two sports—track and football. Ritchie possesses a high level of positivity and he is often the source of encouragement for peers and siblings alike. He is very appreciative of his family and often expresses his gratitude for his life experiences as a military-connected student. Currently, he is scheduled to attend college on a partial football scholarship. Although the

college will be a significant distance away from the family, Ritchie takes joy in knowing that he will be attending college with another military-connected student from his past. He believes he is ready for college and credits his preparation and positive attitude about the upcoming transition to his experiences as a military-connected student.

Dory

Dory is a shy ninth grader who moved to Virginia from another southern state in the middle of the school year. She is an African American and the middle sibling of three. Although she is new to high school, she is not new to executing military relocations. That is, Dory states that she enjoys some aspects of moving; however, she dislikes leaving behind friends. As a result, she has developed a strategy that allows her to minimize the agony of relocating by minimizing the number of friends she makes at any new location. Dory describes a world where the possibility of relocating is always at the forefront of a military-connected high school student's mind.

Cagney

Cagney is an African American senior in high school and looking forward to graduation. Cagney projects a rather gregarious demeanor. She has relocated several times, including her move during the beginning of her sophomore year, but noted that she likes and dislikes various aspects of relocating. Central to her mixed view is the fact that she participates in extracurricular activities and often loses significant status or advancements when she relocates. Despite such setbacks, she maintains a positive attitude and has found unique ways to cope with the uncertainties and stresses of relocations. She enjoys playing instruments, singing, and writing poetry. These outlets allow her to cope with practically any challenge and, as she described, are key to surviving as a military-connected high school student.

Wilson

Wilson is a very young and somewhat shy African American military-connected high school student. He is a sophomore and relocated to Virginia at the beginning of his freshman year. Wilson noted that military relocations can be very difficult. In his case, he relocated to southern Virginia from a state in the western part of the country and, due to a change in his sponsor's orders, relocated six months later to northern Virginia. According to Wilson, he loathes practically any type of change, and this most recent ordeal only solidified his view. Despite spending a short time in southern Virginia. The latter relocation did allow Wilson to arrive in time to participate in sports; however, he often described how his military-connected friends arrived just shortly after he did and were unable to participate in sports because either practice had already started or a single game had already been played. Wilson viewed this study as a way to not only voice his views regarding the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who relocate to different states but also, in the spirit of agency, to provide a voice for his friends who experienced what he perceived to be a grave injustice.

Results

Results are presented in two subsections: *Theme Development* and *Research Question Responses*. Under the former subsection, I underscore a key characteristic that is innate to a theme and provides a unique definition to emphasize this point. Afterward, I delineate key steps that were initially addressed in Chapter Three and subsequently executed during the data analysis phase of the study. As part of the discussion, I expand upon various coding techniques that I used and provide a rationale for selecting particular techniques or methods as opposed to others. In addition, I adduce important participant comments to further substantiate my decisions and to demonstrate how the techniques are integrated into the theme development function. Key themes that arose, but were not anticipated under the

established research questions, are also addressed within this subsection. While the primary or overarching themes are addressed in the Theme Development subsection, the subsection concludes with an outline of all themes and subthemes via a meaningful table located in Appendix C. A detailed discussion of the resulting themes and subthemes is presented in the *Research Question Responses* subsection of the results.

Theme Development

Before an in-depth discussion of the processes and procedures used to develop the resulting themes can ensue, it is imperative that I first describe how I defined the concept of a theme. When defining the term, Creswell (2018) noted that themes are “also called categories” (p. 328) and proceeded to describe how the term referred to a wide scope of information comprised of a grouping of several codes to form a “common idea” (p. 328). While I, a fledgling researcher, would not dare assert that Creswell’s definition of a theme is incorrect, I, sheepishly, would like to acknowledge that perhaps he did not provide a definition that amply captures the true nature of the term. That is, the taxonomy of organizing and classifying various codes during the data analysis process leads to the development of categories, which is the “primary product of analytical process” (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016, p. 102). Moreover, categories are directly derived from the content and the detailed descriptions the participants provided in the transcripts acquired during the data collection phase (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). On the other hand, themes are more abstract in nature, require a certain level of interpretation, and the development of which takes place at the end of the categorization process (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Hence, when the terms *categories* and *themes* are used interchangeably, the user introduces a significant level of ambiguity. That is, Vaismoradi et al. (2016) purported that the symmetrical use of these terms “results in a lack of cohesion between the method of data analysis and the result” (p. 101).

Perhaps the most important attribute to remember about a theme is that it, “is a meaningful ‘essence’ that runs through the data” (Morse, 2008, p. 727). Hence, I define a theme as *a common, yet quintessential and meaningful idea that pervades every categorical component of a group of concepts*. Just as the quintessential meaning and tenets of a parallelogram (i.e., a quadrilateral where opposite sides are parallel) pervade all groups of squares, rectangles, and rhombuses, so does the essence of a theme pervade the derivative categories from which it emerges. This vital, yet common, thread of pervasive essence serves as the basis for my definition of a theme and clearly helps distinguish categories and the taxonomical functions of categorization from themes and thematic development, respectively.

Although the current study uses a transcendental phenomenological approach and relies on participants’ descriptions to facilitate the revelation of the essence of the phenomenon, thematic development is an abstract function that incorporates interpretation as part of the bracketing reintegration process and *does not* violate the tenets of Husserl’s transcendental approach. In the current study, both automated and manual tools were used to formulate categories from participants’ data gleaned from face-to-face interviews, self-recorded self-reflections and creative writing assignments to policymakers and other stakeholders. The categories and resulting themes were developed in accordance with the *Modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data* model (see **Error! eference source not found.**) that Moustakas (1994) suggested. Initially, using the process that Moustakas termed horizontalization, all participant statements were examined and selected based on the relevance participants attributed towards these statements. It is important to note that each of these relevant statements, in accordance with Moustakas’s guidance, were given equal weight at this point in the thematic development process.

Following the identification of these relevant statements, I engaged in the process of elimination and reduction by deciding which statements were deemed critical or necessary to

comprehend the phenomenon under investigation. In situations where I was unable to immediately determine the necessity of the statement for understanding the experience, I employed Moustakas's (1994) suggested second criterion of determining whether or not the statement could be classified using a label. If the statement met one of these criterion, I, in accordance with Moustakas's guidance, classified the statement as an "invariant constituent" (p. 120).

The latter decisions required some level of interpretation on my part as the principal investigator; thus, before a thorough discussion of theme development can continue—and for reasons of transparency, clarity and increased credibility—it is imperative that I take a moment to reiterate Gearing's (2004) purported final phase of bracketing—*reintegration*. Such a pause will help illustrate how the amalgamation of theory, design, and methodology helped to formulate the subsequently delineated themes. According to Gearing, the purpose of reintegration is to allow the researcher an opportunity to reintroduce data that were bracketed back into the overall research effort.

At the point of data analysis where I allow my presuppositions to enter and facilitate the process of organizing and categorizing data, my presuppositions are no longer held in abeyance. It is this necessity for some level of interpretation that adduces evidence that factors, outside the bracketed concepts, are now being introduced into the investigation. That is, just as a mathematician would complete a calculation after finalizing computations within the bracketed sections of a math problem, qualitative researchers must, at some point, incorporate various aspects of knowledge in an effort to convey the essence of a life experience (Gearing, 2004). In the current study, once I determined a statement met one of the two criteria and resulted in the classification as an invariant constituent, one could argue that the reintegration phase of bracketing commenced—*although I would contend ever so slightly*. According to Gearing (2004), this distinct act of clearly identifying when the

process of reintegration begins is a feat seldom described by researchers. In fact, to reveal the initial invariant constituents for this study, I used an automated coding feature inherent in the NVIVO qualitative research software to produce several possible horizons to facilitate the clustering of data. These automated results, however, were superficial in nature and revealed codes (e.g., military, schools, academics) that were more reflective of a robotic word count than an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Keeping in mind that the automated software is just one of many tools in a qualitative researcher's professional repertoire, I employed a combination of manual coding techniques outlined in Johnny Saldaña's (2016) book, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, and Moustakas's (1994) guidelines to streamline my efforts.

Before proceeding with coding, I initially relied on what Saldaña (2016) termed "first cycle coding method" (p. 67). This method focuses on the initial coding of the data and is divided into seven smaller subsections: "Grammatical, Elemental, Affective, Literary and Language, Exploratory, Procedural, and a final profile entitled Themeing the Data" (p. 68). While Saldaña highlighted several key characteristics related to these subcategories, I found a combination of the *descriptive coding*, *initial coding*, *emotion coding*, *In Vivo coding* and *focused coding* methods to be most useful during my initial first cycle coding activities. That is, Saldaña noted that the descriptive method of coding uses short phrases or labels to succinctly describe data; initial coding allows a researcher to divide data into unique pieces, conduct detailed examination and highlight commonalities and differences; emotional coding offers opportunities to capture various participant descriptions regarding their feelings during a given experience; and In Vivo coding presents opportunities to use the verbatim words of participants.

Due to the unique complexities immanent to the participants of the current study, and after combining Saldaña (2016) and Moustakas's (1994) guidance regarding the nature and

uniqueness of each study, such a combination of coding techniques proved to be both vital and worthwhile. For instance, immediately after being notified of the requirement to relocate, several of the participants described their emotions in a similar fashion. For example, Cagney stated, “I was upset and anxious because we had just moved . . .” (Interview). Similarly, Sean stated, “I was upset at first. I mean, at that point I was on [the West Coast (REDACTED)] for five and a half years” (Interview). Dory also described similar feelings when she emotionally reflected on her most recent move and noted, “I was . . . I was sad. I was upset because I made friends and had to leave them and . . . probably not even see them again” (Interview).

The explicit sentiment of feeling upset or sad following notification of the relocation correlated well with emotional coding; yet, In Vivo coding provided an opportunity, at least initially, to form a code using the verbatim description of the participants (i.e., upset). Thus, as Saldaña (2016) aptly noted, “depending on the nature and goals of your study, you may find that one coding method alone will suffice, or that two or more are needed to capture the complex process or phenomena in your data” (p. 69). Hence, I sought to tailor the selection of coding methods to accommodate the needs of the study and used both coding methods initially to help cluster data. The process was repeated and codes transformed or became more defined following each iteration of review and analysis.

When the initial group of codes and labels emerged, I conducted a second cycle coding process known as “eclectic coding” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 212). In this process, I intentionally selected a combination of coding methodologies to generate codes that reflect a greater meaning of the phenomenon. For example, a single term or category labeled *stress*, could provide more meaning in line with the participants’ experiences by denoting the source of the stress (e.g., academic, home, the situation). Still and even more profound than the ostensibly important act of identifying the sources of stress revealed in descriptive coding, I

realized that understanding how the students perceived the stress and the manner in which the stress affected them was far more telling, and meaningful, in my efforts to reveal the essence of the overall phenomenon. It was at this point the embryonic formulation of the first theme began to take shape. For example, students described experiencing stress associated with a family members' potential, current, and even past deployments in the following manner:

Also, you will never know. . . . When your parents are deployed in places like Iraq, Iran, which are currently the most aggressive places on the planet, you don't know if they're going to come back or not, which is also scary. Because what goes through your head is "Are they still alive? What's going to happen?" That's one big problem. You think about that, not just at home, but in public places and school. That's scary also. (Jacques, Self-Reflection)

Similarly, Cagney noted the following:

I would like you to know that it is hard for military-connected students to adjust to new schools and with the move. It is also hard for military students to focus or stay focused when one of their parents is not at home because he or she is on duty away from home, deployed, or in place like Iraq or Afghanistan. (Self-Reflection)

These stressors transcended the boundaries of home and often seeped into the academic realm when students contemplated the topic of deployment. The realization that students often needed help in school but were preoccupied with military-related thoughts that sometimes prevented them from receiving the help they needed became apparent in their descriptions. However, it was this sudden flash of insight that allowed me, as the primary researcher, to obtain a revelation from the collective recall of each experience to formulate a theme to describe what military-connected high school students were experiencing. This subtle morsel of insight led to the establishment of an overarching theme where students were not only asking educators and other stakeholders to *help them understand* various challenges

associated with their relocation requirements and academic experiences, but *they also sought to be understood*. Moreover, without such an understanding, the military-connected high school students described how attempts to help could be limited or in some cases, futile. For example, one military-connected high school student wrote:

I have always had the ability to get really good grades, but whenever I was in a bad mood from moving, I didn't care about school, and I just didn't pay attention and I got bad grades because of it. (Dianna, Interview)

The resulting theme, *Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help*, reflects the underlying concept that was present in each of the categories I had clustered. This theme was supported by three subthemes, which identified the sources of challenges and stressors. The primary theme and supporting subthemes, along with a synopsis of each subthemes meaning, are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Theme 1: Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help

Theme 1: Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help		
<u>Academic Challenges</u>	<u>Desire for Increased Awareness</u>	<u>Understanding of the Situation</u>
This subtheme refers to the various challenges that military-connected high school students encounter in the school or academic environment.	This subtheme highlights areas where participants described strong desires to see improvement. Such were often highlighted during the interview but repeatedly validated during review of self-reflections and the creative writing assignment to policymakers. Students often cited frustrations in these areas because they either did not have the resources to help themselves or effective use of such resources where often stymied due to lack of awareness.	This subtheme addresses various aspects of the situation revolving around the relocation, including the onset or prolonged emotional and psychological stress manifested in the experience. Reactions to “triggers” (Anderson et al., 2012, pg. 68) and various experiences at home are also addressed.

For example, many of the military-connected high school students participated in some form of extracurricular activities. Although the term extracurricular activity barely surfaced during initial coding analysis, the references to such activities (e.g., band, choir, sports) were ubiquitous throughout the transcripts. Initially, I coded these activities under extracurricular activities and subsequently under coping mechanisms. However, while in my bracketed state, I learned from listening to the participants and from my reactions during the interviews, there was a significant and more profound meaning behind their descriptions of these activities. Moreover, the transcriptions did not reflect the level of emotion nor the strong sense of meaning, which these participants tried to convey. Vince, for example, wanted stakeholders to understand the significant role sports play in the lives of military-connected high school students and passionately described his view by noting, “It [extracurricular activities] is not just academics for some of us. The only reason I am going to college now is to continue playing the sport that I'm in love with, which is football” (Interview). Another participant described sports as important but also underscored how sports fulfilled another role by serving as a medium to strengthen family bonds. Specifically, he noted the following:

During my senior year of football [at a school in northern Virginia (REDACTED)], I made my first interception on the varsity football team, and my dad was one of the ones who was cheering me on from the start. My dad, with my mom, they were my number one fans, and always will be—whether I continue to play football or not. (Ritchie, Interview)

Besides sports, students also described other forms of extracurricular activities and emphasized the activities' heightened role of importance. Jennifer, for example, described her participation in band as follows:

I always found band and music to be very comforting. I didn't really have a good band

program at the high school I attended in [the northern part of the U.S.], but I did when I was living in [the southern part of the U.S. (REDACTED)], so I couldn't wait to get back to music and marching and performing. . . . Band always seem to be like another family for me. (Interview)

After analyzing these and other similar examples, I determined that to simply describe extracurricular activities as a coping resource would be an understatement. Moreover, while I sought to maintain an abeyant mindset pertaining to presuppositions, I was compelled to notice that even after transcribing verbatim, the written document did not capture what the participants were trying to convey. At this point I recalled the words of Mortimer J. Adler (1983), author of the book, *How to Speak and How to Listen*, where he described how the functions of reading and writing were nonsocial in nature. However, speaking and listening, he purported, were “always social and cannot be otherwise” (p. 13). Similar to Adler’s (1983) view, Steinar Kvale (2011), author of *Doing Interviews*, posited the following similar explanation:

To transcribe means to transform, to change from one form to another. Transcriptions are translations from an oral language to a written language; what is said in the hermeneutical tradition of translators also pertains to transcribers: *traduire trahitori* – translators are traitors. An interview is a live social interaction where the pace of the temporal unfolding, the tone of the voice and the bodily expressions are immediately available to the participants in the face-to-face conversation, but they are not accessible to the out-of-context reader of the transcript. (p. 11)

Adler’s and Kvale’s insights influenced my coding because I was able to ultimately decide that it was not the structural descriptions of how they experienced the phenomenon and the associated focus “on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced” (Creswell, 2018, p. 201), but it was *what* the participants experienced that was important.

Emphasizing the significance of the experience as described by the participants was tantamount in my decision pertaining to how to proceed. The final decisions regarding how to summarize themes and where to finally locate these themes and subcategories were based on *the participants' experiences and not theory*. That is, key to the current study was to investigate whether Schlossberg's (2011) adult theory could be used as a framework to facilitate understanding of the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who relocate across states. Anderson et al (2012) identified four key coping resources of which the *examination of a person's support resources* was highlighted as a key factor. This coping resource focused on people and manifest several key tenets that the military-connected students experienced. However, for many of the participants, extracurricular activities transcend a mere coping resource. It was instead at the heart of the experience for them. Vince, for example, described the paramount role that sports take on in the lives of military-connected high school students as follows: "Honestly, perhaps the most important point I would like to make is, 'Do not forget the student athlete.' I understand that everybody places humongous emphasis on education, but for us athletes, the sport that we play is our life" (Letter). Describing how extracurricular activities often transcend the boundaries of the competitive environment, one participant noted the following:

Sports translates to the classroom, too. You gain that level of confidence where you feel you can do anything. Sports do help you to become flexible too and it is also a challenge. In fact, maintaining sports and maintaining your academics too is a challenge on its own. It also encourages flexibility because you learn to get to practice on time and to get your homework done on time and other things like that. (Ritchie, Interview)

As a result, I modified the 4S system and placed one of the coping resources, situation, in a category under Theme 1. That is, the participants revealed that the

extracurricular activities were a pinnacle in their lives and went far beyond the academic realm. Just because a theory does not fit a phenomenon perfectly, does not mean that the phenomenon does not exist. In fact, van Manen (2016) noted the following:

A distinguishing feature of a human science approach to pedagogy is how the notions of theory and research are to be related to the practice of living. In contrast to the more positivistic and behavioral empirical sciences, human science does not see theory as something that stands before practice in order to "inform" it. Rather theory enlightens practice. (Section 507)

In short, the practice of coding and thematic labeling techniques served as the basis for the emergence of themes and subcategories. Initially, themes emerged; afterward, I used theory to enhance or enlightened the practice of coding by labeling themes, when applicable, with terms are concepts already evident in various scholarly theories.

Using the same praxis that led to the formulation of Theme 1, I was able to identify several coping mechanisms that military-connected high school students used to adapt to various situations. At the conclusion of several iterations of coding, categorizing, and analysis, the second theme emerged—*Coping Resources Begins With Me*. This theme highlights the primary resources that military-connected high school students use to assimilate into schools and adjust to new environments after executing geographical moves. While the selection of coping resources is predicated on the situation and the person making the selection, the participants constantly and consistently highlighted how they initially turned to themselves first to tackle practically any challenge they encountered. Felicia, for example, described her independent personality in the following manner:

I have always been pretty independent when it comes to my academics. So I think that with knowing I have to be going to different changing environments, different schools, different teachers, and being able to adapted as quickly as I can and figure

out how I am going to be able to go about this in the best way to give me an A is what I have learned to do. (Interview)

Similarly, Vince noted that, “any military kid knows how to overcome certain challenges. It's just, it's kind of who we are, who we are built to be from a young age” (Self-Reflection).

Cagney also stated that “when I do not understand something, I will try to get it, and then I'll review my notes” (Interview). Key categories listed under Theme 2 reflect the primary coping resources that the participants identified and are reflected in Table 6:

Table 6

Theme 2: Coping Resources Start With Me

Theme 2: Coping Resources Start With Me			
<u>Self—(I Am a Military-Connected Child)</u>	<u>Strategies</u>	<u>Extracurricular Activities</u>	<u>Social Supports</u>
This subtheme illustrates how military-connected high school students often view themselves as the primary source of support.	This subthemes provides insights about the various strategies military-connected high school students use to tackle academic challenges. It emphasizes how students use the internet and social media to overcome academic obstacles.	This subtheme could have easily fallen under the Support subtheme. However, military-connected high school students frequently described this resource as such an integral part of their experience that to embed it within another subtheme would detract from its level of significance and possibly dilute the powerful nature of extracurricular activities as described by participants.	This subtheme highlights key sources that military-connected high school students use to confront problems or obtain guidance. Included under this subtheme are family members, friends, teachers, and other trusted sources.

The final theme that emerged addressed the topics of resiliency and academic outlook.

Many of the participants described a strong, innate desire to succeed. Dory, for example, stated that “Whether you are happy about the move or you are upset about the move, you

must still push through it. You must still strive to be your best” (Interview). Similarly, Cagney also expressed a desire to perform to the best of her ability when she described her academic purpose and qualified how she would pursue it, in the following manner:

I believe my overall purpose, when it comes to academics is to excel and be the best student that I can be. So, by that I mean, if I'm not initiating something or if I have a goal for myself, then I push myself to make that goal. (Interview)

Nearly all of the participants viewed their status as a military child as proof that they could practically overcome anything.

However, Creswell (2018) also challenged researchers to not fall into the habit of looking to corroborate a perspective but to also ascertain whether disconfirming information also exists. A deeper analysis of the data revealed a somewhat surprising dichotomy. That is, prior to or shortly after relocating, some students displayed a tendency to focus on the negative issues of relocating. For example, when reflecting back on his experience, one participant described a period following several moves where lack of care or concern about academics was the predominant attitude. He noted,

Reflecting back on my academic career or just academics in general, I am going to be honest. I don't really feel like academically, I'm the best person for this. For example, it definitely took me some time to care about high school. It definitely took me some time to think and actually start caring about my academics. (Vince, Interview)

Moreover, despite admittedly having the ability to perform well academically, many students described how it was difficult for them to rouse from their emotional or cognitive stupor and focus positively on their situation. Dianna, for example, described this period of dysfunctional focus in the following manner:

I have always had the ability to get really good grades, but whenever I was in a bad

mood from moving, I didn't care about school, and I just didn't pay attention and I got bad grades because of it. But, I knew that was on me because I knew that I could do it. (Interview)

A combination of strong affirmations to be the very best that one can be intermingled with descriptions of utter discontent compelled me to acknowledge this duality of perceptions, even if it was later deemed to be temporary. Recalling the once popular United States Army slogan, “Be All You Can Be,” I took the liberty of modifying the slogan to formulate the third theme—*Be All You Can See*. This theme appears to represent both views and acknowledges the temporal aspects of the military-connected high school student’s experience. Students noted that whatever the state of mind they were in just prior to or following a relocation, they possessed a proclivity to respond to a given situation in a like manner. This does not negate the fact that resiliency and a positive outlook still exists overall, but can serve as an important insight for stakeholders who may eventually seek to assist students.

The subthemes supporting the third theme include a category that addresses academic outlook. This subtheme seeks to provide insights about how military-connected high school students view their future academic outlook, including the efforts they employ in high school to prepare for college. To capture insights regarding the accuracy of academic outlooks formulated in high school, participants, who are now in college, were asked to reflect on their initial outlooks and describe how accurate the outlooks were when compared with the reality of college.

Finally, a category pertaining to self-efficacy supports the third theme. This subtheme addresses many of the cognitive functions that transpire before, during and after military relocations. In addition, it specifically addresses many of the immanent attributes that are difficult to observe but were explicitly described by participants. Although potential

unanticipated subthemes such as strong ethical values and expressions of being part of something bigger than themselves did arise, such potential subthemes and classifications were placed under the self-efficacy category and thus no unanticipated themes are noted. The third theme and the supporting categories are depicted in Table 7.

Table 7

Theme 3: Be All You Can See

Theme 3: Be All You Can See	
<u>Outlook Assured Through Positivity and Gratitude</u>	<u>Self-Efficacy</u>
This subtheme addresses the level of resiliency students described as it relates to their academic outlook.	This theme outlines how military-connected high school students' belief systems are instrumental in their ability to achieve or failure to achieve their goals.

Understanding what is going on and when, coupled with the introduction of the proper level of care and concern, can significantly reduce the amount of time military-connected high school students spend in the doldrums of negative thoughts. The three aforementioned themes are depicted in

B along with a more detailed delineation of the associated categories.

Research Question Responses

RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academics when relocating to a new state? Military-connected high school students described their overall experience as a dichotomy of understanding. That is, Theme 1, *Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help*, aptly captures the essence of the participants' experiences by illustrating how students desire to be helped but also long for stakeholders who understand military-connected high school students. These students described situations where stakeholders could either facilitate or hinder the adaptation and assimilation processes prior to or following a military relocation into a new academic environment. Having such an understanding, therefore, was not only a desired attribute that military-connected high school students wanted stakeholders to possess but a *necessary* prerequisite in the facilitation of assistance for this unique group of students. This theme, *Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help*, pervades all facets of the military-connected high school student's academic experience.

Academic challenges. Key to understanding the phenomenon are the challenges that arise within the academic environment where participants cited examples of challenges they encountered within the schools themselves. These challenges ranged from frustrations with differing standards and challenges with enrollment and transfer of credits to perceived inequities in extracurricular activities or entire school systems. Moreover, the students also voiced perceived shortcomings revolving around awareness levels among teachers and administrators regarding military-connected students as a whole. Other shortcomings were noted in the area of academic resources. Military-connected high school students described such shortcomings as a major point of contention that was inextricably linked to their experiences.

Frustrations stemming from differing academic standards. One particular issue that appeared frequently revolved around frustrations generated by differing enrollment and graduation standards. According to military-connected high school student participants, the lack of standards across the country places students at a disadvantage. In many cases, participants described how they exhausted efforts pleading with school administrators, to no avail, to make exceptions or modifications to their course schedules to accommodate for past or future relocations associated with military mobility requirements. One example of such a case pertains to a military-connected high school student who moved three times during high school. He described the situation as follows:

I told them several times that I would not be graduating from Virginia and that I was finishing my junior year and then relocating back to [the western part of the country (REDACTED)], and they said “There's no guarantees that that is a possibility.” I was like, “No! I’m a military student. I’m a military kid. I’m moving back after my junior year.” And they wouldn't help me because I knew, at this point, that there were certain requirements that [the western part of the country] had that I wouldn't meet if I followed what they (here in Virginia) were setting up. Even though I would be over achieving on my basic diploma, but not quite hitting the intermediate level for the intermediate diploma, they wouldn't help. They wouldn't give me any wiggle room. . . I actually have to pick up a second class down here in [the western part of the country] which is now affecting my college opportunities. (Vince, Interview)

Such modifications to the academic schedule, similar to the one that Vince described in the aforementioned example, were vital to many military-connected high school students obtaining key credits or types of courses necessary to graduate. Moreover, many military-connected high school students described how they have become accustomed to battling for various modifications to their schedules, and even then, there are no guarantees that the

resulting schedules will meet a respective school's graduation requirements. Sean described one such case as follows:

Like I said earlier, you have to get used to swapping different school systems. They might have entirely different guidelines or entirely different degree paths to get your high school diploma. They might have entirely different credits. Sometimes some of your credits may not even transfer to other schools so that's always going to be an issue. (Interview)

Similarly, as part of her creative letter writing data collection requirement, Cagney expressed a similar view when she noted the following:

When moving the standards may be different, and if they are, we are forced to pick up extra courses in order to meet the requirements. Sometimes we are forced to take the classes again, because the school will not accept the credits. It would help a lot if there was something in place to help military connected students with their credits and courses so they would not have to repeat the course or pick up extra courses to graduate on time. (Letter)

Even in instances where participants did not experience some significant setback themselves, they recalled situations they were cognizant of and expressed a sense of concern. Louise, for example, recalled a situation where she was aware of another military-connected high school student who experienced a major setback due to variant school standards. She described the incident as follows:

I know a [military-connected] girl who, when she moved, she had half a year of her senior year left. It was a pretty awful move and because some of her credits didn't transfer, she had to attend summer school just to graduate. (Interview)

In each of the aforementioned examples, participants described situations where relocating to different states due to military mobility requirements can have a negative effect on academic

achievement or, due to the uncertainty revolving around such situations, increased emotional stress.

Inequities in the school systems military-connected high school students must attend.

Military-connected high school students appear to have varying views regarding the inequity of school systems they attend over the course of their high school experience. For the most part, military-connected high school students who attended high school in northern Virginia and went to college or relocated to another state immediately afterward, generally expressed being thankful for the seemingly rigorous standards they experienced in northern Virginia. Louise, for example, stated “I would say that in northern Virginia, especially, high school is really competitive. They have really good schools especially compared to other places I've lived. So it's helped me prepare for college” (Interview).

I learned things more for myself, but also, they have the International Baccalaureate Organization (IB) program here and they had dual enrollment, and I got to take advantage of that before going to college. I think that was a good way of transitioning me and getting me ready, and I had more opportunities here than I would have received in [the Midwest (REDACTED)]. (Interview)

On the other hand, at least four of the 11 participants relocated to Virginia from another state and within one year, relocated again within Virginia and noted vast differences in the quality of school systems. One participant described the disparity in standards within the state as follows:

[I]n general, the teachers, they structure everything differently from state to state and not only from state to state, but from county to county. . . . For example, if you're in, I don't know, calculus in one school and the other school doesn't even have calculus, what do you do then? . . . I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing but it also affects you. (Jacques, Interview)

In another example, a participant described the poor economic condition that his school district on the West Coast experienced and described how such poor conditions hindered his opportunities to acquire a quality education. He described the conditions as follows:

Well, I think it [the poor education system] was like that simply because of the budget of the school. The [West Coast (REDACTED)] County was going through bankruptcy at the time when I was there. So it was much more difficult to get better education programs and teachers and all the other items. . . . So everything just seemed pretty bare boned when I was over there. It seemed like a skeleton of fundamentals in most of the subjects that I was studying. (Sean, Interview)

Still, similar in nature to a desire to see common standards throughout the country, some students noted how they felt somewhat penalized because they often attended schools that were of poor quality. In one case, a military-connected high school student relocated to a school in a very economically depressed area. Although the school system was far below the standards that she had become accustomed to in Virginia, she did not focus on describing her plight as a disadvantage; instead, she described the inequitable school system and her desire to see a change from the following, and rather unique, perspective:

I believe all the states should have the same standards, because it was sad going to [the southern part of the country (REDACTED)] and seeing what standards the kids should be at and seeing where they were because of their school system. It was not because of them. It was because of the school system and the standards it held.

(Dianna, Interview)

Unfair extracurricular activity practices. Perhaps the one underlying universal academic challenge nearly all of the military-connected high school students described pertained to the unfair practices implemented at various schools in the areas of extracurricular activities. These extracurricular activities are often the pinnacle source of coping and are

addressed under Research Question 2. However, the perceived unfair treatment is a segment of the academic experience that participants often described as emotionally painful.

According to most participants, the inability of new school administrators to place military-connected high school students in positions comparable to those they were in when they left the previous schools disrupts their personal perception of their social status in the new school. Cagney, for example described her frustration with administrators' inability to place students in extracurricular activities positions at the same level they were in at their prior schools as follows:

A change I would love to see is that military students would be allowed to pick up where they left off in extracurricular activities even when they move in the middle of the school year. This is really important because when we are not able to or allowed to pick up where we left off it makes adjusting harder and it is upsetting. (Interview)

Wilson, on the other hand, expressed his view of unfairness in the current athletic laws that govern the placement of military-connected high school students who relocate at times other than the very beginning of the school year. Specifically, he described how such laws or regulations negatively affected military-connected student friends of his who were not enrolled in sports at the beginning of the year. He noted the following:

[Newly arriving students in the neighborhood] were from the military, and they went to the same school. We would hangout outside sometimes when I didn't have practice and they would talk about how they wanted to do sports too, but they could not because they got here in the middle of the year and sports were already ongoing. Coaches informed them that they could not do anything either because they had already [played] the first couple of games. They were very frustrated because they did not want to wait until the following year to play the sport they loved playing. (Interview)

Desire for increased awareness of military-connected high school students' needs.

An underlying universal that nearly all of the participants (i.e., 10 of 11) explicitly expressed was a desire to increase the awareness levels of educators and administrators regarding the needs of military-connected high school students. As one participant noted, "I think that teachers and people who aren't in the military, who don't understand military families, they will never understand how the kids feel" (Dory, Self-Reflection). This particular perspective appears to permeate the participants' experiences whenever they address difficulties adjusting to academic requirements prior to and following relocations. From increased access to resources to facilitate relocations to an overall desire to increase the awareness among educators, military-connected high school students described situations where educators could be more proactive. In many cases, military-connected high school students explicitly called for more training because they believed that many of the teachers or administrators are unable to provide proper assistance without fully understanding several key aspects of the military-connected high school students' milieu. As part of her creative writing assignment, Felicia appealed for such training among educators. Specifically, she wrote the following:

Give teachers sensitivity training. Dealing with students that are from military households can be more challenging; they sometimes go through more than the average child. These children need support from both their parents and the teachers that they spend most of their week with. A lot of teachers might not know or understand what these children are going through. By providing these trainings, teachers will be equipped with the tools to handle all situations. (Letter)

Participants whose parents deployed (i.e., 9 of 11) also had a tendency to desire greater understanding among teachers involving situations related to such deployments. As Jennifer noted, "If the child's parent is deployed, it is harder for them to fit in because they are worried about their family more than fitting in at school (Letter). Still, others expressed a

desire for educators to be aware of challenges within the home that are highly likely linked to such deployments. Dianna described her desire for increased understanding of factors in the home related to deployment in the following manner:

There is a lot that goes on that a lot of people don't realize. Not only moving constantly, always dealing with transitions, it's also dealing with your military sponsor and what they have to go through because you are a family and it affects everyone and not just them. For example, my sponsor dealt with PTSD and more, and a lot of people don't realize how serious that can be. It's a constant battle each day that they have to deal with and being in the family. When one person deals with something everyone has to deal with it and it can be challenging and being in school and trying to keep your grades up and excel in school it's hard when you're dealing with stuff at home and a lot of people including teachers don't realize that.

(Interview)

Besides knowledge of their desire to be known as a unique group of students coupled with an extensive awareness of precisely what such an identifier means, military-connected high school students also expressed a desire to increase awareness regarding some of the academic tools and resources they need to succeed academically. In her letter to stakeholders, Cagney emphasized her desire for both a formal military-connected high school students identifier and additional resources as follows:

It would be cool and very nice if there was a tutoring or study program for military students. This would allow students to have another resource they can use. Another thing I would like you to consider is having a category for military connected students and counting them when considering the student body. (Cagney, Letter)

While resources may be available, if educators are not fully aware of the needs of this unique group of students, the resources may not be employed in an efficient and

accommodating manner. In some cases, as Jacques pointed out, awareness may have existed at one time in some schools, but lack of funding has since hindered such efforts. He noted that, “There are programs that do help with getting us use to each other as military children. These programs use other military children, but that did not really last that long, because it ended up getting cut . . .” (Letter).

Understanding of the situation. Identified as the first S, or coping resource, in Anderson et al.’s (2012) 4S system, the *situation* addresses factors such as the event or nonevent that stimulated a transition, the level of control the person has over particular aspects of the transition, and how the person assesses the situation—either optimistically, pessimistically, or neutral. While this factor is considered a coping strategy, the coding process actually resulted in a complete set of factors that would describe the experiences of military-connected high school students under Theme 1. The single event that initiated the transition action in all of the instances investigated was the military mobility requirement to relocate to a different state. Other categories derived independent of the Anderson et al. definition, aligned well with other elements of Anderson et al.’s definition and aided in the final formulation of the *Understanding of the Situation* subtheme.

Emotional stress. Many of the participants described emotional stress related to several aspects of the transition. These stressors were not necessarily isolated to the academic environment. Moreover, participants described stress as a factor that seemed to transcend various boundaries (e.g., home, academic, relational). As discussed in the aforementioned Theme Development section, stress generated by thoughts of loved ones deployed or the probability of being deployed often affects how students perform in academic environments. In fact, stress related to deployment was a significant factor that military-connected high school students sought increased understanding and this aspect of stress greatly influenced the formulation of Theme 1.

Besides deployment-related stress and stress related to the aforementioned academic challenges, students also expressed stress that was specifically related to the contextual setting of the academic environment. Leaving the somewhat busy and metropolitan-like area of northern Virginia, Dianna described her relocation to a rural area in the South as a horrifying event. She noted that, “We were not moving close to family or friends or anything. It was legitimately in the middle of nowhere, so it was really terrifying (Interview). Similarly, when Felicia moved from a sparsely populated town in the Midwest to northern Virginia, she too was affected by the contextual setting of the academic environment. Felicia recalled that, “The school was two stories high. I was confused, and there were a lot of people everywhere, and the demographics of the people that were here were completely different” (Interview). From demographics to natural surroundings to the cultural settings within the schools, military-connected high school students often described how the environment can add to the level of stress that they are already experiencing in the classroom.

The cultural environment within the contextual setting also reflects aspects of the situation. One student described how she, being of Asian descent, currently embraces her ethnicity and how it is celebrated in her current, culturally diverse, high school setting. Still, she recalls the pain she endured following earlier relocations when placed in other settings where other students referred to her using derogatory name-calling. Whether the remarks were motivated by ignorance or racial animus due to her ethnic peculiarities did not matter. The only thing she recalls when reflecting on the earlier chiding was that it was painful. Similarly, another student described how she, prior to coming to Virginia for her senior year, was subjected to bullying in a high school academic environment following a military related relocation from the South to the North.

Still, there are aspects of stress that are so daunting, until some students either experience or witness other military-connected high school students who need, what

participants described as, professional help to address such issues. When asked if military students were any different from any other student who relocate to another state, one participant began his response by describing how military-connected high school students were practically no different than any other transient student; however, before completing his response, he qualified his statement by highlighting one major difference: “some military students suffer from depression and stuff like that because they move so much and go through a whole bunch of change” (Wilson, Interview). In one case, a participant described how a school provided the resources to address the issue of possible depression among military-connected high school students. Through such tools, Felicia learned that she could be suffering from emotional stress:

I think that a lot of military kids need therapy or something. They should spend a lot more time with their advisors so that they can talk to the about what is going on in their lives. Because that year, we had a self-evaluation day and the results came back indicating that I was depressed. . . . Military kids have so much going on all the time.
(Self-Reflection)

In addition to the emotional stress experienced in school, military-connected high school students experienced stress vicariously through family members. Witnessing such stresses often required military-connected high school students to take on new roles or reduce coping resource options. That is, they often chose to exclude or limit access to familial resources to avoid adding more pressure to family members who were also experiencing emotional stress. In this process, military-connected high school students appear to reflect a sense of empathy and compassion while simultaneously, and sometimes unknowingly, taking on additional stress. Jennifer, for example, described the stress that she, her mom and sibling experienced, whenever her sponsor deployed, in the following manner:

Well, there were times when our father would get deployed and they [my siblings]

would be upset and crying, and so would my mom. We would all just try to help each other. And there were times, when I got older, where my mom needed me to do more like, take my siblings to school or something like that. (Interview)

Felicia also described a similar experience regarding stress revolving around deployments and illustrated how the military-connected high school student functioned in a support system role for the family. She noted the following:

I want say my sophomore year my dad was deployed to Afghanistan and that was really hard for all of us. My sister would not sleep in her own bed. She slept in my mom's bed the whole deployment. I think it was the first time he had deployed, since I had gotten older. He had been deployed before with this person who burned during the war in Afghanistan, and it was really sad and it was hard. . . . There is always so much happening and. . . my mom was also without her husband for months at a time and that is a fact. She is going through something so hard until she cannot help me more than she can help herself, if that makes sense (Interview)

Overall, this small group of military-connected high school students described several examples of stress related to the relocation, the military milieu, including witnessing some of the effects of stress on their siblings and friends, and how this stress influenced their performance in class.

Accelerated maturity. Military-connected high school students often took on new or multiple roles when relocating to new schools in a different state. At home, for example, older siblings with greater experience with relocating often took on a subtle role of lead by example. In other cases, the relocations were conducted in conjunction with a family member's deployment requirements; hence, some participants found themselves taking on greater responsibilities to facilitate the operation of the household when the member is away or helping to take care of the member once he or she returns from a deployment. Simply

adjusting to a variety of factors in addition to academic responsibilities appear to somewhat force military-connected high school students to mature faster than normal. As Wilson highlighted during his interview, “Sometimes I'm more mature than some other people, or I know more, so others would ask me stuff about either military situations or other situations.” Similarly, Felicia described the familiarity of taking on such a mature role as part of being a military-connected child in the following manner:

I think that when you are a child joining the military, you have to grow faster than everyone else, because you have to figure out how to be okay with being in all of this new and different environments and how to be okay when your parent has been deployed. (Interview)

Still, there appear to be some aspects of accelerated maturity that is neither sought nor necessarily desired but involuntarily assumed by default for being a military-connected high school student. In some cases, such accelerated maturity revolves around the aftermath of a sponsor’s military service in hostile areas and requires the military-connected high school students to adapt quickly and accordingly. Dianna’s description of her experience underscored such a view and is delineated below:

Mental illness is like a secret word that no one talks about. But being in the military, seeing it in person, face to face, every single day, it opens your eyes and it makes you wiser than you should be. (Interview)

In short, the seeds of accelerated maturity for military-connected high school students appear to be cultivated in the vicissitudes of everyday military life.

Varied efficacy beliefs regarding the timing and assessments of the requirement to relocate. The final category under the situational awareness subtheme is comprised of codes related to the timing of the relocation, the participant’s assessment of the requirement to relocate including the participants’ initial views regarding whether or not he or she could

control the situation. It is important to note that the participant's individual response to the situation is addressed under the coping resources identified under Theme 2.

While relocating from a given area after being settled for any length of time can be an arduous task, seven of the 11 participants highlighted how relocating to another school during the middle of the year was far worse than moving at the beginning or end of the school year. This self-described inconvenience of timing of the relocation appeared to have consequences in a wide variety of areas (e.g., emotional, extracurricular, relationships). For example, Cagney noted, "I think it is important for you to know that military families moving in the middle of the school year sucks and is probably one of the hardest moves to make besides leaving the country" (Letter). When military-connected high school students relocate in the middle of the school year, according to participants, they encounter additional difficulties on forming relationships. That is, while other students have gotten to know each other from the beginning of the school year and have formed coterie of like-minded friends, when military-connected high school students arrive into a new school, they must begin the process of forming a relationship with people and navigate, sometimes awkwardly, through a gauntlet of unfamiliar social mores. Such tasks can sometimes cause students to feel less confident, vulnerable, or isolated. One participant described the difficulty associated with relocating in the middle of the school year as follows:

But when you come in the middle of the year, fresh off the winter break, there are already big cliques, established groups of people, and it is very hard to just find someone to be a friend and kind of show you the ropes. (Vince, Interview)

Thus, when relocating in the middle of the school year, the desire to form friends can become so strong, that, if they are not careful, military-connected high school students could possibly succumb to the formation of relationships with other students who do not possess values conducive to a positive academic outlook.

Besides the timing concerns, nearly every participant described how they had practically no control over the requirement to move. However, participants' initial assessment of the requirement to relocate (e.g., optimistic, pessimistic, or neutral) were varied and sometimes mixed. That is, often participants described experiences that were more reflective of a cognitive wrestling match as they waxed and waned between the positive and negative emotions related to the move. Cagney, for example, described her initial assessment after being informed to relocate in the following manner:

Okay, I was thinking maybe I'll give it a chance, but I was still a little upset about it.

But then I was like, maybe a new environment would be good; it would be fun. There were a lot of mixed emotions. (Interview)

Unlike Cagney, Wilson primarily focused on and vehemently expressed perhaps the most difficult aspect of moving—leaving one's friends. As he noted, "Moving with the military is hard for most students because they don't want to leave their friends and schools and if they don't like change like I don't, then it may be even harder (Letter). Of the 11 participants, ten cited this factor as one that makes relocating difficult. It is important to note that Jennifer did not cite leaving friends as a major hardship of relocating due to her desire to leave a toxic environment filled with the pain of being a victim of bullying. Still, she too did note that she experienced some angst about leaving her trusted sources behind.

Still, taking into account the reservations about leaving friends behind, nearly half, five of the 11 participants, described their initial assessment of the requirement to relocate as a positive experience. This is a significant finding because the participants wanted to convey that some military-connected high school students have become so accustomed to relocating until they actually look forward to going to new places. Vince provided the following description, which is somewhat reflective of those students who expressed such a positive view about relocating:

I was excited to try something new when I first learned that I was moving to Virginia; after all, I was the one that pushed for the move. It's one of the aspects I do actually enjoy about military life, or being a military child. I get to move and meet new people and experience new places. I have not experienced a bad move yet. (Interview)

In short, military-connected high school students experience transition differently as it relates to academics when relocating to a new state. Some encounter challenges that are unique to their school or state requirements, while others appear to experience similar challenges in the areas of unfairness in extracurricular activities or a desire for heightened awareness among educators and other key stakeholders. Still, whatever the challenges are, the military-connected high school student often experiences increased stress regarding the unknown as they approach transition and immediately thereafter, due to possible role changes, inequities in school standards or the quality of school systems. These challenges and experiences appear to have stimulated the maturity level in many of the participants.

RQ2: What coping resources do military-connected high school students use and how are they employed to adapt to various academic challenges related to military mobility and relocation requirements? Anderson et al. (2012) delineated four key resources that people use to navigate the transition process: (a) Situation, (b) Self, (c) Support and (d) Strategies (p. 39). While coding revealed that these resources were manifested in the adaptation processes military-connected high school students use to navigate the academic challenges associated with relocating to a different state, the precise manner regarding how the resources were classified and eventually formed into a theme and subthemes to answer Research Question 2 does not align exactly with Anderson et al.'s 4S model. As noted in the aforementioned Theme Development section, one of Anderson et al.'s factors, *Situation*, was placed under Theme 1 because it aligned more with what the participants were experiencing

as opposed to how they used this factor to cope and adapt. The resulting subthemes that align with Research Question 2 and serve as coping resources are: (a) Self (The Military-Connected Child), (b) Virtual Strategies, (c) Social Support, and (d) Extracurricular Activities. These coping resources align well with Anderson et al.'s coping factors. However, since I derived three S's from my coding process and extrapolated the extracurricular activity factor, I refer to the coping resources as the *3S+ Coping System*. It is important to reiterate that a transcendental study is not used to corroborate theory, but as van Manen (2016) purported, theory can be used to elucidate practices.

In the current study, the coding process independently generated isomorphic coping factors, which, through an iterative process, transformed into the subthemes and categories of the 3S+ Coping System. Although the original transcendental phenomenological approach and subsequent coding process did not seek to corroborate Anderson et al. (2012) 4S Resource System, the resulting subthemes were similarly named to underscore the extant elements of Anderson et al.'s work and allow for a more robust understanding of the parallel groupings of each model. Thus, theory lends a hand in the elucidation of the resulting subtheme labeling.

Self—(Military-connected child). Theme 2, *Coping Resources Begins With Me*, reflects the strong propensity of military-connected high school students to attempt to handle any challenge using their own personal strength, wisdom or other intrinsic resources. This characterization does not mean that they do not rely on others such as friends, family, teachers or other trusted sources to assist them; however, these external resources are best classified in accordance with the *Support* nomenclature of Anderson et al.'s (2012) 4S model or the Social support factor of the 3S+ Coping System.

Participants frequently described how they viewed themselves as a unique group of students. The terms *military child*, or those of us *in the military*, were frequently used to not

only identify themselves but, also, to underscore or qualify a response. For example, when asked to describe her level of resiliency, Louise stated that she had an average level of resilience but when asked to define or clarify what the average was predicated upon, she simply stated, “I suppose for military children” (Interview). Similarly, Vince noted that, “any military kid knows how to overcome certain challenges. It's just ... it's kind of who we are, who we are built to be from a young age” (Interview). Still, most participants (i.e., 10 of 11) seemed to imply that, intermingled with the identification of themselves as military-connected, is an intrinsic emphasis to *personally* address challenges as an individual before seeking assistance elsewhere (e.g., family, friends, trusted sources). Even when asked to describe how they would address the most difficult or challenging academic requirements, most participants responded in a manner similar to Louise’s following statement:

I would need to keep a positive attitude. For example, I would not just want to come home and take a nap and just cover up and do nothing. I would have to communicate with my teachers and try to have them help me through the challenge because you have to help yourself through it too. (Interview)

What is significant about Louise’s response is that she began by describing her personal optimistic mindset followed by a description of her cognitive formation of alternatives and subsequent evaluation of those alternatives to derive at a viable solution to resolve the problem. Although she also described how she would communicate with her teachers as part of the solution, she emphasized that finding and executing this viable alternative was part of her actions of helping herself.

This unrelenting will to help oneself first, however, can be a detriment. That is, students often described a high level of determination to resolve academic challenges on their own. So much so, they may not realize that they need to ask for assistance from external sources much earlier in the academic process. The detrimental facets of this resilient

behavior was perhaps best reflected in Wilson's response to a question pertaining to how he addresses a situation if it is challenging or if he is not being successful at resolving a challenge:

If my grade is low, for example an F around 59% or one point away from a D, I will try to take care of the grade myself. Although I know my parents check my grades, I still try to bring the grade up on my own. I simply pay attention more in class and check to see which assignments are pulling my grade down and correct them or complete them and turn them in. If the grade is really low, then I will ask my parents to help me out, or stay after with the teacher more often. (Interview)

Such persistence, while good in some cases, appear to be detrimental in cases where personal efforts are not sufficient to address the shortcoming. Moreover, in an academic environment where students may not feel comfortable or simply familiar enough with the new school environment following relocation, it may be even more difficult to request assistance.

Strategies. Military-connected high school students also employ a host of strategies to navigate academic challenges when they relocate; thus, the *Strategies* element of Anderson et al.'s (2012) model, again, offers some form of clarity and understanding to the overall military-connected high school student transitional experience. These strategies, for example, include the use of the internet and other online academic sources such as Khan Academy, IXL, and YouTube. These virtual tutoring sources still reflect the overall theme of looking to oneself first to tackle challenges. As Cagney noted, "And then, if I still don't get it, I'll go back to my resources—either YouTube, Kahn Academy" (Interview). In fact, when participants were asked to identify their source of support for overcoming difficult academic challenges, seven of the 11 participants cited some form of online support.

Likewise, when attempting to stay in touch with friends following relocations, military-connected high school students often turn to Facebook or other social media to stay

connected and reduce the stress of being apart from friends. In fact, Felicia gained insights, or somewhat of an epiphany, regarding her future career based on her experiences of interacting with friends via social media. Felicia described the importance of social media in maintaining connections with friends following relocations in the following manner: “Texting and social media are really, really big. I’m also a PR [Public Relations] major, so I’m always on social media. . . . You can always find somebody. . . . I am still friends with them on Facebook” (Interview). This source of support, however, appears to wane over time. That is, as military-connected high school students remain in a new location longer, according to participants, they tend to communicate with friends living in previous locations in a more aloof manner. Jennifer’s describes this rather distant type of communication and interaction with friends in the following manner:

I have one friend where we call on the phone every now and then and we play chess almost all the time online versus another friend where we just text each other on our birthdays or major holidays. I consider my friend that I play chess with a close friend, but the other friends where I just text them on birthdays or something like that, I don’t consider them close friends anymore. (Interview)

While the level of anxiety or stress associated with a relocation to a new school across states may be reduced through the use of social media, when the relationships are not cultivated or the communication between friends significantly tapers off or, in some cases, ceases, participants appeared to describe friendships with decreased levels of affect.

Extracurricular activities—It is a lifeline. Another category of resources that emerged during coding and thematic development pertains to the military-connected high school students’ use of extracurricular activities as a coping mechanism. Technically, extracurricular activities could fall under the *Social Support* subtheme of the resulting 3S+ Coping System; that is, various social support sources such as teachers, friends and families

are addressed under this subtheme. Despite acknowledging this perspective, to simply list extracurricular activities under the Social Support subtheme would risk losing the sense of importance these activities play in the military-connected high school students' lives. While the rationale for why this particular support element was segregated and given its own subtheme is well outlined in the Theme Development section, the significance that many of the participants (i.e., 10 of 11 participants) described when it comes to extracurricular activities, cannot be overstated. Cagney, a member of the high school chorus, described how her participation in chorus and subsequent infatuation with the multi-dimensional aspects of chorus (e.g., singing, poetry, music) provide a sense of tranquility when navigating the academic challenges associated with military relocation requirements. Specifically, she described her experience as follows:

I also use poetry, writing and music. Those are my outlets. That is how I cope with life. . . . For example, recently we had a family issue, so my way of coping with it was. . . I wrote a lot. It happens all the time or either I play my guitar or the piano. I am just letting it all out. In a way, it acts like a positive outlet. . . . [PAUSE] That way it won't get built up, and I won't let that out on other people because nobody deserves that. (Interview)

In fact, participants described the role that extracurricular activities play in the lives of military-connected high school students as somewhat of a haven and expressed an affinity with this source when contemplating future academic outlooks. Louise, for example, expressed such a view when she provided the following description:

I'm in a lot of extracurricular activities at school. For example, I've been in band three years, especially at the program at my current high school, so it would be sad not to be able to see it through. It has been a really good way to make friends whenever I've moved. I started it in elementary school and it's been a constant thing that I have done

everywhere I have gone since. (Interview)

While Louise's view is reflective of the affinity for extracurricular activities that most participants described, a possible indicator or just how important such activities can be for military-connected high school students in coping with life's challenges cannot be understated. In fact, one unique aspect of this study is that it provides a glimpse of how at least one participant viewed the importance of an extracurricular activity (i.e. band) in high school and how the current loss of this coping resource, now in college, affects her academic outlook. Jennifer provided the following insights:

I thought I was going to be attending [REDACTED] University, down in [the southern part of the U.S. (REDACTED)], studying science and part of the marching band. I'm still in the School of Science, but I thought I was going to be at a completely different school doing something else. And I'm at [REDACTED] University [located in northern Virginia (REDACTED)], still studying science, but there's no marching band. I am not doing anything musical this semester, and it kind of stinks. (Interview)

Throughout the study, military-connected high school students demonstrated a proclivity to describe extracurricular activities as something more than an academic requirement. Over time, such activities became a lifeline.

Social support. The final subtheme addressing the coping resources that military-connected high school students use is *Social Support*. This element of the 3S+ Coping System refers to the military-connected high school students' personal perceptions of who they believe they can turn to for a range of tangible and intangible supportive assistance. This range includes, but is not limited to, academic support, emotional support, cultural support, and comradeship. During the current study, military-connected high school students unanimously identified four major sources of social support: (a) family, (b) teachers, (c)

trusted sources, and (d) friends.

Family. Military-connected high school students often identified family members as their primary external source of support. In fact, family members often played a pivotal role in discussing many of the concerns students had regarding academic requirements before, during and after a relocation. Moreover, military-connected high school students described a sense of knowing that their parents would be there based on past experiences. As a result, participants described parents as a steadfast force who remain resolute in their determination to help their children succeed. Dianna, for example, described how she viewed her parents as a coping resource in the following manner:

I go to my parents whenever I need help with anything, especially academics. . . .
Parents are always there, and they are there through the hardships and through everything. So they are always the ones I go to whenever I have a problem. I think you have a closer relationship with your parents when you have been through all of what we have experienced. (Interview)

Vince also described how he relies on his father who is currently deployed in Afghanistan as the primary source of familial support. Specifically, Vince provided the following description:

Really, I just talk to my dad and he reassures me by letting me know that he would be there for me too and would help me out when help was needed. That was a big stress reliever. It's really the family that actually does the helping or the mental reassurance more so than other people within the school system. (Interview)

Ritchie also described how both of his parents were sources of support and helped him to cope with every relocation that he could recall. However, like Vince, Ritchie also underscored how his father, the military sponsor, served as a major source of support.

Ritchie described this source of support in the following manner:

He was the number one supporter. That's regardless of whether he's here or not, and that puts a really big impact on me too as a military child. No matter how far away your parents are, they don't stop caring about you, and they don't stop encouraging you to do the things you want to do, and they'll never stop loving you despite the distance. (Self-Reflection)

Family members, therefore, appear to be the first line of defense in providing the psychological safety cushion that military-connected high school students depend on when faced with challenges, including the requirement to conduct interstate military relocations. More important, participants described several innate qualities (e.g., caring, communicative skills, tenacity, empathy) that parents possessed and were able to convey to military-connected high school students. Transcending the boundaries of a need for the physical presence of parents, these attributes appeared to serve as key *sources of strength* for military-connected high school students. While students may look to themselves first when attempting to cope with academic and other life challenges, participants described family members—or friends, in some cases, who were viewed as an extension of the family—as the primary source that helped to influence military-connected high school students' perception of themselves.

Teachers. Military-connected high school students also described teachers as a major source that helps them overcome any academic challenges when they relocate across state lines. For academic assistance, participants appeared to describe the teachers as either the first or second source of support they turn to for assistance. While going to the parents as an external source, often initially, they described the teacher as the definitive source to address any academic challenges. Wilson underscored this point during the interview when he stated, “When it comes to academics, I ask my parents for help too, but I'll ask my teachers because they'll know better than my parents what I need to do” (Interview). Despite expressing a

desire for increased understanding among teachers when it comes to understanding the military experience, many participants were quick to highlight that there are a number of teachers who do understand and who take positive actions to assist military-connected high school students.

Such understanding, according to participants, included additional steps teachers took to ensure that military-connected high school students understood the material or that they were afforded ample opportunities to work and attain the level of proficiency necessary to succeed. Cagney, a bright young lady who had great grades before relocating to Virginia, found herself falling behind immediately after arriving in northern Virginia. She described how there were some teachers that after informing them that she, Cagney, was a military-connected high school student, they simply replied, ““And?”” (Interview). On the other hand, she spoke highly of those teachers who were understanding towards military-connected high school students. Cagney described the extra care and attention she received when encountering one of those understanding teachers in the following manner:

The teachers were really helpful. If you didn't understand something, they would help you after school or you could go to them during lunch and they would go through several of the problems and then made sure that you understood them. After that, they would quiz you on it and made sure you understood everything. But if you didn't, they would find other ways and determine what was best for you and they would teach it that way. (Interview)

In short, those teachers who are cognizant of the unique characteristics of military-connected high school students were described as a main source of support to address academic challenges following the execution of interstate relocation requirements.

Trusted sources. Still, within the school system, and sometimes outside of the school system, students described a *trusted source* of support as critical to their ability to adapt and

assimilate in a new environment or to survive in a current environment. This source could be an academic advisor or another educational assistant or administrator or even a friend. As long as the student viewed the source as one who was able to assist, demonstrated a sincere sense of caring and the source could be trusted to do what the student viewed to be right, the participants believed they could meet the criteria of a valid coping resource. The trusted source also can serve as disconfirming information to the view that parents were always considered as the primary coping resource. That is, as one student noted:

Counseling services give military kids the opportunity and the spaces to vent about what is going on in their lives. Specifically, as they get older, sometimes they don't want to talk to their parents about what is going on with them. I think that this could be a great tool to help aid these children through what they are going through.

(Felicia, Letter)

What is unique about this particular source, is that it takes on many forms, it can be a friend, an administrator or "the principal" (Felicia, Interview). The key attribute that must be present is trust. Dory underscored the trust prerequisite when she described a trusted resource in the following manner:

[S]ometimes challenges can be hard and I might feel like I can't accept whatever the challenge is, so I would go talk to somebody because other people can help you. Some people may not like to talk to other people about how they are feeling or express their feelings about either their moving experience or anything else. *You'll only talk to someone you trust* [emphasis added] because they can help you.

(Interview)

In fact, participants described experiences where they themselves used these trusted sources, despite knowing that their parents were available. Some expressed an unwillingness to burden already overly stressed family members. Moreover, the concerns that drive these

students to trusted sources outside of the parents can be harbored for long periods and, like chattel, packaged and carried to new locations. Jennifer, a student who was being bullied at her high school in the North, described how she harbored her negative experiences and cognitively and emotionally transported them to northern Virginia as part of a military relocation requirement. Only after finding a trusted source, was she able to reveal what she had been experiencing. She describes her ordeal in the following manner:

I was really upset for a while, and I was really frustrated, and I didn't really talk to anybody about it until I moved here, because I didn't feel comfortable and I didn't know who I could trust up in [the northern part of the U.S. (REDACTED)]. I found a few people I was able to trust here, which helped a lot. (Interview)

When parents are away or when military-connected high school students perceive the pressures of daily life to be too burdensome to share with parents who themselves may be navigating challenges associated with relocations, trusted resources appear to be a significant source of support to help the military-connected high school student cope and adapt.

Friends. The final major source of support that military-connected high school students described as a key coping resource was friends. This source appears to be one of the primary reasons students express a desire to either remain in a current location or possess anxieties about going to a new location. This source, or the thoughts of possibly losing this source, often has a significant effect on academic performance or relationships at home.

Dory described the pain associated with leaving a friend in the following manner.

So when you go to a new place it's hard because you never know if you're going to be the same person, and that can affect your grades because you keep thinking about your best friend or your closest friend at your other school, or you feel like you can't do things the same as you did at your old school, you know? (Interview)

Military-connected high school students often described feeling torn, having to

choose between family and friends, when the time to relocate arrived. In some cases, military-connected high school students either observed, contemplated, or formulated plans to live apart from parents during a relocation to remain with friends if relationships with friends were cemented or graduation was imminent. Wilson, for example, described a situation where he observed how another military-connected student addressed the dilemma of deciding between remaining with friends or relocating with the family:

I remember this one kid. He was playing sports for [a northern Virginia school (REDACTED)]. He was supposed to move, but his mom told him that he could stay at his friend's house located on base—another military kid, too—and finish up his season for a school year; then, he would move back in with his mom. (Interview)

Unlike Wilson, Louise is a military-connected high school student who has enjoyed the pleasure of remaining in the same high school for three years. However, she has been informed that relocation orders could arrive at any moment in the near future. Hence, currently she is wrestling with how she and her family will live should she decide to stay. After all, she explained, her older brother was in high school during his senior year when the family executed the prior relocation. She described her plans for the future in the following manner:

So my mom and I have talked about it [options that the family would consider if the military issued orders to relocate] before and we have somewhat decided that if it comes down to it, it would be better to get a small apartment near my school, and she would just continue with her job and I would go to school for a year, and my dad would have to go somewhere alone.

The researcher asked her how she would feel about that, and Louise responded as follows:

It would be pretty sad to live without him, but we would probably see him over the holidays. I have a friend who decided to move instead of doing what my mom and I

have planned to do. She said that she did not regret it because her family is really close, but she was pretty upset about leaving her friends. (Interview)

In short, the force of the social bond between friends are often tested to extreme limits when military-connected high school students are faced with relocating across states to fulfill military mobility requirements.

The intersection of two coping resources, *perceptions of self* and *the acquisition of friends*, became apparent when participants described one peculiar behavior that occurs shortly after arrival at a new school—*the act of consciously dawning a new perception of self in an effort to fit in*. Arguably, this particular section could be placed under the *self* subtheme; however, it is placed under the *friends* subtheme, because the participants often described the desire to acquire friends as the primary purpose or motivation behind the associated change. Because many participants described friends as a major coping resource, sometimes the desire to acquire friends was stronger than the desire to remain oneself. Participants described the seemingly inevitable metamorphosis, not as a true or primary personality change, but one more reflective of a temporary façade.

Military-connected high school students frequently described friends as being in or out of a *group* and the awareness levels regarding when friends entered or departed a group also appeared to be heightened among military-connected high school students. In addition, the male participants had a tendency to describe experiences where they had to take on multiple chameleon-type personae just to fit into various social circles following relocations. According to some of the participants' descriptions, when dawning this façade the individuals controlling the change are aware and have knowledge of their true identities. Jacques described the dawning of this chameleon type of personality in the following manner:

When you move from place to place, you can have different personalities and be who you want to be because no one knows you. You can go and change yourself. You

can be someone different. It is, in a way, weird but you can do that because no one knows you. (Self-Reflection)

On the other hand, some participants described a degree of risk or uncertainty when assuming a façade, because individuals at times, struggled to maintain their identities or became lost in the process. Ritchie, for example, described the pressure and consequences military-connected high school students encounter to dawn such a facade to acquire friends or enter various social groups as follows:

There's always a feeling of having to be someone else—*like dawning a persona to be accepted by the group of people*. . . . You just have to be yourself, because if you don't be yourself, then growing up, who can you look back on? Someone that you tried to mimic or someone you tried to copy? So moving around from state to state, it . . . makes you become someone suitable to that state, versus actually trying to find yourself. (Interview)

If the relocation occurred during the middle of the school year, participants described the ability to make friends much more difficult because peer or friendship groups had already formed and they, the military-connected high school students, believed other students now viewed them as the outsiders. Participants described these types of situations as ones where the pressure to fit in or the perceived need to change were the greatest. In short, participants described friends as a major coping resource factor and appeared to suggest that this source can either strengthen or hinder the adaptation or assimilation process before and after a relocation.

RQ3: How do military-connected high school students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook? Military-connected high school students answered the subject questions in a manner that aligns with Theme 3: *Be all you can see*. This theme reflects the core of what military-connected high school students

perceive as it pertains to academic outlook. In fact, the results revealed that the answer to the subject question could be addressed in two broad parts: (a) a robust and optimistic sense of self-efficacy, and (b) a demonstration of assurance of a positive outlook through preparation and gratitude. Many of the participants expressed a positive or very optimistic view regarding their future academic outlook and described how their view aligned with their primary purpose for academic endeavors.

Robust self-efficacy beliefs. Although some of the participants alluded to the Department of Defense's program that authorizes a sponsor to remain at a location if he or she has a child in the latter years of high school, they all acknowledged that there was nothing they could do about the requirement to relocate due to military directives. Despite this ostensible obstacle, most of the participants described how they could control the way they cognitively responded to such relocation requirements and noted how these frequent moves only added to their ability to adapt to current challenges and future challenges. Using reflection, many of the military-connected high school student participants described how the numerous relocations and the experiences associated with them served as a foundation for generating optimism about their academic future. After analyzing these descriptions, four subthemes that answer the subject research question and illustrate the essence of the participants' responses emerged: (a) perseverance and optimism usurp control, (b) flexibility outweighs organization, (c) remembering that you are part of something bigger, and (d) possession of a strong communal value system. A full discussion of the aforementioned subthemes and an explanation of how they answer Research Question 3 are noted below:

Perseverance and optimism usurp control. Military-connected high school students described numerous situations where their sheer persistence helped them to overcome academic and other challenges related to relocating across state lines. The level of resiliency expressed by military-connected high school students directly parallels how the students

viewed their overall outlook in life and their core beliefs relating to their military-connected status and upbringing. While practically every participant (i.e., 10 of 11) acknowledged that they were unable to control the timing of military orders to relocate, they expressed a variety of views regarding how they would stay focused on their goals, be the best that they could be, and ultimately succeed. Reminiscent of characteristics revealed under Theme 2—*Coping Resources Begin With Me*—Sean described his level of perseverance, when encountering situational control challenges, from a personal perspective. Specifically, he stated, “Even when it feels like something's out of my control, I always relate back to what can I do that can somehow make this situation somewhat better. Because if I don't do something, that's a mistake on my part” (Interview). Cagney on the other hand, credits her family upbringing for her high determination level. When asked to describe her level of perseverance when faced with various academic challenges, Cagney stated the following:

Because being in this sort of family, our dad, never let us just give up. If we were to say we were giving up he would ask, “Say what? What was that?” So there is no giving-up. There's no giving up, no saying I can't. There is only teamwork.

(Interview)

Still, there is another perspective that appears to encapsulate the majority of the military-connected high school student participants' view regarding perseverance—*they are simply determined because they are military-connected*. This finding was perhaps best expressed by Ritchie when he provided the following description of his experience:

So, whenever life throws a challenge at me, I always thought, “It's not ‘*Why me?*’ It's ‘*Try me!*’” When there is a challenge thrown at you, you shouldn't think of it as a challenge. You should just think of it as something you normally do or something that you should do. (Interview)

Over time, military-connected high school students who successfully cope with adversity

regularly appear to develop a sense of confidence that they can successfully use coping resources to handle practically any challenges they encounter.

On the other hand, there appears to be disconfirming information in the early years of some of the male students. That is, many of the younger male participants who are currently experiencing or just recently experienced relocations, expressed a view that was less than all positive. Even one of the most positive students in the study, Vince, was able to reflect and truthfully share how he viewed life in general, from a less than positive, goal driven perspective:

It definitely took me some time to think to actually start caring about my academics. I always just thought “I am going to just scrape by, get going, and eventually just enlist in the military” until colleges started showing interest in me. I have always been a very smart student. I just never really applied myself. So my move didn't really affect me that much until I started caring about meeting the requirements and not just meeting the bare minimum. (Interview)

Flexibility outweighs organization. Military-connected high school students, while expressing some degree of organizational skills, overwhelmingly credited flexibility as being a key attribute to cope with academic challenges and other challenges in life. Moreover, they often explicitly expressed that their flexibility was far more responsible for their ability to cope with challenges and the confidence they have in their future endeavors. Louise, for example, described how the constant thought of a possible relocation order arriving helped shape her flexibility capabilities. Specifically, she stated, “I always had to be ready to move or I had to be flexible with the classes I was going to take or where I was going to go to school or anything else of that sort” (Interview). Similarly, Ritchie expressed the importance of flexibility among military-connected high school students when he noted the following:

Flexibility is very, very important. You can't be stiff and not want to accept new

ideas or try new things. When you grow up as a person, you should grow up mentally as well. And the only way to grow up mentally is through different experiences and through advice of different people who tried different experiences. So being flexible is very important. (Interview)

But just as there are cases where a significant amount of flexibility and optimism about life are expressed, some military-connected high school students expressed a desire to remain inflexible. In fact, Wilson's comments corresponding to Research Question 1 and the *Understanding the Situation* section, illustrate how this particular participant loathed change. Such a view was often expressed by the younger participants and when viewed from a reflective perspective by older participants, they too described how they were somewhat inflexible in their earlier years. Dory alluded to the nexus of age and differences in perspectives regarding change when she provided the following description of her experience:

When I first started moving, I didn't want any change. I didn't want anything to do with changing. But now, I like trying new things. So you have to be flexible and just try things that you might enjoy. Right now, I love change. I like trying things, I like being flexible and stuff, because that can help you learn in life. (Interview)

While, these views serve as disconfirming information they still align perfectly with the overall theme, *Be All You Can See*, corresponding to Research Question 3.

Remembering that you are part of something bigger. Throughout this study, military-connected high school students acknowledged that they were part of something much larger than themselves. Besides simply referring to themselves as being either in the military or military-connected, they all appeared to attach a sense of reverence and patriotism to their descriptions. For example, when asked if he understood why he had to move one participant said, "I believe it's for our country, of course, and then for financial reasons" (Jacques,

Interview). This view was not isolated to a few participants but quite common throughout all of the responses. Despite having to relocate to new areas and new schools many students maintained a positive outlook about the new academic environment because they viewed the country as their home. Reflecting on adages his mom often shared with him, Sean described such feelings of being a part of something bigger in the following manner:

Well, my mom used to always say, 'Home is where the Navy sends us.' So I kind of stopped trying to view myself in a simple hometown, because I find that difficult to view. But I view this entire country as my hometown, because we're in the military. Our job is not just to protect our city or our house or our home. It's to protect the country. The country is our home. (Interview)

Jennifer also expressed a similar view when she described her experience as follows:

It's just part of being a military family. You have to constantly relocate for your parent's career because that's what the Army is essentially telling them to do. I know in the army we have a saying, 'Home is where the Army takes us.' All that really mattered to us growing up was that we had our family and that our dad was safe. (Interview)

Over time, participants began to understand their roles not only as a family member, but as part of the overall military mission.

Possession of a strong communal value system. One area that became apparent when participants described their academic environments following relocations was the possession of a strong communal based value system. That is, participants described situations where military-connected high school students appeared to project a keen sense of social awareness and responsibility reflective of a more mature value system. When providing contextual descriptions of a new school, for example, many of the participants immediately identified the diversity characteristics of the school's or location's population. In addition, this

description was often followed using words to express approval or disapproval of various social conditions.

Where diversity was vibrant, military-connected high school students had a tendency to express appreciation for such environments. Felicia, an African American female who had attended schools where the population was predominantly comprised of Caucasian students through eighth grade, found her relocation experience to an ethnically diverse high school in Virginia as eye-opening. Specifically, she noted, “At [the mid-western part of the country (REDACTED)] it was mostly white, but here it was more diverse because a lot of black students, African students, and Latino students were here and that was really cool (Interview). In cases where social issues were addressed in class, participants had a propensity to articulate not necessarily agreement with a particular issue, but a sense of respect regarding the rights of others to express their opinions. Following Dianna’s relocation from a highly diverse high school in Virginia to a high school in the South she quickly became aware of an environment where lower levels of tolerances for opinions other than the pervasive ones of the South. She described her experience in the following manner:

It was a challenge being in the school system. We had a lot of trouble with it because the teachers are into the drama, too, and they do not separate themselves from their morals. So whatever their beliefs are they let all of the kids know. It was difficult being there because I was not used to that environment. . . . I don't know how to explain it. I am who I am because of being a military child and I'm glad. I would not take anything back. I would not take any of the moves back because it makes me more open and more understanding with people and how they handled things. So, I am glad that I got to experience all that, even though some of the stuff was bad.
(Interview)

In addition, participants who possessed higher levels of academic acumen at various

points during their academic experience described situations where they volunteered to assist other students who were experiencing difficulty understanding the material or were at some point the recipient of such help. Wilson, for example, described observing such assistance from another military-connected student in the following manner:

I remember this one student. He was a military student too, and he went through moving a lot with the military. At first he didn't like it, like me, but then he got used to it. So he started giving me tips and just tried to get me through it too. It helped me get through. (Interview)

In other cases, military-connected high school students demonstrated a keen sense of understanding and empathy for others and had a tendency to assist other family members or other military-connected high school students when they arrived at new schools or new locations. A common belief held and expressed among participants who had siblings (i.e., 10 of 11) was the notion that they, the military-connected high school student, had to remain strong and assist their sibling through a relocation. Cagney, for example, described her situation in the following manner:

I really had to be strong. I would say to [my siblings], "Okay, I'm upset about this move too, but it is going to be okay. We are going to be fine." Because if I was down about it the entire time, then they would not have been more open to moving, and it would have made the move even harder for everybody. (Interview)

In another example, Ritchie underscored how this belief regarding helping others often transcended the sibling level and the family level. He noted the following:

Help your parents as much as you can because they're trying to help you as much as they can as well. This world isn't meant for a person to handle it by himself or herself. Everybody is working with someone, and if you think you're not, you are. That's something very important. (Self-Reflection)

All of these examples reflected a sense of duty towards *advancing the group* instead of an individual focus.

Still, another aspect of this communal value system that was almost overlooked is the concept of *integrity*. While questions about the participants' integrity were not part of the initial questions to help guide the interview, over a series of interviews, this attribute became apparent in the responses. Although the participants were asked questions and, more than likely, could infer that the researcher was trying to solicit responses pertaining to a certain topic, the participants did not answer questions in a certain manner if they had not experienced a situation in a certain manner. Instead, they politely qualified their answers with the word "honestly" or "truthfully" and proceeded to provide answers to questions that may have, or so they believed, gone awry from what the researcher was asking. When answering questions regarding the participant's level of control over situations requiring relocation to another state, Cagney stated, "Not everything is in our control. We don't have control over everything *to be honest* [emphasis added]. So sometimes I feel like I'm not in control" (Interview).

In another case, one participant was asked to describe his perception of his organizational skills as compared to flexibility when dealing with academic challenges. Probably assuming that the question was trying to solicit an answer to reflect the supposedly great organizational skills of military-connected high school students, he responded by stating, "I shouldn't say I don't have any organizational skills. I have some, *but truthfully* [emphasis added], it's more of the flexibility that outweighs the organization. (Jacques, Interview). Likewise, when asked about support networks, one participant, similar to nine (9) of the other participants, revealed that he turned to himself first before he sought assistance from such support networks. But, even when answering such questions, the participant, Vince, acknowledged that he had little or few support sources. The manner in which he

described his situation, however, is reflective of this trait of integrity that appeared to be pervasive throughout the data collection process. Vince noted the following:

Honestly, I don't use a whole lot of support networks. It has been more of a just do it myself. . . . Reflecting back on my academic career or just academics in general, I am going to be honest. I don't really feel like academically, I'm the best person for this. For example, it definitely took me some time care about high school. (Self-Reflection)

When describing scenarios, participants also refrained from using definitive descriptions when they were not aware of the definitive truth supporting a position, but still found a way to convey that a perceived action or action conflicted with their military ingrained concept of integrity. In one case, one student described how her military developed ethics conflicted with the academic environment shortly after her arrival to a new school in the South. She described the event in the following manner:

I had a big 3.9 GPA [in Virginia] and when I got there I had a 4.6 GPA. . . . I had to really work for it. . . . It kind of upset me in a way because everyone around me, their GPAs were really high, off the roof high. But it is because the teachers did their work for them. . . . It was a little troubling . . . [The class valedictorian's] family members were teachers, so she always got that grade, that A. It is all about who you know when you are in the South. It has an effect when you are in the area for a long time.

Dianna indicated that integrity was integral to her military up-bringing. When I asked her why, she replied, "It just takes a lot, I guess. Well, I don't know how to explain it. I am who I am because of being a military child and I'm glad."

In all of the aforementioned examples, participants described a sense of communal responsibility, lined with integrity, which appeared to pervade the very psyche of military-connected high school students. If this finding regarding the perceived high level of integrity

among most of the participants is correct, and if it can be inferred by stakeholders reviewing this study, the participants' responses could, more than likely, add a greater level of credibility to the study.

Academic outlook assurance based on preparation and gratitude. The final subtheme that emerged, but adequately helps to answer Research Question 3, pertains to a combination of two salient characteristics that military-connected high school students described as having a major influence on their academic outlook: (a) preparation efforts to achieve the outlook, and (b) gratitude. That is, many of the participants described how they, over time, developed a positive academic outlook and felt quite confident that they could and would achieve their academic goals. In addition, they often described the preparatory steps they took to ensure that the academic goal would be achieved. Whenever reality conflicted with the academic vision, participants described how they would reflect on their past experiences and gain a sense of gratitude for what they had experienced and this gratitude would help them to adjust their attitude. Despite such positive outlooks and an ability to adjust such outlooks, during the early years of high school, some participants described situations where perhaps an academic outlook did not exist. This disconfirming information became apparent during the data collection and data analysis process; thus, it too is addressed herein.

Preparation efforts to achieve outlook. Some students sought and took pride in taking more advanced courses as part of their high school curriculum and many of these students believed that their persistence and perseverance in these classes, coupled with achieving high marks, serve as proof that they would perform well, academically, in the future. In fact, many of them believed that their high level of performance and associated high marks would continue or remain practically the same in college. Some participants, Felicia, Sean and Jennifer, were selected primarily because they had completed their high school experience.

These participants were asked to reflect on their initial academic outlook that was formulated in high school and describe how accurate those perceptions were when compared to their post-secondary experiences. In these cases participants were able to provide real-time insights regarding the accuracy of their high school academic outlook perceptions.

Generally, participants described, how their perceptions in high school were flawed or somewhat distorted at best. Either way, participants described how their determination and positive attitude allowed them to adjust to the new reality and appeared grateful for their military experiences in the process. Felicia described one of these post-secondary reflections in the following manner:

In high school, I did not think college was going to be hard. I thought it was going to be a breeze. I thought I would study art or something but I did not really have a major. . . . In college, college is hard. I am still doing pretty well. I just think that I was not as prepared to come to college as I could have been. I feel like they could have offered better classes. . . . But, I can handle what I am doing and I am still doing it to the best of my abilities and . . . I am proud of myself. Actually, I thought it was going to be really easy but it is not. (Interview)

Similarly, Jennifer used post-secondary reflections to provide insights regarding her flawed academic outlook formed in high school:

If you are asking me to address how accurate my perception was when I was in high school and thinking how I would do in college or my future academic outlooks compared to where I am at now? Oh, it's nothing like what I thought it was going to be. It is nothing [like] what I expected I was going towards in high school.
(Interview)

During the investigation, these participants provided an evaluative perspective of the initial academic outlook they formulated in high school. Moreover, when faced with adversity in

college, these students appeared to express optimism based on their ability to recall success from their past experiences and a sense of gratitude regarding those experiences.

As part of the study, some students who were performing well in other state schools prior to arriving to Virginia were asked to reflect on their academic outlook prior to coming to Virginia and to compare the level of accuracy of those a priori perceptions to the reality following their arrival in Virginia. Due to the purportedly high academic standards in northern Virginia, many of the students who performed well elsewhere either fell behind after initially performing well in Virginia or they experienced difficulty immediately upon arriving in Virginia. In such cases, these students acknowledged that perhaps their academic outlook was not as accurate as they initially perceived. In the following example, one participant described how optimism, predicated on high academic performance in one state, collided with the reality of different academic standards once she relocated to Virginia. Dory, for example described her experience in the following manner:

When I first moved here, it was my sophomore year, and I was in IB Math and IB Chemistry and AP Government. It was my first time taking all those classes. My counselor did not prepare me mentally for the workload. So when I got here, I was very overwhelmed and stressed out, and I felt so dumb because I was so used to A's and being on the A/B Honor Roll. I received an F for the first time and I thought, "I am stupid. What is happening?" (Interview)

Practically all of the students, (i.e., 8 of 11) described how their initial academic outlook was flawed, but qualified this view by describing how they were able to overcome such setbacks by relying on various coping resources (e.g., family, teachers, trusted sources, friends) and their positive attitude, fierce level of determination and a strong sense of gratitude for their experience. In fact, it is the latter three intrinsic attributes that many participants described as the foundation of their overall positive outlook.

Gratitude. While their academic outlook may have been overly optimistic or even flawed, in some cases, in general, participants described remaining steadfast with their outlook or making adjustments whenever they realized they encountered a disconnect between their initial academic outlook and the reality of a challenging academic environment. Either way, whenever participants faced challenges, they described how the use of reflection helped them gain a sense of gratitude for what they had experienced in the past and such gratitude allowed them to re-focus and adjust their outlook. In doing so, participants described how the adversity they experienced in the past served as a stepping stone to achieving their lifelong academic endeavors. When reflecting on her experiences, for example, Dianna described an amalgamation of gratitude and self-identity in the following manner:

I am who I am because of being a military child and I'm glad. I would not take anything back. I would take any of the moves back because it makes me more open and more understanding with people and how they handled things. So, I am glad that I got to experience all that, even though some of the stuff was bad. But I want to experience the good things too. (Interview)

Also, using his reflections about past experiences to shape his positive outlook about his future, Ritchie expressed a similar tone of gratitude and optimism. He described his future outlook in the following manner:

I have this mentality of, "Whatever happens, happens, and just do your best to get the future you want." So, you fail a test or you don't come first in that race you were working toward. There's always the next test. There's always the next race that you can work towards. But, you have to put in the work in between to get the future that you desire or you want. That's something I've always lived by. Despite how far my dad is, or wherever he is, I'm always working hard because I know that's what he

would want me to do. I want the future that I want, just like he would want the future I want. So we're kind of all in this together despite how far he is away from me, and despite how far I am away from him. (Self-Reflection)

Similarly, but from a different perspective, Louise attributes her current success in college to her experiences as a military-connected child. Her insights are critical because, like three of the 11 participants, she has the ability to reflect on her entire high school experience and speak from a perspective that allows her to compare once futuristic academic outlooks with the reality of experiencing college. Specifically, she noted the following:

So relocating often has probably helped with my academics. It has really shown me that I have to go out of my way to make relationships with teachers and ask them for help if I need it, which has made me much stronger in a lot of subjects in the long run. I am not sure I would have learned that if I were just a normal kid who stays where they are for the whole time. (Self-Reflection)

In short, military-connected high school students, nine of the 11 participants, had a tendency to describe a very positive outlook about their academic future and this optimism was always inextricably linked to feelings of gratitude associated with their experiences as military-connected students.

Disconfirming information. The expression of optimism was occasionally thwarted by individual perceptions of doubt or limited visibility due to current circumstances. That is, if the participant was in the midst of a crisis due to a recent, upcoming or potential relocation some were unable to see beyond the current situation. Often academics and the associated outlooks were not the initial concerns of many of these students. Instead, participants described how they, at least initially, intentionally engaged in dysfunctional behaviors such as refraining from making friends. Such behaviors diminished access to key coping resources and reduced the military-connected high school students' levels of effectiveness or reflected

increased pessimism. After executing some relocations, military-connected high school students often described how they felt upset or frustrated, constantly thought about friends living in past locations and, subsequently, made decisions that were contrary to their academic or other goals. Dory, for example, described how she reacted in the following manner;

I didn't really try to make friends because I was still upset, and I knew that because we were part of a military family, we would move again, so I thought, 'I'll just try to isolate myself and be by myself.' (Interview)

Some participants even described a sense of hopelessness following some relocations, and illustrated how they failed to exert sufficient effort to circumvent such emotions. The rationale behind this dysfunctional behavior, according to some participants, revolved around the credible belief that another move was soon forthcoming. Hence, as Jacques described, a sense of futility often accompanies or pushes aside efforts to form relationships or perform well in school. Jacques described such experiences in the following manner;

You can't really have a stable relationship with your teachers or people around you. Which reflects in your grades because truthfully, you have the mindset of what's the point of doing any work, classwork, or whatever because you are going to leave the following year or month later and it's just a waste of time. (Letter)

Such views generally faded over time; however, at least initially, some participants did describe a phase where the academic outlook was often obnubilated by emotionally difficult thoughts directly related to the requirement to relocate.

Summary

In summary, this chapter delineated the results of the data analysis with a specific focus on the findings. To facilitate this effort, participant information noted in Chapter Three was expanded upon through the use of rich descriptions. A discussion of the thematic

development process was delineated and, as part of this discussion, the final phase of bracketing, reintegration, was reiterated. This discussion was necessary because it provided a rationale for various decisions executed during the coding process, which involved some level of interpretation or introduction of theory. The coding process revealed three overarching themes that sought to convey the essence of the military-connected high school student's experience. These themes were subsequently aligned with the three research questions and, along with related subthemes and supporting quotes from the participants, provided answers to these research questions.

Military-connected high school students seek to understand their environment but desire that those who seek to assist them, also invest time and effort to understand them. From the myriad academic challenges to the rollercoaster-like emotions surrounding relocation requirements to the simple plea for greater awareness among stakeholders, the military-connected high school students' experience is often complex and fluid. While military-connected high school students have access to numerous resources (e.g., social support networks comprised of family members, friends, teachers, and trusted resources; social media resources to assist with academic challenges; extracurricular activities) they have a propensity to rely upon themselves first to resolve most of life's challenges. In addition, military-connected high school students described extracurricular activities as essential coping resources and noted how these activities often served as a source of peace, tranquility and stability in the midst of a sometimes chaotic military environment.

Finally, the manner in which these students cope with adversity appears to be greatly influenced by the military environment in which they operate and their self-efficacy beliefs. Military-connected high school students appear to develop higher levels of resilience over time due to their ability to constantly cope with and adapt to multiple relocations. In addition, they appear to have a positive academic outlook and frequently expressed thoughts

regarding their future with a heightened sense of positivity and gratitude. In the end, the findings revealed that military-connected high school students are very complex individuals who construct a myriad of meanings related to their unique experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of the current study is to describe the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who conduct interstate relocations due to military mobility requirements. This chapter provides a synopsis of the findings and discusses these findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature outlined in the Literature Review section of Chapter Two. A more detailed discussion of the concomitant methodological, practical, empirical, and theoretical implications of the study are also delineated herein. Afterward, a brief discussion ensues to address the delimitations that were consciously employed to help define the boundaries for this study and the limitations, which acknowledges potential weakness that may become apparent due to uncontrollable circumstances or conditions. Finally, after considering the congeries of the study's findings, limitations, and the delimitations, this chapter provides multiple recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

In summary, military-connected high school students are very complex individuals who view their academic experiences differently when conducting interstate relocations. That is, individuals may share similar contextual experiences; however, the manner in which they construct meaning regarding such experiences is unique and dependent upon the individual's depth of resources. When seeking to answer the research question related to how the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academics when relocating to a new state, military-connected high school students described how they desired to succeed academically, but needed stakeholders to be aware of the unique situations and experiences of military-connected high school students. This sentiment is reflected in the theme, *Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help*.

As for answering the research questions regarding the coping resources that military-connected high school student use, this study found that they use numerous coping resources; however, military-connected high school students tend to start any coping process by turning to themselves first. The theme, *Coping Resources Start with Me*, reflects this view. After trying to cope with challenges themselves, the primary resources that they tend to rely on are family members, teachers, trusted sources and friends. Finally, when seeking to address how military-connected high school students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook, this study determined that military-connected high school students tend to have a positive academic outlook regarding future academic endeavors. While this view may be skewed at times, military-connected high school students appear to gain a sense of confidence about the future based on their history of dealing with adversity over a lifetime. While some disconfirming information did emerge during the study, much of this information was predicated on the individual's personal constructs about what was taking place at the present time. As a result, the theme, *Be All You Can See*, does reflect the rather complex dichotomy of how some military-connected high school students are able to show such a high level of resiliency at various points in their lives, while others struggle to adapt before, during or after executing an interstate relocation.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to address the findings of the current study as they relate to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Specifically, this section seeks to illustrate how the current study confirms or corroborates previous research. In addition, this section will highlight those areas where the current study diverges from or expands upon the scope of previous research studies. This section will also highlight one finding related to some military-connected high school students' behaviors immediately prior to or shortly following relocations. The rationale for discussing this point is to illustrate how

the decision to use a transcendental phenomenology design and approach possibly led to a scholarly contribution in the area of studying military-connected high school students. That is, this study addressed a gap in literature that, until this point, was only tacitly addressed or researchers simply voiced an appeal for more research. Moreover, while theory is not a prerequisite for conducting a transcendental phenomenological study, this section discusses two theories, (i.e., Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory and Schlossberg's (2011) transition model), which appear to elucidate several key facets of the military-connected high school student's experience.

Empirical Literature

Military-connected high school students who experience interstate relocations have similar academic experiences related to military relocation requirements; however, they experience such relocation requirements differently. The transitions that occur are not fixed to a single point in time, but occur over a period, as evident by the changing of opinions over time regarding academic environments following a relocation (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Clever & Segal, 2013; Lenz, 2001). As a result, as military-connected high school students and their families experience military and personal transitions, their needs change over time also (Clever & Segal, 2013; Lenz, 2001). Because these transitions often interrupt routines, require the assumption of new roles or the relinquishment of hard earned statuses in various social circles, it is imperative for stakeholders seeking to influence the academic outcomes of these students to both understand what the student is experiencing and know how they can positively assist students (Arnold, Garner, & Nunnery, 2014; Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty & Berkowitz, 2016; MacDermid Wadsworth, Bailey, & Coppola, 2017; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Russo & Fallon, 2015). According to Anderson et al. (2012), to best assist a person with any form of transitions, counselors or other stakeholders should seek to determine

precisely where in the transition process a person is and seek to meet them there and guide them to where they need to be.

While some students are capable of and, in many ways, look forward to relocating frequently, it is important for educators to recognize that even in the most seemingly optimistic cases, some form of coping is still required to successfully transition. The unfamiliar environmental setting in a new school, anxiety regarding the successful transfer of school credits and a host of other concerns related to varying academic standards, all contribute to the formation of a rich mosaic of the military-connected high school student's academic experience (Arnold et al., 2014; Astor et al., 2013; Conforte et al., 2017, p. 1573; Meadows et al., 2016). Understanding the complexities that are manifested in the military-connected high school student's environment is critical to being able to assist military-connected students (Arnold, Lucier-Greer, Mancini, Ford, & Wickrama, 2017; De Pedro et al., 2016; Eastbrooks et al., 2013; Gilreath, Estrada, Pineda, Benbenishty, & Avi Astor, 2014; Lester et al., 2013; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016; Wykes, 2015). Thus, the theme *Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help* appears to be well supported by the empirical literature regarding military-connected high school students.

This study also highlighted how military-connected high school students coped with academic and other challenges related to military relocations. Many prior studies have underscored the importance of family members, friends or trusted sources in coping with academic, relocation related or other challenges (De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, & Astor, 2014; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016; Russo & Fallon, 2015; Sories, Maier, Beer, & Thomas, 2015; Strong & Weiss, 2017; Wykes, 2015). However, this study highlighted how military-connected high school students described a proclivity to initially address challenges associated with interstate relocations from a personal perspective and how many military-connected high school students exhibit accelerated maturity. Some

researchers observed that when adolescents take such a proactive approach to “managing their stressors and displaying higher levels of maturity” (Okafor, Lucier-Greer, & Mancini, 2016, p. 134) they tend to exhibit fewer psychological or emotional health difficulties. In another study, Lucier-Greer et al. (2016) found that “late adolescents who live outside the USA also have higher self-reliance, whereas early adolescents have significantly lower self-reliance/optimism” (p. 429).

This study revealed that those students within the United States who executed interstate moves exhibited similar behaviors. Hence, actions taken to increase coping skills or bolster the military-connected high school student’s ability to tackle academic or other challenges could prove beneficial by helping to reduce potential challenges related to mental health issues among military-connected students. In addition, military-connected high school students described extracurricular activities as an important resource to help them cope with various academic and other challenges related to interstate relocations. Thus, as Mesecar and Soifer (2017) noted, “Effectively supporting these students’ success makes it essential that their school understands their needs, including academic, social/emotional, athletic, and extracurricular considerations” (p. 5). The latter point was reflected in the creation of the 3S+ model emphasizing the importance of extracurricular activities to military-connected high school students.

To move forward effectively, both military-connected students and teachers need a means to engage in pedagogical discussions that require both sides to listen, because only then can the students’ voices be heard and transformed into a pedagogical instrument that educators can use to effectively teach this unique group of students (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). Similarly, other studies underscored how the juxtaposition of the perspectives of the students and the perspectives of teachers can be epistemically examined to expose similarities and differences in perceptions. Without taking the time to determine where commonalities

and differences exist, school system leaders could be inadvertently eroding the nurturing climate that they are seeking to cultivate; that is, some studies have suggested that chasms in perceptions have been associated with the creation of destructive or pessimistic school climates (Astor et al., 2013; Gilreath et al., 2014).

The findings related to the high level of resilience among many military-connected high school students also appear to be well supported by the empirical literature. Specifically, this study found that many of the military-connected high school students described a high level of resilience when reflecting on their past experiences and subsequently prognosticating about their future academic outlooks. These findings, however, qualified the final position by noting that the level of resilience exhibited among these students varied and depended upon the level of individual coping skills and experience and this qualification is reflected in the theme, *Be All You Can See*.

Other researchers noted how military-connected children's outcomes "vary considerably" (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017, p. 26) and posit that because of this variation, greater research in the areas of both risks and resilience is needed (MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et al., 2016). Still, some researchers have found, similar to this study, that the more frequently individuals use different or diverse coping strategies the greater their level of resilience becomes (Okafor et al., 2016). Hence, the findings of this study where older military-connected high school students who had experienced more interstate relocations and described higher levels of resilience appear to be supported by several previous research studies (Lucier-Greer et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2016; Okafor et al., 2016).

Theoretical Literature

Although some military-connected students view the myriad of demands as positive cognitive stimuli, others view such demands as weighty emotional and social stressors that

drain cognitive resources. In such a reality where military-connected high school students readily admit that they have little or no control over their situations, students still described having a desire to control some aspects of their lives. This cognitive desire often manifested itself in the form of behaviors that either propelled or curtailed the military-connected high school student's path to their academic goals. For example, when some students choose to take on the challenges associated with relocation to different states, they apparently adopt a positive or optimistic view about the situation and, relying on past experiences, move forward by making decisions that coincide with their academic goals. Just as an adage conveys the point that rain falls on the sinner and the saint, so do unfortunate events and disappointments befall optimistic and pessimistic people alike. However, as Anderson et al. (2012) noted, "the optimist tends to weather them better" (p. 78).

Conversely, this study illustrated how some military-connected students chose to react in a pessimistic fashion and sometimes assumed negative behaviors that were contrary to their goals. In fact, a rather unique risk factor that researchers have found to be extant among many high mobility students is lower academic achievement; yet, when it comes to explaining the reasons behind this phenomena, military-connected high school students' experiences may be able to shed some light on this area. That is, Cutuli et al. (2013) purported that residential mobility is a risk factor that leads to lower academic performance, but when seeking to explain how the factor operates they noted that such a matter requires "further research" (p. 84).

In the current study, students described how they often entered into somewhat of a cognitively induced academic fog following notification of an upcoming relocation or immediately after relocating. In addition, these students admitted that they could perform better academically; however, they *chose*—albeit, contrary to their academic goals—to perform poorly while they contemplated the relocation requirement. Many of these students

described how most of their cognitive abilities were dedicated to focusing on the *immediate situation* or the potential or active disruptions to established routines and roles. Anderson et al.'s (2012) description of the rebellious youth in the counterdependence stage does not necessarily explain nor corroborate the military-connected high school students' response. Instead, the military-connected high school students' response could be addressed as part of Anderson et al.'s rationale for understanding where a person is in the transition process. That is, Anderson et al. purported that while the 4S model delineates the various resources people can use to cope with transitions in life, often the full range of resources are qualitatively "restricted" (p. 67). Specifically, some people may have extraordinary concerns weighing on them that limit their ability—videlicet, visibility—to cope efficiently and effectively (Anderson et al., 2012).

Bandura (1989) highlighted a similar concept when he described how a person's belief in their abilities and capabilities can affect the level of stress and depression they experience during execution of onerous or minatory requirements. Moreover, the person's psychological reactions can affect his or her response to these situations, according to Bandura, both directly and vicariously, "by altering the nature and course of thinking" (p. 1177). Hence, the resulting theme, *Be All You Can See*, could possibly be used to help explain those cases where lower academic performance is prevalent and other cases where students still thrive despite such obstacles. This is especially important when considering that some of the military-connected high school students who employed this strategy were in the top of their class.

In addition, educators can learn from this finding that suggests that some military-connected high school students tend to dawn an emotional state of paralysis as they focus solely on the most recent traumatic event and potentially help them emerge from this restricted state by illustrating various courses of actions that can facilitate accomplishment of

relevant near term goals. That is, instead of attempting to communicate to students about some distant goal (e.g., graduation, college, adult careers), perhaps by getting students to understand how their behaviors can attain more immediate goals—such as the formation of friendships to facilitate the completion of an impending group project—educators and other stakeholders could cognitively nudge students to begin using more effective coping resources. After all, the selection of less than effective self-regulatory strategies is not unusual in cases where the supposedly motivating factors are, perceivably, too far into the distant future. Bandura (2001) purported that the “proximal subgoals mobilize self-influences and direct what one does in the *here and now* (emphasis added)” (p. 8).

Military-connected high school students, while unique in their own ways, still display some behaviors that are rather common among other human beings and these students can experience periods of extended doldrums if they fail to employ proper coping resources. Key stakeholders in the lives of military-connected high school students, therefore, must be able to identify when they are choosing to cope less effectively and provide real-time scenarios and incentives to help them combat negative influences much sooner than later. Success, as Bandura (2001) suggested, is more likely to be achieved via the establishment of a “hierarchically structured goal system” comprised of a fusion of “distal aspirations with proximal self-guidance” (p. 8). In other words, the stakeholders should employ a combination of strategies that seek to provide purpose and direction to the military-connected student and outline the benefits or consequences of employing various coping strategies in the short-term and the long-term.

Although military-connected high school students described numerous academic challenges related to their relocations across states, many of them still expressed a strong sense of belief that they could achieve the goals they set out for themselves; moreover, these students, in the midst of describing their challenges, found ways to still consider the plight of

other students in the academic environment. When Dianna, for example, described the substandard academic system she encountered after leaving Virginia, she described it from a perspective that conveyed empathy for students who had to undergo such an ordeal.

Likewise, other students expressed how they, due to their experience or somewhat accelerated maturity levels, served as informal leaders to assist others. Such findings appear to support other works where this strong sense of belief that one can still achieve goals despite obstacles also cultivates a sense of duty to assist others. Aligning with this view, Bandura (2001) noted that, “indeed, developmental studies show that a high sense of efficacy promotes a prosocial orientation characterized by cooperativeness, helpfulness, and sharing, with a vested interest in each other’s welfare (p. 15).

The current study also appears to suggest that such a ‘prosocial orientation’ exist among military-connected high school students. Similarly, Meadows et al. (2016), following their 7-year study of military-connected families, noted the following: “Prosocial behavior and pediatric quality of life, on the other hand, were relatively high, and anxiety and depressive symptoms were low. These findings suggested teens were generally doing well emotionally and behaviorally at baseline” (p. 202). Similarly, the propensity of military-connected high school students to serve as volunteers or reflect a strong communal philosophy tends to corroborate the works of Arnold et al. (2014). That is, Arnold et al. purported that military-connected students tend to be a part of various groups and take on their values but “share a common set of experiences that derive from the structure of their parents’ occupation” (p. e9). The proclivity of students to identify themselves as *military* and to behave in a manner that is reflective of the attribute of selfless service, which is displayed by many who serve in the United States Armed Forces, appear to be in line with Arnold et al.’s findings.

This study also found that the relationship with teachers and the perception of that

relationship is worthy of further discussion. That is, military-connected high school students described a close relationship and a strong sense of gratitude toward teachers who understood their experiences and took time to ensure that military-connected students succeeded in the academic environment. Military-connected high school students described numerous instances where teachers exerted extraordinary efforts to provide assistance that was necessary for academic success. In addition, as a coping resource, many students described teachers and other education administrators as a trusted source they could rely on to discuss significant problems.

While the efforts of these proactive and capable educators were applauded by many of the military-connected high school student, some students also described times when they intentionally disengaged from forming constructive relationships with adults because the frequency of relocations make such a feat seem nearly impossible to achieve. Jacques' interview echoed this type of thinking when he described the futility of trying to form such a relationship with teachers because he was certain that another move was quickly forthcoming. This study complements studies such as Arnold et al.'s (2014) where care was taken to capture the perceptions of teachers using the teachers' voices. In such studies the teachers who were cognizant of the military experience expressed confidence in their abilities to properly teach military-connected students while those who were not familiar with the military culture expressed a desire to acquire more knowledge (Arnold et al., 2014).

The current study reflects this sentiment by acknowledging and applauding the efforts of those teachers who are aware of the military environment and culture. This study also highlights how military-connected high school students perceive the actions of those teachers who are either ill-equipped to function in such a capacity or not as informed as they should be. To military-connected high school students, the most important issue is not simply having an understanding of the military milieu and culture, but it is *being willing and able to*

act as an agent on the behalf of military-connected high school students—a point that Arnold et al. (2014) also accented in a previous study.

As part of this study, students underscored the importance of extracurricular activities (e.g., band, chorus, sports) as another facet of understanding that was necessary to help them adjust to the stressors of the academic environment following relocation to another state. As Mesecar and Soifer (2017) highlighted in their study, educators must consider the needs of military-connected students in the areas of extracurricular activities, academics and social engagements. From a theoretical perspective, Bandura (1989) noted that people have a propensity to refrain from engaging in activities or situations where they believe it is too difficult to adapt or it is too daunting of a task from a coping perspective. However, people, under their own volition, will choose to engage in activities or choose various social groups or settings, regardless of the level of difficulty, if they believe they have the ability and associated coping skills to successfully navigate the activity or situation or thrive in such social settings. Bandura vehemently purported that any variable that affects a person's ability to decide to engage in such activities “can profoundly affect the direction of personal development because the social influences operating in the environments that are selected continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its inaugurating effect” (p. 1178). Several descriptions provided by the participants of this study appear to support Bandura's position.

Another area that deserves highlighting pertains to how military-connected high school students approach academics once they conduct interstate relocations—*they tend to look to themselves first*. Understanding this practically universal attribute among military-connected high school students, could prove to be a vital part of assisting military-connected high school students in the future. That is, previous studies have highlighted how understanding the life experiences of military-connected students can lead to more “culturally

responsive pedagogies” (Arnold et al., 2014, p. 12). This study has elucidated how military-connected high school students, at least initially, often seek to resolve challenges by themselves; moreover, these students, at times, tend to employ a coping strategy that is detrimental to their academic well-being. If educators can become more aware of how a vast majority of military-connected high school students function, they can, perhaps, develop mechanisms to facilitate and encourage these students to solicit more timely assistance. The manner in which educators interact and communicate with military-connected high school students on a daily basis could serve as the catalyst to generate the appropriate level of trust to cultivate appropriate coping behaviors. (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017).

Ultimately, making sense of the various descriptions of academic experiences that emerged during this study requires one to gain a greater understanding of the self-efficacy factor of human behavior. Many of the military-connected high school students expressed extraordinarily high levels of optimism about their academic outlook and their overall ability to handle adversity in life. According to Bandura (1989), “The more efficacious people judge themselves to be, the wider the range of career options they consider appropriate and the better they prepare themselves educationally for different occupational pursuits” (p. 1178-1179). As noted earlier, the *family* coping resource was described by participants as a major source of strength that helped to reduce the effect of academic and other stressors associated with interstate relocation requirements. The family members, through the demonstration of key intrinsic attributes (e.g., love, caring, empathy, selfless service, integrity), also appear to have a major effect on the military-connected high school students’ self-esteem development. Such findings appears to coincide with more recent studies that highlight the critical role that family members assume in the positive development of military-connected students’ lives (Arnold et al., 2017; Conforte et al., 2017; MacDermid Wadsworth et al., 2017; Meadows et

al., 2016; Mesecar & Soifer, 2017; Russo & Fallon, 2015; Skomorovsky, Norris, Bullock, & Evans, 2016; Strong & Weiss, 2017). More specifically noted, Russo and Fallon (2015) emphasized that the various support resources that children use initially emanated from the family and were identified as either “the personal characteristics of individual family members such as, knowledge, self-esteem and skills; or family system resources such as cohesion, communication, and adaptability; or social supports” (p. 409).

Implications

Partnering to Increase Awareness

One area of the study that has significant practical implications pertains to the military-connected high school student’s desire for teachers and other educational administrators to have a greater awareness of the military-connected high school student’s experience. These students described a sense of helplessness and psychological anguish they experienced when they would seek out such sources but failed to receive the assistance they needed—*especially in situations that were beyond their control*. On the other hand, when such assistance was provided, military-connected high school students described a feeling of empowerment and gratitude. Educators must become even more aware of the role and functions they serve in improving and sustaining the overall health and welfare of the military-connected high school student.

As Bandura (2001) highlighted, often people are unable to directly control the various social situations and the execution of organizational practices that affect how they function daily. As a result, “through the exercise of proxy agency” (Bandura, 2001, p. 13), people seek to acquire a sense of confidence, safety and overall well-being by soliciting the help of stakeholders “who have access to resources or expertise or who wield influence and power to act at their behest to secure the outcomes they desire” (Bandura, 2001, p. 13). Such insights should serve as a call to action on the part of educators and policymakers alike.

Each year, organizations such as the Military Child Education Coalition conduct quality training for its staff, families and professionals who serve the needs of military-connected students. Although DODEA sends representatives to participate in such training, representatives from public school systems can also benefit from such training and should explore ways that they too can partner with such organizations to increase their level of awareness and the efficacy of the level of understanding and support they provide to military-connected students. The post-military career system does place an emphasis on taking care of the service member. Still, it is feasible to believe that the children are somewhat forgotten, and this ostensible oversight could partly be due to their ages. However, as these children also transition into other phases of life, including new phases in their academic endeavors, it is important for professionals who wish to assist them, to understand their backgrounds and experiences to perhaps examine these students from the perspective of where they fall along life's continuum rather than their age. That is, Anderson et al. (2012) noted "life stage may be a more useful concept than chronological age in examining transitions" (p. 76). Moreover, in an effort to substantiate their position, Anderson et al. noted, "The younger subjects (high school seniors and newlyweds) reported more 'stressor events' during the last 10 years of their lives than older subjects (middle-aged and preretirement couples) (p. 77).

Veteran Affairs Visibility of Military-Connected Students

Another area that has significant empirical implications pertains to the need for greater attention for military-connected students once the sponsor retires from service. This study allowed students to share one very important fact about life after active duty—they too bear the burden of any psychological challenges that military sponsors carry when exiting Active Duty. The question that deserves asking is, "How does a military-connected student obtain help and remain visible to psychological assistance resources once the sponsor departs active duty?" Similarly, MacDermid Wadsworth et al. (2017) highlighted the fact that, "once

their parents' service has been completed, they become largely invisible to military or veteran systems of care, just as they already are to civilian providers unaware of their histories" (p. 27).

This study, allowed military-connected high school students to add their voices to this much need-to-have discussion. After all, as Dianna highlighted during her discussion of what she experienced in the area of dealing with a family member suffering from psychological challenges, "it opens your eyes and *it makes you wiser than you should be*" (emphasis added). Many of the military-connected high school students have experienced facets of military life that are far beyond the average childhood experience. While the focus of this study did not require an assessment of participants in the form of a psychological study, nor were any of the participants exhibiting signs of maladaptive psychological behavior to the untrained eye, it was apparent that the participant's whose parents experienced or witnessed some form of trauma while deployed, did provide descriptions of themselves or their family members that would suggest that some form of counseling would be helpful. Moreover, this particular opinion is supported by research. That is, according to the results of Meadows et al.'s (2016) longitudinal study teens whose families executed a deployment following the initial study's commencement reflected a significantly higher number of teen self-reported need for mental health services than the parent reported need for this same group.

Similarly, Skomorovsky et al. (2016) used the verbatim words of a parent to convey how children vicariously experience stress related to the military environment in the following manner: "She has a hard time making friends. She has ADD. Is it because of the military? I'm not sure, but they live stress through the way we feel and they feel it" (p. 31). Through the voices of military-connected high school students in the current study, such views have been corroborated and reflect an ongoing issue that needs more attention.

The Relationship between Efficacy Beliefs about Coping Strategies and Resiliency Transcends the Military Family

Perhaps one of the most significant theoretical implications emerging from this study pertains to the relationship between efficacy beliefs about coping strategies and the level of resiliency military-connected students displayed. Military-connected high school students encountered challenges on multiple fronts (e.g., academics, home, deployments, social); yet, if they believed that they could overcome a challenge, they employed successful coping strategies to accomplish their goals). (Anderson et al., 2012; Bandura, 2001; Jensen et al., 1986). By elucidating some of the more subtle, yet important, characteristics of this somewhat complex relationship, this study possesses the potential to affect families beyond the military milieu. That is, military-connected high school students described how their knowledge and experience in dealing with adversity gave them the foundation to not only know how to practice and eventually employ positive coping strategies, but to possess *certainty* in their beliefs that they would overcome any challenges they encounter.

This axiomatic kernel of truth regarding efficacy beliefs appears to suggest that a person's confidence in employing successful coping strategies is a key factor in building resiliency. Moreover, Bandura (2001) seemed to express a similar view when he noted the following:

The likelihood that people will act on the outcomes they expect prospective performances to produce depends on their beliefs about whether or not they can produce those performances. A strong sense of coping efficacy reduces vulnerability to stress and depression in taxing situations and strengthens resiliency to adversity. (p. 10)

Bandura's view, if correct, also suggests that there are other benefits (e.g., reduced

depression, less anxiety) that can be gained through the proper development of such efficacy beliefs pertaining to coping with adversity. In fact, MacDermid Wadsworth et al. (2017) also concluded that, “Because deployments are both similar to and distinct from other adverse experiences, studying them can yield insights about exposure to adversity that might apply to families beyond the military” (p. 27). In short, professional counselors for military-connected students and nonmilitary-connected people alike can gain a deeper understanding of this intriguing relationship between resiliency and coping efficacy beliefs.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

There are several delimitations implemented to narrow the focus and scope of the study. First and foremost, this study was delimited to military-connected high school students. Much of the decision to restrict the sample to this educational level and exclude younger participants is embedded in the research design principles of a transcendental phenomenological approach. That is, it is rather dubious to assume that a small group of participants, or even an individual, could accurately capture and convey some of the more complex nuances of military-connected students’ academic experiences. However, Creswell (2018) clearly challenged researchers to consider several key factors when contemplating the composition of the participant pool to ensure success in attaining the goals of phenomenological type studies. One of the more salient factors to consider was the participant’s ability to “articulate” (Creswell, 2018, p. 174) the facets of the phenomenon that affect the group being studied. While some may jest that teens are less articulate than younger children, axiomatically, teens possess a greater ability to reflect and convey some of the more abstract nuances of their experiences than their younger counterparts. Hence, the research approach’s prerequisite for a sufficient level of communicatory skills guided the decision to implement this delimitation.

Complementing the decision to focus on high school students, a delimitation pertaining to the minimum and maximum time between relocations and experiencing high school was implemented. For example, only students who had experienced a relocation after their sixth grade academic year were permitted to participate in the study. This decision is based on the premise that those experiencing a relocation prior to the sixth grade, may not be able to recall much of the experience due to the passage of time. Moreover, in Virginia, several of the decisions pertaining to the high school curriculum that a high school student will encounter are predicated on decisions regarding the curriculum executed during the seventh and eighth grade academic years. This post-elementary school level delimitation also allowed the study to capture feedback from military-connected high school students who had not relocated from that point through their current year of high school, but who were now on the precipice of a possible military relocation. Their feedback of this anticipated event, as defined by Anderson et al. (2012), did not rely on memory or recall; rather, participants described the event in detail because they were currently experiencing this phase of a military relocation and they were also in high school. Unlike students who experienced moves years ago or qualified their experiences with less precise words when asked to describe their feelings related to relocating (e.g., Felicia: “I was younger so I was, *probably* [emphasis added] sad to leave all of my friends.”), a participant who was currently experiencing a potential move after being in one location for more than four years demonstrated no problem articulating her experiences.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that are worthy of acknowledgement. First, not all branches of Service are reflected in the sample selected for this study. Only participants whose sponsors were serving in the Army, Navy, or Coast Guard were included in the study. While efforts were made and participants from both the Air Force and Marines

initially agreed to participate, academic requirements, scholastic aptitude testing and preparation, extracurricular activities, and a myriad of other responsibilities caused these students to withdraw their initial anecdotal consent before formal proceedings could commence. Despite this shortcoming, having representation from three of the five branches of Service, coupled with the fact that many of the participants attend the same schools as military-connected high school students who have sponsors from the branches of Service that are not reflected in the current study, should make these findings transferable to those Services. Access to a larger pool of participants were stymied by significant bureaucratic obstacles employed by DOD.

Despite my serving in the military for over 21 years, completing all educational requirements for Human Research Protections Program in accordance with the Department of Defense and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD(P&R)), navigating through the Department of Defense Education Agency's research approval gauntlet only to be re-directed to DOD's channels, contacting designated personnel in accordance with guidelines outlined in DOD Instruction 3216.02 Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DOD-Supported Research, efforts to access potential participants via approval to conduct research on military installations were thwarted. Despite these set-backs and constraints, I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to acknowledge members of the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, G9 Division of the U.S. Army Installation Management Command located at Fort Sam Houston, the U.S. Army Human Research Protection Office (AHRPO), the Army Research Institute (ARI) For Behavioral and Social Sciences and Members of DODEA's Research Request Office. Members of these aforementioned organizations worked diligently to galvanize support for this study, only to have efforts negated by the then looming and eventually executed Government shutdown. While this study was handicapped by the constraints placed

on it by DOD's intentional or inadvertent actions, over time, it is the children and, indirectly, the military service members themselves, who will eventually be harmed by the mountain of bureaucratic obstacles that hinder or prevent the employment of studies to elucidate important issues pertaining to military-connected students.

Another limitation revolves around the timelessness of recall. That is, some of the students described events that, while within the study's screening criterion of executing a relocation within the past four years after high school, required some form of recollection from an event that did not occur in the immediate past. Data emerging from such *ex post facto* recall, are limited by the constraints of the students' ability to accurately describe each experience. This shortcoming has been highlighted by many of the earlier pioneers of qualitative research. In fact, Denzin (1970) noted, "The passage of time as seen by subjects' maturation, or as evidenced in historical shifts and events, can introduce distorting influences, as can unique characteristics of respondents" (p. 23). Inclusion of military-connected high school student participants who were on the precipice of relocating added a sense of real-time experiences to the study. That is, while not negating various unavoidable distortions due to maturation, such input aided in balancing out or validating feedback from participants who had relocated earlier in their high school experiences.

The final limitation pertains to the inability to obtain all three sources of data from one individual. That is, one participant, Dianna, experienced a very hectic schedule as she completed high school early. Besides preparing for her next phase in life, she often lost control of her schedule due to the need to provide care for a family member who suffered from a psychological condition. As a result, only two sources of data were provided by Dianna before she entered into military service shortly after graduation. Despite this shortcoming, Lincoln and Guba (1985) explicitly instructed researchers to take steps to validate each form of information "against at least one other source" (p. 283). Moreover,

when wrestling with questions regarding how much triangulation would be considered sufficient to provide an adequate level of trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba noted that such a question “can be answered *only* through experience” (p. 330).

Based on the high level of detail and overall quality of Dianna’s interview and self-reflection data, coupled with the fact that Dianna’s interview was one of the last few interviews conducted—thus, I as the researcher had far more experience conducting her interview as opposed to earlier interviews—I believe my decision to include Dianna’s data was appropriate. Moreover, as part of this study, I introduced information to suggest that triangulation is more about gaining a robust understanding about a phenomenon than it is a validation tool to address a definitive form of accuracy. By including Dianna’s data, despite being unable to obtain a third source of data (i.e., the letter to stakeholders) my decision demonstrates my conviction regarding the true purpose of triangulation.

Recommendations for Future Research

After considering the study’s findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, the following recommendations are delineated herein to provide direction for future research. Perhaps one area of research that could augment this study and benefit military-connected high school students pertains to examining the level of emotional stress that students experience related to military relocations beyond the scope of academics and the efficacy of programs designed to help lessen such stress. Although the majority of the participants in this study projected strong mental soundness they did describe cases where they observed others who could benefit from such access to psychological health professionals. While researchers (e.g., Arnold et al., 2014; Conforte et al., 2017; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010) have cited the creation or implementation of various support groups to increase the level of resilience among military-connected students, Aronson and Perkins (2013) also noted that such programs were not widely disseminated. Likewise,

participants of this study reported spotty engagement with similar programs but also underscored how the lack of funding greatly hampered the effectiveness of these programs. As a result, it may be time to assess the viability of such programs and, if determined to be successful, use research to bolster support among policymakers and other stakeholders for dissemination and greater funding of these programs.

While not a specific focus of this study, a few participants described incidents of in-school-bullying or referenced school environments that were conducive to bullying. Although this study highlighted how trusted resources emerged as a factor that military-connected high school students often used to address a myriad of challenges, transcendental phenomenological studies designed to address the effectiveness of such sources in cases of bullying or school victimization could prove beneficial for military-connected students and other students alike. The suggested work would focus on key people and organizations within the school and allow students to describe both their perspectives of victimization and share their strategies for reaching out to these trusted sources. In addition, the suggested future study would augment the current study and the works of De Pedro et al. (2016), which examined the potentially constructive role that school climate played in supporting military-connected high school students in cases of victimization.

Summary

While many of the tenets of Schlossberg's (2012) adult transition model are applicable to the academic experiences of military-connected high school students who execute interstate relocations, some may argue that to use an adult model to help understand the experiences of children may seem unfitting. In such cases, I only state that the use of any model over a broad range of scenarios will have the propensity to break down at some point. In fact, many astrophysicists wrestle with a similar conundrum every day as they observe the seemingly steadfast laws of physics prove relatively useless in scenarios where hypothetical

experiments approach the realm of a black hole. Still, what has become abundantly clear at the conclusion of this study is that despite the numerous theories that shed light on the descriptions that the participants provided, in the world of transcendental phenomenology, theory for the purposes of explaining phenomena is not a prerequisite, but it is a tool that allows the researcher to construct a more plausible understanding of the world in which the phenomenon exist (van Manen, 2016).

Military-connected high school students who execute interstate relocations due to military mobility requirements have myriad academic experiences and they construct meaning about those experiences differently. The academic experiences of these students cannot be segregated and kept secluded from other facets of military life nor studied as a detached concept free of the tangible and intangible elements of these aspects that affect the academic environment. The threads of varying academic standards generating perturbations about graduation; concerns for family members who are or could be deployed; specters of relocation orders constantly looming; experiencing rollercoaster like emotions reflective of the joys of euphoric highs and the pain of dysphoric lows related to relocations; and a strong desire for educators to simply take time to understand what is and has transpired, are all interwoven to create a swath of the military-connected high school students academic experience and project a sentiment of *Help Me to Understand and Understand Me to Help*.

Another swath of these military-connected high school students who execute interstate relocations academic experience is reflected in the manner in which coping resources are employed. While the use of virtual tools to assist with academic challenges are helpful, when it comes to school resources, many military-connected high school students find solace in choosing and participating in extracurricular activities. Beginning with military-connected high school students, who initially prefer to resolve challenges by themselves, and expanding outward to family, friends, teachers and other trusted sources for

assistance, most of these students intuitively know that they can handle practically any challenge they encounter in high school and in life. As a result, a major segment of these students' overall experience is reflected in the theme, *Coping Resources Start with Me*.

Much of the military-connected high school student's experience is also interlaced with a reassuring cognizance that the academic outlook is realistic and attainable. Through preparatory efforts and a sense of gratitude they believe they can control this aspect of the future. For many of these students, this assurance is complemented by a strong sense of self-efficacy where perseverance tends to usurp situations that lack control, flexibility outweighs the need for organization, and integrity is paramount. While these attributes are pervasive among many military-connected high school students, it is important to acknowledge that such attributes are not readily evident or easily perceived in all cases. Some face challenges, such as relocating and leaving behind close friends, which obscure their outlook or stymie their ability to move on. As a result, this particular swath of the military-connected high school students' experience is best reflected in the theme, *Be All You Can See*.

In the end, the pattern of the military-connected high school students' academic experience, as it pertains to executing interstate relocations due to military mobility requirements, is an aggregate of diverse constructs and meanings and reflective of an ever-changing camouflage pattern. Because the primary characteristics and purpose of a camouflage pattern are to blend in and be as inconspicuous as possible, such a pattern appears to be aptly suited for depicting the essence of this phenomenon. But in nature, even the most obscured and concealed objects or lifeforms can be identified once their patterns are studied, understood and viewed from various perspectives. Thus, it is imperative that teachers, administrators, parents and perhaps, the nation as a whole, make a concerted effort to learn how to identify the various patterns of the military-connected high school students' experiences and through training, and eventually time, learn to see these students for who

they really are—the *sine qua non* of the American Fighting Force. Only then will such stakeholders recognize, with a sense of gratitude, that when interacting with this uncommon corps of students, they too deserve to be honored by the salutation, “*Thank you for your service.*”

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 11, 2018

Norman E. Solomon

IRB Approval 3427.121118: Uncommon Corps: Academic Experiences of Military-Connected Students Transitioning Between States—A Transcendental Phenomenological Approach

Dear Norman E. Solomon,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Your study involves surveying or interviewing minors, or it involves observing the public behavior of minors, and you will participate in the activities being observed.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix B: Themes and Subthemes

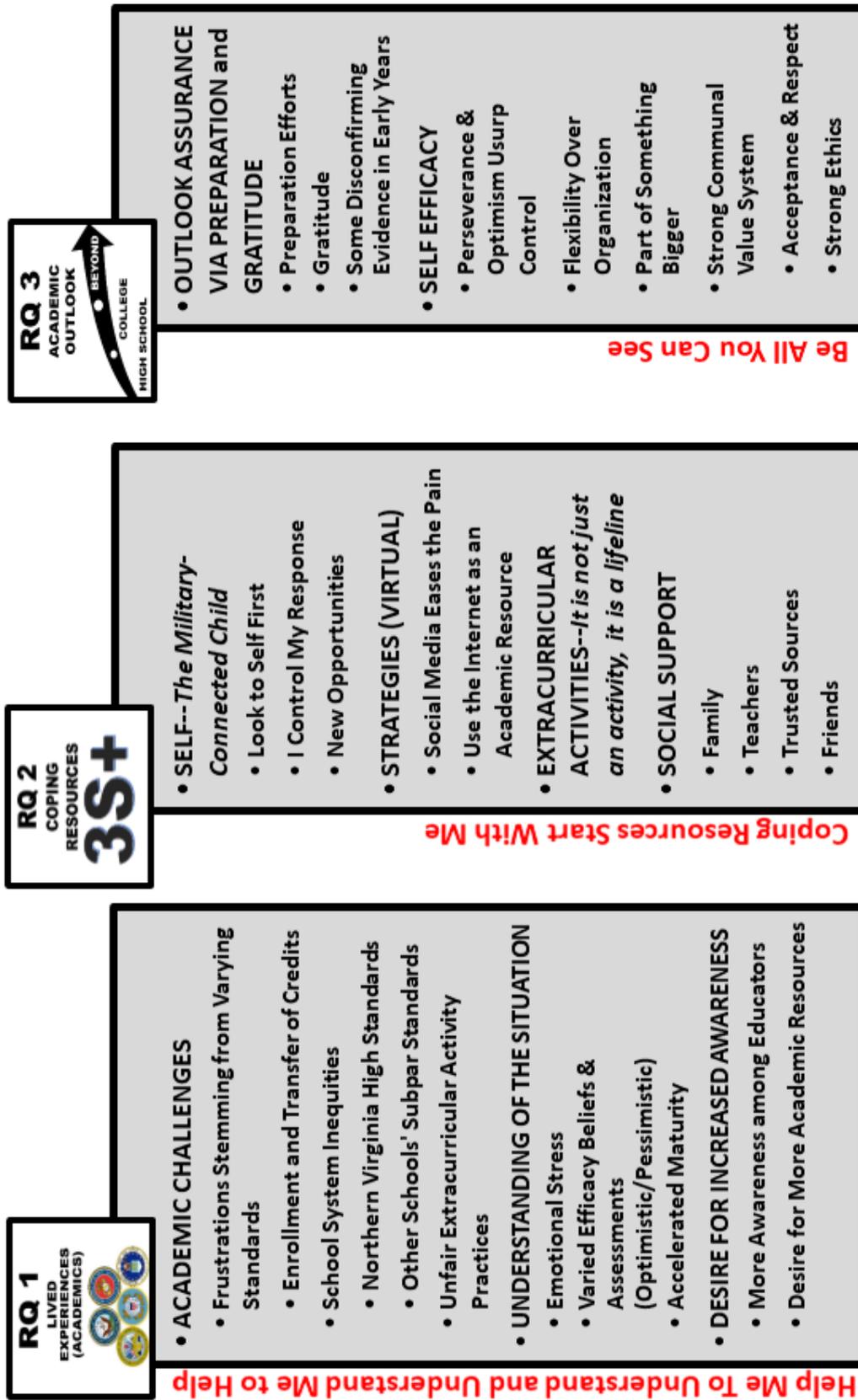


Figure F 1. Themes and subthemes.

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	2. When was the last move that you experienced that relocated you here to Virginia and from where did you relocate from? [For students who relocated from Virginia to another state: Where did you relocate to after leaving Virginia?]	7. Opening Question a. Chief among the sampling selection criteria is the criterion that requires the participant to have experienced the phenomenon being examined (Creswell, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). b. “The relationship between the family and military youths’ outcomes is acutely relevant as those who have experienced parental deployment and multiple transitions, are already at risk for higher rates of depression ... and lower academic achievement” (Arnold et al., p. 862). <i>Determine if points revolving around multiple transitions and lower academic achievement are corroborated.</i>
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	7. You noted that you relocated from XXXX. Describe your experience regarding the academic challenges you encountered from the time	8. Researchers should rely on the participant’s first-hand description of the experience (Creswell, 2018; Husserl (2012); Moustakas, 1994). In addition, the participants is guided to reflect and provide a more in-depth description of what occurred and can later add to extraction of textural and structural descriptions and result in capturing of thick descriptions to help describe and convey the phenomenon to reviewers (Creswell, 2018; Husserl, 2012; Moustakas, 14; Patton, 2002).
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	8. So you appear to describe [XXX a particular event XXX] as important or significant event, what made this aspect of the transition important?	9. Transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state is defined as “any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg, 2012, p. 39). Anderson et al., 2012.

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ1: How does the military-connected high school student experience transition as it relates to academic standards when relocating to a new state?	9. So, what I hear you saying is, [parroting]. Is that right? Tell me a little more about this?	10. This study uses a transcendental phenomenological approach; therefore, reflective, probing, leading questions are more apt to generate the type of data and rich descriptions required of this approach. (Buser, Parkins, Gelin, Buser & Kearney, 2016; Ramney et al., 2015).
RQ1	10. What is different about your academic experiences in Virginia when compared to your previous school system [or subsequent school system?	11. Same as above
RQ1	11. What, if anything, is different about military relocation and transitions when it comes to academic experiences?	12. This is a probing question similar to 4 and 5 above, but seeks to highlight how military relocations, specifically, are unique.
RQ 2: What coping resources do military-connected students use and how are they employed to adapt to various academic challenges related to military mobility and relocation requirements?	8. When faced with a requirement to relocate, how do you view the requirement to move as it pertains to academics?	8. This question addresses how the participant views the transition itself (e.g., negative, positive, stressful) (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 64-66). Also, opportunities exist to address nonevents if an anticipated event did not occur (Anderson et al., p. 105, 2012).
RQ2	9. What factors exist that, over time, may cause you to change your initial feelings about relocating and attending another school?	9. <i>Examine factors that influencing change:</i> “People have changed little genetically over recent decades, but they have changed markedly through rapid cultural and technological evolution in their beliefs, mores, social roles, and styles of behavior” (Bandura, 2001, p. 3).

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ 2: What coping resources do military-connected students use and how are they employed to adapt to various academic challenges related to military mobility and relocation requirements?	10. So, you noted that you consider [XXXXXX] as a factor(s) that can affect your perception of the requirement to relocate and attend another school. How would you describe the thought processes you use to derive at your final decision about how to review the requirement to relocate and attend another school?	10. Examine meaning making processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. This question seeks to gain insights regarding the participant’s meaning making/ cognitive processes used to make sense of the world (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 67). b. “A functional consciousness involves purposive accessing and deliberative processing of information for selecting, constructing, regulating, and evaluating courses of action” (Bandura, 2001, p. 3).
RQ2	11. Do you believe anything can be done about the requirement to relocate to different states and attending school elsewhere for military-connected students?	11. This question seeks to determine if the participant’s view of structural and psychological use of coping resources (Anderson et al. (2012, p. 65).
RQ2	12. How do you cope with that?	12. This question seeks to address the participant’s view regarding control—a perception that is, according to Anderson et al. (2012), is “critical in to success in managing transition” (p. 105).
RQ2	13. How does your link with the military allow you to cope with various academic experiences when you relocate to another state?	13. Seeks to gain insights about the participant’s worldview and determine how it influences selection of various coping strategies.

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
RQ2	<p>14. Starting with you and expanding outward, describe the types of support systems that you use to navigate academic challenges?</p> <p>a. This coping strategy allowed you to [XXXXXX]. Why was it important for you to [XXXXXX]?</p> <p>b. Tell me more about how you developed the coping strategy of [XXXX]?</p> <p>c. So what you are saying is ...</p>	<p>14. Seeks to gain insights about each participant's perception of the significance of resources available to cope specifically with academic challenges (Anderson et al., 2012).</p>
RQ 3: How do military-connected students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook?	<p>3. How do you currently perceive your level of resilience as it pertains to your future academic outlook?</p>	<p>3. Inquiries about the participant's outlook and how optimistic or pessimistic views affects resilience. The findings taken as a whole show that the stronger the perceived collective efficacy, the higher the groups' aspirations and motivational investment in their undertakings, the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments and setbacks, the higher their morale and resilience to stressors, and the greater their performance accomplishments. (Bandura, 2001, p. 14).</p>
RQ3	<p>4. How does your organizing skills influence your academic experiences as it relates to relocation? How does flexibility play a part in adjusting to academic experiences?</p>	<p>4. Organizational skills and flexibility have been linked to increased resilience (Anderson et al., p. 83 2012).</p>

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Relevant Literature Support
<p>RQ 3: How do military-connected students perceive their level of confidence as it pertains to their future academic outlook?</p>	<p>5. What do you believe your overall purpose is when it comes to academics?</p> <p>a. How committed are you to achieving this purpose?</p> <p>b. Do you believe you can control your purpose when you relocate often?</p>	<p>5. Three attitudinal theoretical factors (i.e. control, commitment, and challenge) that result in increased resilience or "hardness" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 87). Understanding what the participant perceives as his or her purpose and how he or she pursues achieving that purpose can help to elucidate positions regarding levels of resilience.</p> <p>a. Resilience has been found to be strongly correlated with an "individual's belief and confidence that things in life would work out well" (Svetina, 2014, p. 394).</p> <p>b. Resilience also addresses both "positive and negative psychosocial outcomes such as maladjustment, post-traumatic stress disorder, health, school performance, well-being, and overall quality of life" (Svetina, 2014, p. 394).</p> <p>c. "Efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions." (Bandura, 2001, p. 10)</p>
<p>RQ3</p>	<p>6. You stated that your overall purpose as it pertains to academics was [XXXXX], describe how you would pursue this purpose if you viewed it as challenging to achieve.</p>	<p>6. This question allows the researcher to gain insights into the participant's sense of self-direction (Anderson et al., p. 107, 2012).</p>