

Exploring Female Leader Development:
Women and Leadership in the Minnesota Army National Guard

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how female military officers describe their personal experiences and perceive their professional development in a male dominated organization. A phenomenological research method was most appropriate for this research study to capture the lived experiences of female leaders from their individual perspectives based on their service in the military. Nine female commissioned officers were interviewed from the Minnesota Army National Guard in the military ranks of captain, major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel. Three themes emerged from the study that expand and enrich the understanding of the lived experience of female commissioned officers in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Within the three major themes there were several sub-themes. The three major themes: (1) personal and professional relationships, (2) leadership strategies, and (3) operational experience and assignments. The themes revealed the multifaceted dimensions of female officers and their experience with leader development. The findings suggest a stronger need for leader development programs in the military. The study confirmed mentoring future leaders and providing a leader development program is important to the development of leaders in today's military. These findings provide a baseline for future research in the area of leader development for women in the military.

Key Words: Army, female leaders, leader development, leadership development, military leader, phenomenology

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Leadership has been an indispensable part of success for military and civilian organizations, and historically, the majority of organizational leaders have always been men. The United States military is one of the most diverse organizations in terms of gender and ethnicity but it still faces its own challenges with respect to adaptability and change; particularly when looking at key leadership positions that are held predominantly by men. Leadership has been primarily a male prerogative in the military sector of society (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and has only surfaced in academic literature within the last 20 years. Given the considerable biases against women in male-dominated organizations, the military has validated that even legislated initiatives will be insufficient to bring about tangible and sustainable change without other kinds of organizational interventions.

In terms of the role of women in modern military, the military cannot afford to lose talented leaders, regardless of their gender. Given the ubiquitous nature of beliefs that women cannot hold military leadership positions based solely on sex is a disgrace to an organization that relies uniquely on leadership. Sex-role stereotypes and behavior congruent with these stereotypes have been demonstrated to be key drivers of perceptions of competence in military environments, as the military officers' role is highly stereotypically masculine (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). In terms of leadership, a study by Boldry, Wood & Kashy (2001) evaluated sex stereotypes within a military

context and found that men were more likely than women to be seen as possessing the leadership and motivational qualities necessary for effective military performance.

According to the Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) published in 2013, developing leaders is a competitive advantage the Army possesses that cannot be replaced by technology or substituted for with weaponry and platforms (U.S. Army, 2013). The perceived competence of women leaders in the military is partly based on their job assignments. If women have unequal access to challenging assignments deemed necessary for upward movement into high ranking positions, they are less likely able to demonstrate their competence and skills as a leader, in these specific positions. Clear systemic factors may account for difficulties in seeking, training, and retaining the best women for leadership roles (Loughlin & Arnold, 2007, p. 161). Leader and leadership development initiatives could be implemented to ensure more qualified and talented women rise to the top. Specific design and delivery principals may increase the likelihood that these programs will help women advance into more senior leadership roles but women must be afforded the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

Statement of the Problem

There are factors and competencies that the male-dominated Army has enshrined upon as acceptable roles, norms and values. Talented women continue to have difficulty advancing their careers worldwide which includes private, public and military organizations. Many of the cultural norms found in these organizations were created by men for men and reflect the wider patriarchal society (Acker, 2006). As a consequence, some women feel uncomfortable in these types of organizations, are regularly

disadvantaged, and often face barriers to advancement. In the military, the masculine nature and acceptable norms exposes many barriers to women who serve.

According to Rey (2005), women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping (p. 6). Women are still underrepresented in positions of leadership, power and responsibility despite the focus on integrating women into the combat arms so they have equal access to attain these positions. The vast majority of the most senior positions require an officer to have experience leading in a combat environment. The combat experience is being used as an important factor to hold positions of increased responsibility, and without it they not allowing individuals to fill specific positions. Until recently, all of the combat arms positions were closed to women so they were automatically excluded as a potential leader for the most senior ranks of the organization. The requirement for combat experience prohibited a large pool of qualified female leaders from competing with their peers for these positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The lived experiences of female leaders may reveal congruity as to the key attributes, characteristics, backgrounds and experiences needed for a woman to serve in key leadership roles that prepare them for levels of increased responsibility and upward mobility. Leaders are products of their life experiences which usually begin and are developed at an early age; however, numerous factors affect a leader's development during their lifetime.

The study will add to the small existing bodies of research for leader and leadership development. By focusing on ways in which women develop their leadership knowledge and skills, the field of leadership can establish a more complete picture of the leader development process for women in a military context. Leader development programs can be tailored to help facilitate qualified women into highly pursued leadership positions. Leader and leadership development and educating leaders is a top priority for militaries throughout the world; winning wars has been attributed to great leadership. Leadership remains inextricably intertwined with the military at every level (Wong, Bliese, & McGurk, 2003, p. 657).

Research Question

The research question for this study is: How do female military officers describe their personal experiences and perceive their professional development in a male dominated organization? This question allowed for participants to provide open-ended responses based on their experiences. By addressing the proposed research question, the results help develop a better understanding of what is needed for female leaders to develop in the Minnesota Army National Guard and can be viewed from a larger scale as to how female leaders develop in a military context.

Leader development is a complex topic that is deserving of scholarly attention specifically in the review of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The study may serve to further the understanding of the perceptions and underlying assumptions with which female officers in the Minnesota Army National Guard are challenged with when competing for senior leadership positions that women may be

otherwise qualified to perform. Leader and leadership development should be studied independently from what has been studied in the general field of leadership.

Scope of the Study

The proposed study will aim to focus on tapping a rarely used female sample as a source of understanding the leader development process. By using a sample from the Minnesota Army National Guard it allows the potential to capture the complexities, processes and contexts of leader development from the female leader perspective. Leadership underpins everything the Army does, which is why the Army continues to invest in the people, even during times of austerity (U.S. Army, 2013). The process of Army leader development is deliberate, continuous and progressive. Because leadership is such a dominant staple in our military, the Army recognizes the importance of human capital within its organization.

Importance of the Study

The significance of the study to the field of leadership is the contribution of knowledge relating to understanding the impact of leader development programs in the military. Despite a plethora of studies examining the acceptance of women in the military (e.g., Armor, 1996; Durning, 1978; Rosen, Fancher, & Knudson, 2003), there have been very few studies examining the role of gender and military leadership. As the novelty of women in the military wears off, researchers should shift to more substantive gender issues other than just integration. According to O'Connell (2013), learning to lead involves an intricate and expansive set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions (p. 183). The research will contribute to the study of modern leadership issues by attempting to

bring the focus back to the importance of finding a balance in exemplifying leadership diversity in the work force of the future; whether it is in the military or within any other type of organization while primarily looking at the lack of female leaders in key positions.

Definition of Terms

It is not unusual to find definitions of leadership in a male normative (i.e., based on areas where men dominate). Definitions of leadership are not changing at the same pace as the environment (Loughlin & Arnold, 2007, p. 162). Definitions of leadership are more than just theoretical; they drive the attributes that are often sought in individuals who are deemed qualified to lead. The definitions of leadership must keep stride with the changing demands of the future in order to recruit and identify leaders who possess the requisite skills to function effectively.

The following definitions are provided as a means of uniformity and understanding of these terms throughout the study.

Army Leader: “Anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals. Army leaders motivate people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization” (U.S. Department of Army, 2012, p. 1).

Leadership: “Leadership is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization” (U.S. Department of Army, 2012, p. 1).

Leader Development: “The deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process, grounded in Army values that grows soldiers and civilians into competent and confident leaders capable of decisive action” (U.S. Department of Army, 2007, p. 4).

Leadership Development: “Expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes (McCauley, Moxley, & Van Velsor, 1998).

Command: “The authority that a commander in the Armed Forces lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment” (U.S. Department of Army, 2012, p. 4).

Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC): A college-based officer training program for training commissioned officers of the United States Armed Forces.

Officer Candidate School (OCS): The United States Army’s main training academy for prospective Army officers.

This chapter provided an introduction and brief background of the study and described the purpose of the research. The study examined the lived experiences and perceptions of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The following chapter will review relevant literature to the research topic. Chapter three will provide the framework and methodology used in the study, chapter four presents the findings, chapter five will include the discussion of the findings, chapter six will discuss the conclusions of the study, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research. Finally, the dissertation will end with my own personal reflection on the dissertation topic and experience while conducting the research. Covered in the next chapter, the literature

review will describe, summarize, evaluate and clarify the literature most important and relevant to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

United States Army's Approach to Leader Development

Leadership and the military are practically inseparable so the review of “military leadership” appears to be fairly straightforward. According to LaMoe and Strickler (2012), the Army trains and educates more than half a million individuals per year in an institutionalized, regular, course-based process of developing leaders. The Army consciously works to develop its future leaders through training, experience and a formalized, structured program of professional education which is a process that takes years (LaMoe & Strickler. 2012, p. 28). The military as a whole cannot rely solely on recruiting leaders who have college degrees and/or senior civilian experience because these qualities alone, do not qualify individuals for the demands of leadership responsibilities in a military environment. Leader development is a continuous process that occurs over the course of an individual's career and is not a single training session, specified course or particular assignment. The combination of these things will contribute to the holistic development of a leader. The Army recognizes that throughout an officer's career, there is a strong need for leaders to be well-educated, adaptable and innovative. Organizational success is largely predicted upon the ability of leaders to effectively implement strategies that yield competitive advantage in a rapidly, changing, and sometimes chaotic environments (Gibson, 2005, p. 1).

In 2013, the Army published a Leader Development Strategy (ALDS) with the expectation of re-balancing the three crucial leader development components of training, education, and experience. At the time publication of ALDS, the Army recognized a need

to get back on track because the primary focus over the last 15 years had been placed on warfighting operations (U.S. Army, 2013). ALDS provides vision and guidance on ends, ways, and means for developing leaders of all cohorts that exercise Mission Command while planning, preparing, executing, and assessing Unified Land Operations to meet the challenges of the 21st Century (U.S. Army, 2013, p. 3). Mission command is the “exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operation” (U.S. Army, 2012).

“Leader development is achieved through the career-long synthesis of the training, education, and experiences acquired through opportunities in the institutional, operational, and self-development domains, supported by peer and developmental relationships” (U.S. Army, 2013, p. 3). Army officers are leaders of character, competence, and commitment (U.S. Army, 2013, p. 13). Officers are leaders at all echelons where their primary duties can include commanding units, establishing policies, and managing resources all while balancing risks and caring for people and their families. The Army has not published an updated Army Leader Development Strategy (ALDS).

The Center for Army Leadership (CAL) administers a survey annually which was initiated in 2005 to evaluate the quality of leadership activities and the effectiveness of leader development experiences within Army units. The survey is designed to assess and track trends (2005 to present) in Army leader attitudes of leader development, the quality of leadership, and the contribution of leadership mission accomplishment (United States Army Combined Arms Center, 2013). Four leader development programs that are

available to all Army leaders were evaluated through questions on the 2013 Center for Army Leadership Annual Survey of Army Leadership (CASAL). Based on the feedback from the survey, informal leader development practices and domains are consistently preferred over formal leader development activities (U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2013, p. 10). Universal leader development programs, like training on the profession, Multi-Source Assessment and Feedback (MSAF) tool, Army Career Tracker (ACT) and Army Training Network (ATN) are effective but are under-subscribed (CASAL, 2013, p. 10). This information provides the Army with valuable insight into the needs of the Army as they pertain to leader development. The survey is from leaders in the field whose responses are based on their own experiences and perceived development.

Historical Overview of Women in the Military

Since the Continental Congress established the United States Armed Forces in 1775, women have been significant players of the American military. Women may have served initially in support roles such as nurses during the Revolutionary War, but over the centuries, women have transitioned from those roles to occupations that have put them in the line of fire. The issue of women in the military was not seriously debated until the draft ended in 1973 (Armor, 1996). Prior to World War II, women were restricted to nursing and medical jobs, but during the war some administrative and clerical jobs were opened to women due to severe manpower shortages. With this exception, the total manpower on active duty only rose approximately 2 percent of the total force by the end of the war (Armor, 1996). This small success led to the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, which formalized the right of women to serve in the military

(Murdoch et al., 2005). The act established legal parameters for women to serve as paid members of the United States Armed Forces. These mandates established limits for enlistment, promotion, and combat service; simultaneously, the parameters provided opportunity for exponential increases in the number of women serving in the military. Historically, women's integration into the Armed Forces has followed a series of advances and setbacks, with advances closely tied to shortages of qualified males, usually during wartimes (Murdoch et al., p. S5).

The changing values about the role of women in society coupled with the conversion of an all-volunteer force, led to a major and changing impact on women in the military. The immediate motivation for increasing women's participation in the early 1970s was a concern about manpower shortages in a voluntary military, and as a result, all four military services opened a large number of non-combat jobs to women (Armor, 1996, p. 11). Nearly 30 years after the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, in 1976, the United States Congress passed into law that women should be allowed admittance into all service academies. The United States military academies participation revolutionized one of the largest changes that helped recast the role of women in the military. In these academies, they train recruits to become officers and leaders. It takes time for traditional cultures to change and for fairness in opportunities for women to be developed (Reichard, 2006, p. 5). The momentum for change may have decelerated but it is more prevalent in today's military than it was 40 years ago. The opportunities for women to serve are becoming more available with changes to combat exclusions which were established during the first wars of the United States.

One of the major issues in recent years has been the statutory combat exclusions that restricted the availability of jobs for women. The roles of women in the military workplace have changed significantly over the past two decades (Rosen, Knudson & Fancher, 2003). In February 2012, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced that more than 14,000 combat-related positions in front-line support units would open to women. A report was submitted to Congress and part of the vision statement said “the Department of Defense is committed to removing all barriers that would prevent service members from rising to the highest level of responsibility that their talents and capabilities warrant” (Parrish, 2012). The report identified that the changes will expand career opportunities for women, provide a greater pool of troops from which combatant commanders may draw, reduce the operational tempo for “male counterparts” by increasing the number of service members available to support direct combat forces, improve consistency in assignment policy, and give field commanders more flexibility in meeting combat-support mission requirements (Parrish, 2012). Although the law was changed to include women, the emphasis was to reduce the high mobilization tempo for men and not solely because the desire was to integrate women.

Nearly a year after the announcement that jobs would open to women, the Defense Secretary, Leon E. Panetta and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey announced the rescission of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule for women and the Department of Defense plans to remove gender-based barriers to service (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). In this press release, Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta said “women have shown great

courage and sacrifice on and off the battlefield, contributed in unprecedented ways to the military's mission and proven their ability to serve in an expanding number of roles" (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). As traditionally male-dominated occupational specialties (MOSs) are opened to women, the standards are questioned and maligned as unfairly discriminatory as women's inability to achieve them is exposed. Two years after the Pentagon carefully began working on this goal, thousands of jobs have become available, though many combat-related issues remain. There is no shortage of women who believe they can do more and serve in the same capacity and assignments of their male counterparts. In August 2015, two women made history by graduating from the United States Army's elite Ranger School (Tan, 2015). This was a historic moment in the integration of women in the military and exposed that women are capable of achieving the same success as their male counterparts. According to Tan (2015), "the assessment has drawn a high level of scrutiny, with many questioning whether the Army is lowering its standards for the elite school – which until now was open only to men – while many others have cheered on the female students."

Prior to these announcements by the Department of Defense (DOD), the reality is that women have already been filling these positions for the last decade of war. In 2012, statistics compiled by the Pentagon revealed that 144 military women have been killed and 865 wounded in combat and non-combat incidents in Iraq and Afghanistan (Parrish, 2012). Women make up about 280,000 of the more than 2.3 million service members who have served in combat and non-combat operations over the past decade (Parrish, 2012). The rescinded exclusion is a small step in the right direction but change has come

slowly in the military to incorporate women into combat assignments since the first announcement by the Department of Defense (DOD). The fact that women were not allowed into combat roles has had a significant negative impact on some women's career progression to date. The landscape of the future is changing, but not without sacrifice. Oftentimes without combat experience, it becomes difficult for women to garner the respect of their direct reports and senior leaders. The end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan marks the close of the first era in which women excelled through the ranks into significant and crucial leadership roles.

The demographics from the United States Department of Defense in 2012 revealed the total number of military personnel is over 3.6 million between Active Duty and Selected Reserve components of the DOD. The DOD Active Duty military personnel totals 1,388,028. Women, who number 202,876, only comprise 14.6 percent of the DOD Active Duty force. Narrowing down the numbers, the total Army National Guard strength was 358,078 with only 154,346 of that total being women. The 18.2 percent is slightly larger than the active duty force. Across all DOD forces, the percentage of female military personnel has increased from 15.4 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2012 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

In the past decade, more than 280,000 women have deployed to support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they proved their mettle as contributing members of the team (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). Although women were not officially assigned to combat roles, they were attached to units who brought them into action and placed them under fire. In these environments, they had the same

responsibilities and expectations as the men on their team. Women have shown courage, grit and heart on the battlefield. They have killed and been killed in combat and have received prestigious recognition for their heroic actions. The Pentagon aims to ensure the continued success of our Armed Forces by preserving cohesion, individual and unit readiness and morale across all ranks. The Pentagon also aims to retain the confidence and trust of the American people by promoting and endorsing policies that maintain the best quality and most-qualified people for each position regardless of gender. Therefore, the new policy is being enacted cautiously and with forethought by phasing women into these newly opened positions. They are validating occupational performance standards and gender-neutral requirements before women will be allowed to fully integrate into some positions.

Leadership is a classic conundrum and has been defined in many different ways across a spectrum of organizations. The environment in which the term is used is often an indicator of how it is described. For example, leadership characteristics may be described differently for men and women based on the unique traits they bring forward. The absence of noble leadership is usually profoundly felt, but try to accurately define it and it is very difficult. The lack of leadership has lost battles and has resulted in inexpressible human death and destruction. The undeniable presence of leadership, regardless of sex, has benefitted millions in an organization that relies on leadership to win wars and to defeat the enemy.

Building Leaders for the 21st Century

Loughlin and Arnold (2007) discuss a new approach on the future of leaders in the United States Armed Forces. The authors propose that seeking the best leaders in the future may require raising the bar for male soldiers on certain skills more closely aligned with current realities (e.g., the ability to meditate, resolve conflicts, and exercise controlled aggression) (p. 150). Service members rising to positions of leadership in the military of the future will likely require a distinctly different skill set than those of the past. The military must start to prepare for this reality now by identifying leaders who will best fit the demands of the future.

Officers will be encouraged to seek graduate degrees. Leaders with an advanced civilian education will diversify the officer corps' education and experience. Traditional military schools are no longer able to provide the training required for the next century of leaders; therefore, officers will become dependent on civilian universities to provide the education to advance their knowledge and help prepare them for the challenges of the future. Obtaining a civilian education will provide future military leaders with more experience studying and developing nontraditional skills which are outside of the realm of what is taught in a military schoolhouse curriculum.

Army National Guard

The Army National Guard (ARNG) is a very large and complex military organization formed as one of three components of the United States Army. Based on a 2013 report, the strength of the National Guard was 357,733 with 302,478 being male and only 55,255 female (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). More specific to the officer

ranks, there was a total of 45,065 with only 5,822 of that total being female officers (about 13 percent) (U.S. Department of Defense, 2013). The vast majority of the Army National Guard (ARNG) members are dual hatted as civilians and soldiers. Traditionally they serve one weekend a month and two weeks a year; during which time they are trained on their military skills. Because the force is made up of primarily part-time soldiers, these individuals must constantly toggle between the two environments – being both a citizen and a soldier. The culture of the ARNG is unique in this regard because it is a cross between the two. The ARNG has an advantage over the other two components because the soldiers bring their civilian skill sets and experience to their military positions which oftentimes are a different set of skills than the job they perform in the military.

The Minnesota Army National Guard is the sixth largest across all 54 states and territories by total assigned strength. The total strength of the Minnesota Army National Guard in February 2014 was 11,039 soldiers (Army National Guard G1 Gateway, 2014). Of those assigned only 1,844 were females which is 17 percent of the total strength. Of the 1,844 females assigned, 192 of them were officers which equals 10 percent of the total assigned strength. In comparison, there are 1,273 male officers which is a total of 12 percent of the total assigned strength (Army National Guard G1 Gateway, 2014). Many of the positions in the Minnesota Army National Guard were previously closed to women because they were combat arms. With the recent Department of Defense (DOD) law change, it is plausible to think more female officers will fill these roles in the immediate and near future. As of February 2015, there were 107 individual command positions

across the Minnesota Army National Guard. These command positions were at all echelons of the organization. Of these positions, only 11 were occupied by a female leader (Army National Guard G1 Gateway, 2015). Some of the positions could not be filled by women because they were closed due to being combat arms. The dispersion of women filling command positions across the state will likely change with the new guidance from the Department of Defense (DOD).

Women and Leadership

There have been several studies and many scholars who have tested leadership. In a review by Lowe and Gardner (2001), they compiled ten years of leadership studies into one scholarly article. Unfortunately, the vast majority of samples in these studies included male leaders and few of the studies include female leaders. This can be a direct reflection on years past in that the majority of organizational leaders were men so the pool of applicants to choose from only included one gender. Military leadership positions, particularly those characterized by individuals holding higher rank and tenure, have historically belonged to men (Gibson, 2005, p. 2). This over-representation of men as emerging leaders is not limited to the military, however, and is well documented in business and laboratory settings as well (Eagly & Karau, 1991).

Extensive research over the years supports the importance of leadership. Reichard and Avolio (2005) discussed the findings of a meta-analysis study that was conducted by the Gallup Leadership Institute (GLI). The results revealed that when the effects of 200 experimental and quasi-experimental leadership students were aggregated, leadership had a small, positive effect on important outcomes (Reichard & Avolio, 2005). This study

found that the effects of leadership appeared to be stronger in both education and military settings than in other organizations. The vast majority of samples included men with only nine of the 200 studies reported using a sample of women (Reichard & Avolio, 2005).

Over the years, several studies have tested leadership theories which predominantly included male leaders; research on female leadership is lacking (Lowe & Gardner, 2000).

Although women have gained increased access to supervisory and middle management positions, they remain quite rare as elite leaders and top executives (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573). The disparity of women in top leadership positions does not reside only in military organizations. Some companies have made it a top priority to advance qualified women into leadership roles but a massive gender gap still remains. The Catalyst survey investigates female representation within the largest companies and tracks the progress of female leaders into key positions. As of 2014, women held 4.8 percent of Fortune 500 CEO positions and 5.2 percent of Fortune 1000 CEO positions (Catalyst, 2014). There are many consequences of this underrepresentation; one of them is the deterrence of young females looking to enter the business world because of the diminished availability of female role models. On the surface, they may indirectly be discouraged thinking it is not a possibility by lack of sheer numbers. An abundance of explanations exist for why the glass ceiling occurs, but few theories offer explanations for why some women break through the ceiling while others do not (Furst & Reeves, 2008, p. 372).

In a predominantly male, traditionally autocratic organization such as the United States Armed Forces, women leaders may face large challenges. Numerous barriers to

women's advancement have been identified by multiple scholars (Morrison, 1992; Catalyst, 1998; Burke and Mattis, 2005; Rutherford, 2011). These include negative assumptions about women, their abilities and their commitment to careers; perceptions that women do not fit into the military culture; reluctance to give women key line positions important for advancement; women's home and family responsibilities; and lack of mentoring and exclusion of women from the 'good old boys' network.

Mentorship and leadership programs are often the remedies to some of these barriers but it is not that simple. Mentorship tends to be reserved for the select few that senior leaders think will grow into leadership positions.

Women need to be provided opportunities to fill key developmental positions that will prepare them for positions of increased responsibility. Women need to be prepared and equipped with the necessary tools, resources and mentorship to be successful in these positions. The significance of this topic is during a time in the military where a restructuring of positions is allowing women to serve at every level and in positions that were previously closed to women. Numerous men in the military are supportive and frankly champions of equal access for qualified women to all professions and schools; however, there are similarly as many men who believe that specific assignments and schools should be reserved for the sacred place of men. This is not a political experiment, it is equality based on qualification. There is no other profession in the United States that bans someone simply due to his or her chromosome make-up. It is time male counterparts recognize the unique skills and leadership that women can offer across the entire force; not just in specific positions identified by the male population.

Gender Stereotype Barriers

Some may assume that race and gender in the military are relatively new issues, coinciding especially with the rising concerns about equality of opportunity and affirmative action policies (Armor, 1996, p. 8); however, the debates over military representation are much older than the modern civil rights movement. In the area of gender, the major issue in recent years has been the statutory combat exclusions that restrict the availability of jobs, but that is slowly shifting with the recent changes to the combat-exclusion law. Women may have to work harder to prove their competencies and skills but they are willing to pave the way for aspiring junior female leaders.

Gender stereotypes have been defined as “the belief that a set of traits and abilities is more likely to be found among one sex than the other” (Schein, 1973, p. 259). The tendency to attribute specific characteristics to gender can be extended to occupations that are more likely to be held by primarily men or women (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Norris & Wylie, 1995). This is often executed in the military because the profession has traditionally been regarded as a masculine occupation (Youngman, 2001); thus military leaders, when selecting or promoting soldiers into key leader positions, may look for personal attributes thought to be more characteristic of men than women (Boyce & Herd, 2003, p. 366). Based merely on these particular characteristics, more men than women may be perceived as having leadership potential and be afforded more leadership opportunities to exhibit and highlight the perceived potential. If men are in positions of leadership they may be more inclined to select individuals to these positions that exhibit the same traits and characteristics as themselves. This culture in the Armed Forces has

been prevalent for years and it will take years to change so there is equal access among both genders.

In Ryan's (2005) interviews with male and female combat soldiers, she found that officers unanimously agreed with the fact that a person's performance is strongly affected by the amount of support he or she receives from both peers and leaders. Consequently, women who want to succeed in these masculine environments must not only perform effectively but must simultaneously overcome these biases and succeed with the additional task of gaining acceptance to hold particular leadership positions. Women's errors and failures may be examined more with a microscope than their male counterparts as they may discover a reason to exclude them from positions based on past failures and mistakes.

According to Eagly and Carli (2003), men are more likely to engage in behaviors that emphasize dominance, aggression, and achievement. In contrast, women are more likely to display feminine behaviors that emphasize affiliation, nurturance, deference, and abasement, traits traditionally associated with supporter or follower roles. Boldry, Wood and Kashy (2001) recognized that men and women differ on a number of psychological dimensions that are relevant for military performance (p. 690). The authors further describe the typical man recognizing he is more likely to make decisions more easily and to be more independent, self-confident, competitive, and leader-like than the typical woman. In contrast, the typical woman is believed to be more helpful, kind, gentle, and emotionally expressive than men. The discrepancy between stereotypic attributes of women and those required in the role of being a service member may have a variety of

effects on the experiences of women in the military (Boldry et al., 2001, p. 691). The United States Armed Forces has not officially given more credit to either of the typical traits identified for the different genders but a review of these traits may reveal that a conglomeration of all the leadership traits benefit the organization because they focus on the human element of leadership. Gender stereotyping also occurs with respect to work-family issues in ways that can impede the advancement of women which is discussed in greater detail under the next section of leadership ambition barriers.

Leadership Ambition Barriers

The evaluation of leadership ambition in our female leaders is necessary. There is little research that evaluates women in the military and if they are being properly prepared for leadership roles despite the well-known and often highlighted leadership ambition gap. Oftentimes, men are criticized for lacking ambition in their professional life while women are criticized for having it. Like many attributes of leadership, ambition can be used for good or bad by both men and women. Developing leaders is a competitive advantage the Army possesses over its enemies. As previously discussed, the process of leader development in the Army is deliberate, continuous, and progressive which is founded in Army values and helps grow soldiers into competent, committed and professional leaders of character.

Leadership ambition can be viewed as a symptom of selfishness. A common notion is that women do not achieve the higher level positions because they are not socialized to be go-getters, or perhaps because they track themselves into motherhood early in their careers and make family their first priority. It is not the ambition gap that is

holding women back; it is that women are being denied key leadership and developmental positions. The military is making positive strides to incorporate women in roles that were not previously available such as prestigious combat-related positions and assignments which have been deemed as important positions for further advancement. This will help revolutionize military leadership by allowing women to be at every level of the military; which ultimately drives having the best qualified person in the position.

Some authors disagree with the concept that women in leadership positions face disadvantages. Vecchio (2002) asserted that male gender advantage due to gender stereotyping is overstated and that more rigorous research is needed. Yukl (2002) argued that there is a feminine advantage for leadership because women have preferences for inclusiveness, power sharing, high interpersonal interaction, nurturing followers, and cooperation. The scope of the proposed study will not address the differences in their opinions, but it is worthy to note that there is a continuing need for research on female leadership. There tends to be an oversaturation of literature that focuses on the leadership traits that do not align with the military. Due to the changing platform and operational environment there needs to be a focus on the positive outcomes that are derived from leadership characteristics most often associated with women.

One Size Fits All Barrier

Practitioners, scholars and educators lack a rational, theoretically-based, and actionable framework for designing leadership programs that focus on the unique needs of women. Lacking such a framework, many adopt an “add-women-and-stir” approach (Martin & Meyerson, 1998, p. 312); which is simply delivering the same programs to

women that are delivered to men. This approach assumes that gender either does not or should not matter for leadership development. Others take a different advancement by adopting a “fix-the-women” approach (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). These programs assume that gender matters, but they locate the problem in women. These types of programs believe that women have not been socialized to compete successfully in the world of men, and so they believe they must be taught the skills their male counterparts have acquired as a matter of course. While both approaches may convey some constructive skills and tactics, neither satisfactorily addresses the organizational realities women face nor is likely to foster in participants a sustained capacity for leadership.

Bridging Leader and Leadership Development

Interest in leader and leadership development is strong among researchers, scholars and practitioners but there is conceptual confusion regarding distinctions between leader and leadership development (Day, 2000). The distinction between leader development and leadership development is more than mere semantics. At the core of the differences is an orientation toward developing human capital (leader development) as compared to social capital (leadership development). There should be a distinct link between leader development and leadership development such that one does not replace the other but rather a bridge between the two. Having a healthy balance of each development process benefits the organization.

The development approaches are grounded in particularly different leadership models. Leader development is based on a traditional, individualistic conceptualization of leadership (Day, 2000). The underlying assumption is that more effective leadership

occurs through the development of individual leaders (Day, 2000). Alternatively, leadership development has its origins in a more contemporary, relationship model of leadership. This model assumes leadership is a function of the social resources that are embedded in relationships (Day, 2000). Understanding the differences between leader development and leadership development in a contextual context is important for researchers in the field because building both human and social capital is significant in all organizations. Many organizations view the overarching concept of leadership as a source of competitive advantage and are investing in its development (McCall, 1998). The concept of leadership development is focused on the interaction between an individual and the social and organizational environment which is a more complex endeavor than one concerned solely with individual leader development.

Leader Development

Leader development focuses on human capital (the individual); the emphasis is on cultivating desired attributes in a leader in terms of behaving and thinking and/or feeling. One of the primary reasons that organizations invest in training and development for employees is to enhance and protect their human capital (Lepak & Snell, 1999). Military organizations are no exception as they continue to develop their leaders and provide programs focused on their individual development. The emphasis is on individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles (Day, 2000, p. 584).

Day (2000) identified specific characteristics of the type of interpersonal competence associated with leader development initiatives which include, but are not

limited to, the following: self-awareness (e.g., emotional awareness, self-confidence), self-regulation (e.g., self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability), and self-motivation (e.g., commitment, initiative, optimism). These characteristics are often identified in military organizations as most beneficial to the development of leaders.

Leader development in the Army. The Army's definition of leader development is "the deliberate, continuous, sequential, and progressive process – founded in Army values – that grows soldiers and Army civilians into competent and confident leaders capable of decisive action" (U.S. Department of Army, 2014, p. 2). The Army Regulation further identifies that leader development is "achieved through the life-long synthesis of knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through training and education opportunities in institutional, operational, and self-development domains" (2014).

In 2008, Rand Arroyo Center conducted research in cooperation with the United States Army (Schirmer et al, 2008) to help the organization identify effective and feasible leader development programs in operational units. The study was focused primarily on the Active Duty component using a sample of commissioned officers. In this study, over 450 officers met to discuss their development. Only 34 officers had served in a Selected Reserve (National Guard or Army Reserve) unit. The authors reported that the responses from these 34 officers were similar to those of the individuals who served in an Active Duty component and did not determine it to be beneficial to single out those officers in their conclusions. Nothing in the data gives reason to believe that the leader development activities within the Selected Reserve units were significantly different from those in

Active Duty units. A larger sample of the former would be required before one could draw definitive conclusions (Schirmer et al., 2008, p. xv).

One of the key findings from this study was that there is no set activities that could be characterized as a standard or typical unit-level leader development program (Shirmer et al., 2008, p. 19). The unique missions of Army units combined with the characteristics of the individuals commanding those units can contribute to the wide variance in content, frequency and perceived quality of leader development activities found in the study. Many of the participants of the study identified that informal mentoring and counseling was most beneficial to their individual leader development. They acknowledged that some of the units in which they were assigned had formal leadership development programs but they did not recognize these formal programs as a significant part of their development.

The Rand study provides some insight to leader development programs in Army units but it fails to address specifically Army National Guard leaders. Army National Guard soldiers come to the military with additional skills and are distinctive in that they are citizen soldiers with a wide variety of skills learned outside of their military service. Additionally, this study did not disclose the breakdown of male and female participants. It can be inferred that the vast majority studied were male because of the timeframe of the interviews and the types of units the officers indicated they had served in (combat arms specific units). The duty positions and units were only open to men during the time period of the interviews in 2006, and as previously discussed, combat positions did not become available to women until 2012 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012).

Despite the advantages and disadvantages that women face in achieving leadership positions there is still a gap in understanding the ways in which female leaders develop. The evaluation of female leaders can provide useful knowledge and insight on how they develop; thus providing women the opportunity to identify ways in which they can become more effective in their leadership roles. Men and women are psychologically wired differently and it is an advantage for any organization to incorporate their differences to benefit every echelon of the organization.

Leadership Development

Leadership development is concerned with the development of social capital; it focuses on the development of leadership as a process of influence. Unlike human capital, in which the focus is on developing individual knowledge, skills and abilities, the emphasis with social capital is on building networked relationships among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organizational value (Bouty, 2000; Tsai & Groshal, 1998). The primary emphasis in leadership development is on building and using interpersonal competence. Leadership development can be thought of as an integration strategy by helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks by applying self-understanding to social and organizational imperatives (Day, 2000, p. 586).

The leadership development process encompasses interpersonal relationships, affective experiences, social influence processes, and team dynamics between the leader and his or her team. Leadership processes generally enable groups to work together in meaningful ways to accomplish the task or mission. The military relies on teams to work

together to accomplish a larger goal; therefore, both leader and leadership development is beneficial for the entire organization. Leadership development involves helping groups of people become more effective in problem solving in a wide range of situations which is also a valued skill amongst the military community.

Theoretical Foundations

Leadership development has emerged as an active field of theory building and research, providing a more scientific and evidence-based foundation to augment the long-standing practitioner interest in the topic (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014, p. 63). Day et al. (2014) contended that the emergence has transpired primarily over the last 10 to 15 years. Many leadership theories have been applied to military contexts and so there exists considerable military leadership research of this nature; however, the vast majority of studies do not solely focus on female leaders (e.g., Csoka & Bons, 1978; Deluga, 1991; Roush & Atwater, 1992). The theoretical framework for this study will strongly consider concepts and theories that fall into the general categories of social, cognitive, and behavioral as they relate to gender and individual leadership processes and outcomes. Society has played a significant role in shaping the perception of leaders and their leadership (Portello & Long, 1994). Social categories are important to the proposed study because they are relevant to past, present, and future societal influence in gender roles and leadership constructs.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Leadership has been traditionally conceptualized as an individual-level skill (Day, 2000, p. 583). The skills at the individual level have been evaluated and reviewed

extensively through the transformational leadership theory. This theory is often examined within a military context; however, transformational leadership as a construct is clearly applicable to organizations other than the military. The United States military is much like other large public sector organizations in that it has tendencies toward a hierarchical bureaucracy and must remain responsive to the American people (Wong et al., 2003, p.660). Transformational leadership enhances morale, motivation and job performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms.

James Burns argued in the late 1970s that analysis of leadership styles left out some of the most important aspects of effective leadership (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). According to Burns, transformational leadership can be seen when “leaders and followers make each other advance to a higher level of morality and motivation (Burns, 1978). From this argument, Bass (1985) developed the transformational leadership theory in order to capture the neglected aspects as noted by Burns. These types of leaders set high standards for behavior and establish themselves as role models by gaining the trust and confidence of their followers. Bass (1985) contends that transformational leadership can be defined based on the impact it has on followers. Transformational leadership is transcendental in nature and is concerned with the implantation of new ideas; providing compelling visions of a better future and inspiring and motivating employees to achieve higher levels of commitment.

The full range of leadership introduces four elements of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspiration motivation, and idealized influence. Each element is connected based on encouragement,

respect and influence. As a developmental tool, transformational leadership can often be found in governmental organizations. Military leadership is formed in a sequential series of physical training, institutional education and experiential events which can be argued as more advanced and time-consuming than other governmental and non-governmental organizations. Many Army officers are equipped with the tools to implement multiple leadership models and are able to effectively adapt to their environments based on the soldiers they are charged with leading and the state of the operational environment.

Authentic Leadership Development Theory

Given the overwhelming number of scholars and practitioners devoted to leadership research, there is still a lack of knowledge and science of leadership development (Day & O'Connor, 2003). In 2003, a new theoretical model of leadership development emerged in academic literature by Luthans and Avolio (2003) which is known as the authentic leadership development (ALD) theory. Authentic leadership development theory differs from transformational theory (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass, 1985), in that the leader may not actively set out to transform the follower into a leader, but may do so simply by being a role model for followers. Moreover, the developmental process is much more relational, where both follower and leader are shaped in their respective development. Transformational leaders are described as being optimistic, hopeful, developmentally oriented and possess a high moral character (Bass, 1998), all of which may also be manifestations of authentic leadership. Being an authentic leader does not necessarily mean that the leader is transformational (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). One final distinction between the two theories is that authentic leaders are grounded in their

own deep sense of self; they know where they stand on their own values and beliefs, and they stay their course to convey to others through actions and words. Transformational leaders may also exhibit a deep sense of self joining the two views of leadership, or they may be able to transform others and organizations, through a powerful, positive vision or by an intellectually stimulating idea (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 330).

Avolio and Gardner (2005) found that over the last 100 years, most leadership theories have been originated without a focus on the essential core processes that result in the development of leadership that would be characterized by those models (e.g., a path-goal leader) (p. 317). As a consequence, there has been little focus and attention to development and the process as it relates to authentic leadership. The author's central premise is that through increased self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive modeling, authentic leaders foster the development of authenticity in followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 317).

Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans and May (2004) defined authentic leaders as "those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others being aware of their own and others' values and moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character (p. 4). All of these attributes and personal competencies are highly regarded by military leaders.

In their initial framework of authentic leadership, Luthans and Avolio (2003) identified the positive psychological capacities of confidence, optimism, hope and resiliency as personal resources of an authentic leader. The authors also assert that

authentic leadership and its development encompasses an inherent ethical and moral component (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Avolio et al. (2004) suggest that authentic leaders are able to enhance the engagement, motivation, commitment, satisfaction, and involvement required from followers to constantly improve their work and performance outcomes through the creation of personal identification with the follower and social identification with the organization (Kark & Shamir, 2002)

Consistent with Avolio and colleagues (e.g., Avolio et al, 2004; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), authentic leadership may be viewed as a root construct that can incorporate transformational and ethical leadership. As noted in transformational leadership (Avolio, 1999), authentic leaders can be directive or participative, and could even be authoritarian. Luthans and Avolio (2003) proposed that authentic leaders are guided by a set of end values that represent an orientation towards doing “what is right and fair” for the leader and for their followers.

Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory was coined by Eagly and Karau in 2002. This theory offers an explanation for the gender stereotyping of leadership positions by maintaining that perceived gender roles may conflict with expectations regarding leadership roles, especially when an occupation is held predominantly by one sex (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that the prejudice towards female leaders occurs because inconsistencies exist between the characteristics with the female gender stereotype and those associated with typical leadership styles. Military responsibilities are often perceived as contrary to societal expectations about appropriate

roles for females (Boyce & Herd, 2003, p. 365) regardless of efforts to change the views of male and female leaders. Prejudice can occur when perceivers judge women as potential or actual occupants of leader roles because of inconsistency between the predominantly communal qualities that perceivers associate with women and the predominantly agentic qualities they believe are required to succeed as a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Although some women carefully try to balance the masculine and feminine aspects of their behavior, it may compromise their advancement to higher level positions because their behavior may appear less powerful and confident than that of their male counterparts. In role reversal, men who display characteristics most often associated with the female gender are not singled out for their behavior.

Prejudice can arise from the relations that people perceive between the characteristics of members of a social group and the requirements of the social roles that group members occupy or aspire to occupy (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). A higher potential of prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a particular group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles. More specifically, the Role Congruity Theory invokes the construct of gender roles. Gender roles focus more on the consensual beliefs about the attributes of women and men. The theory addresses the extent of prejudice for being one factor accounting for the relative lack of women in positions that yield high levels of power and authority. Leadership behaviors exhibited by male and female leaders may differ which could result in the leaders being evaluated differently depending on the extent to which the particular role is defined in masculine terms (Eagly et al, 1995).

Further knowledge of female leader development in the Army National Guard is important because historically there is little information about studies that may have been conducted. Data from this study may provide leadership scholars with information regarding factors that contribute to mentoring, training, and guidance opportunities for females in the Army National Guard who desire to progress through the ranks to prestigious and well sought after leadership positions and assignments. This study comes during a time when the field is changing and allowing female leaders to compete at the same level as their male counterparts for key leadership positions that were previously closed to women. The research will contribute to the study of modern leadership issues involving limiting positions due to gender by attempting to bring the focus back to the importance of finding a balance in exemplifying leadership diversity in the work force of the future; whether it is in the Army National Guard or within any other type of organization.

The theoretical literature summarized in this section included the United States Army's approach to leader development, a historical overview of women in the military, women and leadership which reviewed some of the barriers, bridging leader and leadership development, and the theoretical foundations of transformational leadership theory, authentic leadership development theory and role congruity theory. The chapter closed with an overview of qualitative research on leadership. The next chapter will review the detailed methodology used to conduct the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Role congruity theory maintains that gender roles influence behavior even in the presence of a competing leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 590). Two distinct features of the role congruity theory is the proposition that prejudice toward female leaders takes two forms: (1) less favorable evaluation of women's (than men's) potential for leadership because leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than women; and (2) less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership behavior of women than men because such behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than men (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576). The first stems from the descriptive norms of gender roles and the shared beliefs of women's characteristics. The second type of prejudice stems from the injunctive norms of gender roles and the beliefs of how women ought to behave. If female leaders violate these beliefs by pursuing female leader roles and fail to exhibit the supportive behaviors preferred by females, they can be negatively evaluated (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female leaders' choices are thus constrained by threats from two directions: (1) conforming to their gender role has the potential to fail at meeting the requirements of their leader role; and (2) conforming to their leader role would produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576).

Qualitative Research on Leadership

The study used a qualitative phenomenological foundation. Interviews were conducted with female leaders; officers in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The intent of the interviews was to identify themes, patterns and/or factors believed to be enhancements or inhibitions to career ascension to particular leadership positions and to

study the women's perceived experience with leader development. The interviews explored some of the key aspects in which women leaders feel may have directly contributed to their success and/or failure as a leader.

Bryman (1995) discussed several benefits of using a qualitative method as it pertains to leadership research. Specifically, he highlighted the role and impact of contextual issues and clarification of the process of leadership. Leadership and leader development both imply a process that occurs within a specific context (Reichard, 2006). Although the bulk of leadership studies have employed a quantitative, questionnaire methodology, Bryman (2004) identified that the utilization of qualitative methodologies is on an incline and reported on 66 such studies. Mainstream research tends to focus on static and cross-sectional analysis which does not capture the contextual issues which are inherent in both leader and leadership development (Hunt & Ropo, 1995).

Research Question

The research methodology best employed for the research question is through a qualitative method. A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to (a) gain insight about the nature of a particular phenomenon, (b) develop new concepts of theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon, and (c) discover the problems that exist within the phenomenon. A qualitative approach describes leadership from the perspective of the female officer in the Minnesota Army National Guard by exploring the participants lived experiences and perceptions of their development.

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a deliberate method researchers use to select participants for the study that

have particular characteristics from a population determined to be suitable for the needs of the study. In using this method, participants were selected based on pre-determined criteria in order to offer some meaningful insight into the topic based on their service and background. This type of sampling is popular in qualitative research. The specific type of purposive sampling used in this study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling guided the selection of female officers from the Minnesota Army National Guard. In a qualitative study, the depth of the data that is gathered and evaluated from participants can provide evidence for the development of theoretical findings that contribute to a phenomenon in areas that may be under-researched.

Qualitative Study

Qualitative research is an effort to understand the nature of a setting and the experiences others have in the context (Merriam, 1998). Bryman (1995) discussed several benefits of qualitative research as it pertains specifically to leadership. He highlighted the role and impact of contextual issues and clarification of the process of leadership. Leader and leadership development both imply a process that occurs within a specific context (Reichard, 2006). Although the bulk of leadership studies have employed a quantitative, questionnaire methodology, Bryman (2004) identified that the utilization of qualitative methodologies is on an incline and reported on 66 such studies.

Methodology

This phenomenological study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the lived experiences of female leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The qualitative method employed focused on their human experiences that are not

approachable through quantitative methods. The study sought to identify the wholeness of an experience rather than solely on the objects or parts. Phenomenological principles emphasize that scientific investigation is valid when the information gained comes about through rich description that allows for understanding of the essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

This study used phenomenological inquiry through in-depth interviews to obtain the lived experiences of nine female military officers who are currently serving in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The phenomenological approach was used to understand the subject aspects of leader and leadership development as it relates to their role as female leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. During the interviews with the participants, I captured their personal experiences and developed a rich description based on their experiences with leader development. The interviews were unstructured and informal; utilizing open-ended questions in order to maximize the amount of depth in their experiences. The compilation of the interview responses were used to determine common outcomes of the women's experiences and to create themes and patterns.

In addition to the interviews, I collected an officer questionnaire from each participant (see Appendix C). The questionnaire provided me with a demographic sketch of their name, rank, age, total months served in each component, commissioning source, year of commission, highest level of civilian education completed, discipline studied, military branch, military assignment history, and total months served in a command position at each level of the organization. The demographic sketch allowed for the evaluation of their military experience and background.

Phenomenology

Through the nature of their occupation, female military officers are exposed to a variety of different situational experiences that coincide with their experiences from their personal lives and civilian careers. Phenomenology was used in this study because it seeks to gain truth of the individual's experiences through the consciousness of the experiencer. The experience of female military officers used in this study provides valuable insight into the way they develop as a leader. Their rich backgrounds and experience would not be easily captured in a questionnaire type methodology. Phenomenology allows for autonomy because the researcher can guide their questions based on responses provided by the participant. Additionally, the participants are not restricted to the questions being asked and have the ability to freely speak about their experiences.

Phenomenology was first introduced in its formal structure by Edmund Husserl (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl developed a philosophic system rooted in subjective openness, a radical approach to science that was criticized and laughed at; yet throughout his professional life Husserl remained strong, continuing to expand his ideas, and finally responded with silence to all his critics who held onto their own fixed philosophies and saw only the weaknesses and inadequacies of Husserl's thinking (Moustakas, 1994, p. 25). Husserl became known as a leader in phenomenological research (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994) with a desire to convert philosophy into a strict science (Guignon, 2006). Phenomenology is a process as well as a method, and the procedure involves

studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning.

The term *phenomenology* was used as early as 1765 (Moustakas, 1994). For Hegel, phenomenology referred to knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience (Kockelmans, 1967). Phenomenology attempts to identify shared experience among various individuals experiencing shared phenomena. Husserl was most concerned with the discovery of meanings and essences in knowledge and believed that a sharp contrast exists between facts and principles. (Moustakas, 1994, p.27).

According to Moustakas (1994), the philosophical phenomenological method is comprised of three main core processes: 1) *Epoche*, 2) Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and 3) Imaginative Variation (p. 33). *Epoche* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things. *Epoche* is the necessary first step because it requires a new way of looking at things, in a way that requires we learn to see what stands before our eyes, and what we can distinguish and describe. According to Moustakas (1994), in the *Epoche*, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego (p. 33). The next essential process is the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction. In this process, each experience is considered in its singularity, in and for itself. The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way. According to Moustakas (1994), ultimately through the

Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction we derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon, the constituents that comprise the experience in consciousness, from the vantage point of an open self (p. 34). The final process is Imaginative Variation which aims to grasp the structural essences of experience. The function of this process is to develop a structural description of the essences of the experience derived, presenting a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35).

Interviews

To gain more in-depth information on the female officer's development in the Minnesota Army National Guard, individual interviews were conducted and utilized as the primary data collection. Obtaining descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews is the depth of collection of data for the study. The study used phenomenological interviews to obtain the lived experiences of female commissioned officers in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The goal was to focus on the subjective aspects of female leader development. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations (p. 23). It was my intent to capture personal experiences and draw out the rich descriptions and deep meaning from those being interviewed as they described the nature of their experiences.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was utilized to select the participants for this research. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample were taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness to participate in the research (Jupp, 2006). This research design required an evaluation of the female officers who were willing to be interviewed and able to provide feedback that was appropriate, both in terms of relevance and depth as it relates to the research question. The goal of purposive sampling is not to randomly select units from a population to create a sample with the intention of making generalizations from that sample to the population of interest. A total of ten female officers were selected to participate in the study.

An email was sent to all ten participants and I introduced myself, discussed the purpose of the study, and described the research, confidentiality, and the risks and benefits of their participation. Due to the extreme confidentiality of this study, I assessed the risk to be minimal for all participants. I received positive confirmation that nine officers would be willing to participate in the study and answered some of their preliminary questions. According to Patton (2002), the use of purposeful sampling in this case will increase the in-depth understanding by selecting rich experiences from participants who have experienced and lived the development process for women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard.

Exclusion Criteria of Participants. I did not include enlisted soldiers or male soldiers in my study. Female and male enlisted soldiers and male officers have the same potential to provide insight about their leader development and advancement; however, this study solely focused on female officers. Soldiers who held the rank of second lieutenant and first lieutenant were not selected because I determined they were too early in their career to assess their lived experiences in regard to leader development. If they were not prior enlisted, most second lieutenants and first lieutenants have less than four total years in military service. I did assess this to be enough time for the lieutenants to understand the leader development process. Additionally, my current rank in the military is higher than a lieutenant and I did not want them to feel as if they had to answer my questions in a particular way.

Inclusion Criteria of Participants. The two primary selection criteria were that the participant was a female officer currently serving in the Minnesota Army National Guard and their assignment history indicated that they had held positions of increased responsibility such as an assignment as a company commander. There were three female participants selected from the rank of *captain*, two female participants selected from the rank of *major*, two female participants selected from the rank of *lieutenant colonel*, and two female participants selected from the rank of *colonel*. Initially, there were three selected from the rank of lieutenant colonel but one did not respond that she would be willing to participate in the study. The selection of these female officers was utilized to provide the evidence needed to understand the lived experiences of female leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard.

Interviews with Participants

I coordinated a day and location for each interview based on their schedule and availability. I met each participant at an armory (conference room or office) for the initial in-depth, sixty to seventy-five minute open-ended interview (see Appendix A – the interview question guide). Prior to starting the questions, I reviewed the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality as outlined in the initial letter that I sent to them. I asked them for any additional questions they had before getting started and encouraged them to be as honest as possible while reassuring them that their name would not be used in the study and all information would remain confidential. I informed each participant that I would be digitally recording them throughout the interview. Once I identified that they were fully aware of the study, I collected their completed officer questionnaire and started asking them questions. I used the questions to guide me during each interview (reference Appendix A) and asked the same question of every participant. Many of the participants were guided by the interview questions but often went off topic connecting other experiences. The true essence was derived from the experiences that the female officers shared during the flow of conversation that was key to the study. Throughout the interviews, the conversations were flexible and adaptable to investigate each participants' unique experience based on their current position in the Minnesota Army National Guard, rank and years in service.

Each narrative from the participants was digitally recorded in order to capture their words and voice inflections verbatim. I transcribed the digital records and the participants were provided with a copy of their transcriptions to allow them the

opportunity to omit something they may have said or to expand upon a topic area.

Finally, I sent thank you notes to all participants and offered them the opportunity to read the study when complete. All the data collected was stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. The audio recordings were immediately uploaded onto my password protected computer and then removed from the digital recording device. Only the dissertation advisor and I had access to the data.

Data Analysis

A method of organizing and analyzing phenomenological data is derived from Moustakas (1994) modification of methods of analysis suggested by Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975). The method is known as the Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis. Each interview followed the same process when evaluated to ensure consistency for evaluation across all interviews.

Modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis

First, I listed all statements relevant to the participant's experience based on their responses provided in the interview. This process is known as horizontalization and each statement and response from the participant were of equal weight. This stage involved transcribing the interviews and reviewing the transcripts in their entirety more than once. All interviews were digitally recorded in order to capture the language of the participant verbatim. During the interview process, I recorded some observations and reflections about the interview experience as well and transcribed my own thoughts after they answered the question. I wrote these observations and thoughts in the margins and did not include them in the

transcriptions. I often referred back to the notes I had taken to remind myself of the initial thoughts I had when they provided insight to their development as a leader.

Second, I listed all non-overlapping and non-repetitive statements. This process involved the review of transcripts in order to transform the initial notes into emerging themes. These statements are considered the invariant horizons of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 123). Specifically, this included the formulation of concise phrases that contained enough particularity to remain grounded in the text and enough abstraction to offer conceptual understanding. During this stage, I identified initial themes that emerged. Third, I examined the emerging themes and clustered them together so I was able to interpret and describe each theme. The invariant horizons were grouped into themes that were helpful in highlighting converging ideas. As a researcher, it was imperative that I evaluated each case with an open mind to allow new themes to emerge as it is possible that the first case will influence further analysis. This step proved to be most difficult as I had to focus on removing any of my biases as to allow new themes and ideas to surface. Fourth, I used the invariant horizons and themes to develop an individual textural description of each participant's experience. This step included taking statements verbatim from the participants. Each participants experience varied differently and it was important to recognize the similarities and differences. Fifth, I developed an individual structural description of each participant's experience drawn from the individual textural description and imaginative variation. In the sixth step, I developed a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of each participant's experience, including the invariant constituents and themes. The final step using the Modification of the Stevick-

Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis was to use the individual textural-structural descriptions to develop a composite description of the essences of the experiences for all participants as a whole.

An important consideration with this study was the anonymity and confidentiality not only for the participants themselves, but also the Minnesota Army National Guard. The study of gender issues in the military may be a sensitive subject, and the release of results from the study could potentially be volatile. Therefore, special care was taken to ensure the identities of the participants remained anonymous throughout the final dissertation. Any potentially identifying information was excluded from the final analysis. There were several experiences shared by the participants which would have enriched the overall study but I determined it was too risky to include specific information because another soldier would easily be able to identify the officer based on the current position they held in the Minnesota Army National Guard.

Credibility and Dependability

Triangulation from different data sources was used to build a coherent justification for the themes. An important factor in evaluating any research is trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is determined by four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility is when the researcher analyzes the data through a process of reflecting, examining, exploring, and judging its relevance and meaning and ultimately developing themes and essences that accurately depict the experience. Credibility was established by sending the participants a copy of their transcript for review and verification. This allowed the participant to clarify

anything that was transcribed or to expand upon a response in greater detail. It also offered them the ability to omit information if they did not want it included in the study. Dependability was established with an audit trail in which all transcripts, notes, digital records, and email was maintained. Finally, the study fulfilled a research requirement of a doctoral program so the data analysis portion of the report was scrutinized and validated by the graduate supervisor and committee.

As a qualitative researcher conducting interviews I was mostly interested in how meanings were produced within the particular social, cultural and relational contexts. I recognized the interview itself as an interactive meaning which was important when interpreting the qualitative data as it required a significant amount of reflection on the entire research context. I remained reflexive by making the research process itself the focus of inquiry by identifying pre-conceptions and acknowledging the situational dynamics in which I and the participants were jointly involved in with knowledge production. Throughout each interview I was aware of the emerging themes and understood that not all findings would come to the surface during the last stage of research; there was a deepening of insight throughout the entire research process.

The Role and Background of the Researcher

I am a female commissioned officer in the Minnesota Army National Guard and have served for nine years in the military. I have been afforded the opportunity to fill a key leadership position as a commander and intend to make the military a career. I have been the commander of my unit for 23 months and will soon transition out of command. It is my goal to attain the difficult positions and rank required for those positions

regardless of the gender disparities and difficulties I may encounter trying to rise to the top. As I reflected on potential topics for my research, I was drawn to the topic of leader and leadership development because it directly impacts me and I think I have the opportunity to contribute to the field of leadership while also providing results of the study to interested individuals in the field.

I am aware of my own biases and/or preconceived notions about the development of leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. I am well-informed about both sides of the issue, having read about the subject area and having been in the position to receive guidance, mentorship and development activities for my own personal growth. I believe my own experiences enriches the context of this study. During the interviews I often found myself silently agreeing with a participant based on one or two of their experiences. I believe the easiest way to explain leadership is through examples experienced by others.

Chapter 4: Results

This study presents the lived experiences and perceptions of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Phenomenology provides an opportunity for individuals to share their life experiences in order to illuminate the previously misunderstood, discounted or unknown phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Many of the experiences expressed by the participants are provided to help the reader understand each individual research participant and their background as an Army officer. The female officers interviewed have remarkable lived experiences that express the power they have to create meaningful change in their positions within the organization.

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the interviews. A total of nine in-depth interviews were conducted to gain a comprehensive view of female leader development in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Refer to Appendix A for a list of the questions asked during the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour with one interview exceeding two hours. The participants were free to speak as long as they wanted and were not restricted to a specific timeframe. The major findings will be discussed in this chapter and analyzed in chapter 5. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

This study included nine women leaders from the Minnesota Army National Guard. The years of service in the military across all nine participants totaled 167 years. The names of the participants have been changed to protect the identity of the individual. Assembling individual structural descriptions required the researcher's use of her own experience, intuition, imagination, and understanding to account for the feelings and

beliefs associated with the female officers. Moustakas (1994) posited that core themes emerge from the “composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole” (p. 121). The overarching responses from the interviews revealed that the participants joined the military to serve their country, gain skills, learn discipline, to determine what to do next in life, and to gain access to military benefits (primarily education benefits). Their experiences while serving revealed rich and deep meaning in their military service that connected with experiential learning.

Megan

Megan is a married 32 year old captain with nine years of military service in the Minnesota Army National Guard. She has deployed once to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and is currently assigned as a company commander. Her father was drafted and served in Vietnam. Megan has a baccalaureate degree and received her commission through her college’s Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) program. When Megan was asked about why she joined the military she alluded to the fact that it was a combination of multiple things:

“I was struggling in my personal life and I kind of lost a sense of direction. I wanted to continue to go to school but couldn’t afford it anymore. And I’d gotten myself into a lot of trouble on the civilian side...Because I kind of hit rock bottom so that’s what really pushed me over the edge. When I was homeless living in my car and said ‘okay I think I need to do something here.’ And then my car got repossessed so I’m like okay now I really need to go.” (captain)

Bethany

A 36 year old married captain with 11 years of military service in the Minnesota Army National Guard, Bethany is currently assigned as a company commander. She has never been mobilized in support of a contingent operation and is the only participant that has never deployed overseas. She possesses both a baccalaureate and a master's degree. Bethany received her commission through the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. Both of Bethany's parents served one term in the Minnesota Army National Guard and her grandfather was drafted during World War II. Part of her reason for enlisting is because her family and friends served and she wanted to provide a good life for her son. When Bethany was asked why she wanted to become an officer, she knew she had more to offer the organization and wanted to make a difference:

“There were folks in my unit who didn't have the same level of experience. I felt like I had more to offer my unit as a leader than I did as a junior enlisted soldier. Even though I knew I had a lot to learn about the military, I felt like in that career field I had more to offer. I was the kind of person and still am that's always looking for a challenge. I had heard about OCS [officer candidate school] and I thought ‘wow, this would be a way for me to you know advance my military education; to increase my leadership role and responsibility in my organization’...I didn't fully grasp when I first started on this path what it was going to be, I really didn't, but it felt right. I felt like it suited me and it's turned out to be...absolutely the right decision.” (captain)

Kayla

Kayla is the youngest officer to be interviewed. She is a married 30 year old captain and is currently assigned as a company commander. Kayla has deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). She has 12 years of military service with the Minnesota Army National Guard. Kayla's father was a careerist in the military and both of her grandfathers served and were both drafted. She has a baccalaureate degree and earned her commission through her college's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. Prior to pursuing her commission, Kayla was enlisted and reached the rank of sergeant before commission into the officer corps. She decided to transition to the officer side because she wanted more opportunity:

“I wanted to see if I could compete in that realm. As an NCO, I knew what to expect with my future and what potential I would have. I knew what my future path would sort of look like as far as what challenges I would have. But I didn't really know the challenges on the commissioned side and I was curious to see what that was. And I have always strived to be a top caliber person...I wanted to be part of that community where I felt like there is always a challenge. You are exposed to the more philosophical side of the organization. You're a manager and a leader and you have opportunities where you can affect the organization more on a bigger scale.” (captain)

Brittney

Brittney is a married 44 year old major with 21 years of service in the military. She served nearly seven years in the Army Reserves as an enlisted soldier and has been in the remaining period of her service in the Minnesota Army National Guard. She has deployed twice to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). During her second deployment, she was assigned as a company commander. Brittney has a baccalaureate degree and received her commission through the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. She decided she wanted to become a commissioned officer because she watched a lieutenant fail at leading her unit and she knew she could do it better. Her father was a careerist in the Minnesota Army National Guard and she contributes part of her reason for enlisting to him and his service.

Laura

A 37 year old single major, Laura has served in the Minnesota Army National Guard for 16 years. She has mobilized to Germany and Kuwait in support of Operation New Dawn and Operation Enduring Freedom. Laura was prior enlisted before earning her commission through the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program. She was assigned as a company commander early in her career. Both of Laura's grandfathers were drafted and served in the military. She had never thought about military service as part of her life until a friend convinced her to join.

Amy

At the age of 50, Amy is the oldest of all the participants who were interviewed. She is a married lieutenant colonel with 27 years of military service in the Minnesota

Army National Guard. Her father was a careerist serving in the United States Air Force. Amy has a baccalaureate and master's degree and earned her commission through her school's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. She has held rear detachment and company command positions. Amy grew up as a military child but never thought about military service until she was preparing for college. She knew college was expensive and saw the military as a means to pay for her school. She mobilized once to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

Jessica

Jessica is a 40 year old single female who has 23 years of military service spanning across the Minnesota Army National Guard, Army Reserve and Active Duty Army. She is a single lieutenant colonel with both a baccalaureate and master's degree. She was prior enlisted and earned her commission through her school's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. Jessica was assigned as a company commander on her first deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Five years after that deployment, she was mobilized for a second time to Iraq in support of the same operation. Jessica's father was a careerist in the Minnesota Army National Guard and she indicated that her decision to serve was intuitive having had grown up around military service. She knew the military would provide her with the academic and professional career she was seeking. During Jessica's interview she described her experience during one of her military trainings in which she was one of only a few females:

“...You know when you're an albino squirrel. This is Minnesota, there are millions of squirrels, you know when you are the albino squirrel in the group.

People cannot help but stare, they cannot help but point, they cannot help but isolate that unusual squirrel out of the heard of millions. It's much more about human nature than anything else even when it's not pernicious in the least.”

(lieutenant colonel)

Jamie

Jamie is a 44 year old married colonel with 26 years of service in the Minnesota and North Dakota National Guard. She has held positions as both a company and battalion commander. She earned her commission through the Officer Candidate School (OCS) and has a baccalaureate degree. She has mobilized twice; once to Kosovo in support of Operation Joint Guardian and once to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). A common thread through many of the participants, Jamie decided to enlist so she could receive education benefits to pay for her school. She is unique compared to the other officers as she did not have any family who served in the military.

Aerial

Aerial is a 42 year old married colonel with 24 years of military service in the Missouri, California and Minnesota Army National Guard. Her father was a careerist in the military and she knew the aspect of service from him. She enlisted because she needed a skill set and wanted to give back to her community. Aerial has been a company commander and currently serves as a brigade commander. She has mobilized to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Aerial earned her commission through the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program and has a baccalaureate, masters and first professional degree.

After interviewing these female officers and analyzing the data, three major themes emerged that expand and enrich the understanding of the lived experience of women leaders in a military setting. Within the three major themes there were several sub-themes identified within each main theme. The three major themes: (1) personal and professional relationships, (2) leadership strategies, and (3) operational experience and assignments. The following paragraphs will describe each theme in greater detail and support for these themes will be provided using the leaders' own descriptions.

Theme 1: Personal and Professional Relationships

The participants often described their relationships, both personal and professional, in regard to their development as a leader. The specific sub-themes of relationships included the following: (1) development of values instilled in formative years, (2) establishing personal relationships, and (3) observing interactions and human behavior. The following excerpts from the interview transcripts demonstrate how these sub-themes of relationships impacted the women's individual leader development. Many of the women provided intensive examples of the first sub-theme. Relationships with parents, mentors, peers, etc., and the opportunities to observe other leaders were noted to be key in their development. Of the nine participants, seven of them had a father who served in the military and made mention of the impact he had on their desire to serve.

Jessica grew up on a farm and described the impact of her childhood in learning work ethic and discipline at a very early age:

“I accumulated this work ethic and it was a non-gendered work ethic. As in, you live on a farm, you must do chores. This is how we are able to do subsistence for

our family. And I grew up with that mindset, I never grew up with the mindset that you are this person, you are this gender, here's the box you exist in...The biggest impact was this sense of discipline and work ethic and nothing comes for free, and that success is a struggle, and you're on your own but we need to get by so you much contribute.” (lieutenant colonel)

Bethany described the close relationship she had with her mother and how being an only child impacted her upbringing:

“My mom was really my primary role model throughout my life. I am a lot like my mother and so I have a lot of personality traits that are similar to hers. She was my biggest influence growing up. My mother instilled in me this work ethic and this commonsense. She drove me to be practical...It is a very honorable profession to be in the military and it is also very practical. You know, it provides for my family, it provides for me. My mother is a very thrifty person and so she sees the military and my job as an investment in my life and in my kid's future. So those kinds of traits definitely helped to influence me toward this career path.” (captain)

Megan contributes many of her qualities and traits from her father and uses them to guide her in her own leadership style:

“They [her parents] definitely instilled a lot of my core beliefs and who I am; especially my father...His commitment and strength has molded me in a lot of different ways...He always says ‘if you're a good person and you work hard, good things will happen. Don't expect anything for free and you always need to work

for what you get. And to always treat other people well.’ That’s really what has shaped a lot of who I am and how I respond to people. And the way I tend to try to lead other people.” (captain)

Kayla described her standards of living growing up in a household with a father who was a careerist in the military:

“My upbringing was very by the rules, by the books and it’s scheduled, and it’s very organized, and I think that impacted the way that I am. They always had a lot of structure so I think I learned that from them; thriving in structure and thriving in organization.” (captain)

Aerial labeled her parents as uneducated but very hard workers:

“My home was dysfunctional. My father was a Vietnam veteran and two time Purple Heart recipient with three tours to Vietnam. So I know firsthand what alcoholics and PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] looks like. My mother stayed in a pretty volatile relationship for a very long time. So I had that aspect of it, but at the same time, they are probably the hardest working people I know. And so that has sort of driven me not to follow their footsteps entirely...but to make my own way. I have always had that ‘fine tell me I can’t do something and I’ll prove you wrong’ sort of childish mentality at times I think.” (colonel)

Amy grew up as the child of an active duty military father and spent years in different parts of the world. She described her parent’s work ethic growing up and how that has followed her throughout her upbringing and in her career:

“My parents instilled in me the value of hard work but they also instilled in me, that you can do anything that you want to do...but in order to do it, you gotta work for it. So I always knew that growing up but I wasn’t afraid of it and expected it. So when people say ‘it’s so hard’, it was never anything I thought of. It was just, okay this is what you got to do, and you just did it. And that’s kind of the way I’ve always been.” (lieutenant colonel)

While the influence of parents was clearly an important contributor to the leaders’ development in their formative years, the second sub-theme of establishing personal relationships, were also stated as important to their development as a leader. Discussed in greater detail later in chapter four, being a company commander is a key position in the women’s leader development. As a company commander, Megan’s relationship with her first sergeant is critical to be successful at the company level:

“My first sergeant and I have a great working relationship. I mean, we communicate on a regular basis and he is just...he’s phenomenal. I’m learning a lot from him in terms of how he interacts with the soldiers. And just his experience in general. There are little things we’ve been able to work on together. You know and it’s amazing to think that somebody with that many years of experience still has things that they want to know and they want to learn and they want to improve on. And offering the same to me as well.” (captain)

Megan admitted that she was not prepped on the requirements of her command; however, she did seek out those people in which she admired for their leadership:

“I sought out other people that were either in command or had been in command. And people that I just considered to be good leaders to ask, what’s your advice? What do you think I should do right? How should I prep for this? What do I need to know? Where did you struggle?” (captain)

Brittney believes one of the ways to develop relationships with your subordinates is letting them know that you’re not above them and you’re on the same team to accomplish a shared goal:

“I’m up front. I tell people you don’t work for me, you work with me. We’re a team...we will succeed as a team or we will fail as a team. If we do something bad, I will definitely take the hit. It’s a shared respect. I want them to want to work for me. I want them to know that they can trust me and come to me for anything. And as a team, we’ll get through anything that’s thrown at us.” (major)

Jessica’s idea of leading is much like Brittney’s in developing a command climate that favors the notion that the leader and subordinate work together and not for one another:

“I’ve always been one that was much more inclined for walking alongside people that I intended to lead. And leading by example than I ever was about following the prescribed methodology for leader development...I find that when I develop subordinates that I’m much more in tune to where they’re going in a career standpoint and how I can help them get there.” (lieutenant colonel)

Kayla often goes outside of her chain of command to receive feedback on her performance as a company commander and emphasizes the importance of receiving constructive criticism:

“I think sometimes it’s good to go outside your chain of command and organization to someone that you know and trust. And they know your skill set and what you’re supposed to be doing. Or they’ve been up that path but they’re not someone in your direct chain of command because I feel they would provide a better perspective.” (captain)

Aerial also thinks it is important for leaders to have people they can go to outside of their direct chain of command:

“They [her subordinates] need to have someone to talk to that’s not me. Because just like I would never tell my boss I’m struggling with x, y, z, he’s my rater and I’m not going to tell him that. At the same time there are peers that I can go to and say ‘hey, I got this case that I’m dealing with, I got this soldier who did this knuckle head thing or I got this lieutenant that I can’t seem to get through, what’s your take?’ So having the outside source to bounce things through, every officer needs that. Because then you don’t feel like an idiot in front of your peers that you’re competing against directly.” (colonel)

When talking about her platoon leaders, Bethany knows the benefits of building a relationship with her junior leaders by building a foundation of trust. She creates an environment where they are free to make their own decisions:

“I really try to mentor them [platoon leaders] whether they want it or not, whether they think they’re being mentored or not. And what I want to do is, I want them to not have to make some of the same mistakes that I made. I want them to know things that I wish I had known when I was a young lieutenant. And I want to share what I can bring to them...I want to give them some space to give the position their own, and I want to challenge them to. You know I want to give them challenging assignments but I want them also to seek out their own challenging assignments.” (captain)

Likewise, Kayla knows the importance of developing her subordinates and building and establishing a relationship built upon trust:

“Lead by example. Show them that you’re excited about drill, you’re excited about what’s going on. And that the standards you hold are not that hard to achieve. Hold them to a high standard but obviously something that you want to follow through with...So I think by showing them that, you know the exercising, practicing what you preach is big. Also giving them some down time and giving them some autonomy a little bit. Because it shows that you trust in their choices, and their ability to make good decisions. And I think that gets a lot of buy in which builds their confidence in you and their trust in you. So that whole trust in the relationship develops loyalty in the unit and they’re excited to be there and to train.” (captain)

Mentorship helps develop relationships between superiors and subordinates.

Many of the participants were able to recall a specific person as their mentor and provide

reasons as to why they were so remarkable. Kayla indicated that “it’s hard to pinpoint one person” when she reflects on the mentors who have helped her with her development.

She said:

“There’s been periods of time where I’ve been influenced by different people. I think [my current supervisor] is a good example of a good leader and is someone that I want to emulate just because of his approach and his... way that he gets people to want to do things without directing them.” (captain)

Bethany discussed a particular subordinate (platoon leader) that she had to provide mentorship to and that it’s not always an easy endeavor:

“It’s easy to come in and give mentorship and leadership to somebody who needs it and exceptionally hard to come in and give leadership and mentorship to someone who is really an exceptional officer. But the thing was, I had to identify, like okay he thinks he’s the shit and he is, but as his leader, I need to have something to offer him.” (captain)

As she reflects on the mentorship she provides all her platoon leaders, Bethany thinks you develop as a leader through experience and by having those people you can trust to go to and ask questions:

“It comes from experience of the people around you... Having people you can trust and go to with a stupid question. I have always told my junior leaders that you can come to me and ask the stupid questions. And I will not make you feel like a piece of shit for asking me the stupid question.” (captain)

Brittney recalled the experience she had with a mentor who was one grade above her in rank at the time:

“I would have to honestly say when I came back from my first deployment...I learned more from [my supervisor] about being a knowledgeable leader and how to be more big picture than single focus than I think I ever have. He’s one of the people who’s really influenced me...He helped me be a better leader.” (major)

Amy’s experience in building relationships occurs often with her female peers and being able to share her experiences with them:

“Being able to go to other females and share [experiences]. You know that you’re not going to be able to resolve what’s going on but knowing that there are other people that are having some issues or concerns or that have gone through some of the things that you’ve gone through. Or you think you’re going through right now and that there’s a light at the end of the tunnel so to speak.” (lieutenant colonel)

Establishing relationships is critical to the development of being a leader, the final sub-theme for relationships is the female leaders experience with observing interactions and human behavior. Many of the participants reported that they have learned a great deal from watching leaders who made poor choices and leadership decisions knowing that they did not want to emulate or copy their actions. While talking about Megan’s deployment overseas, she indicated:

“I also got the opportunity to see what not to do which was good. There was quite a few different glaring cases of you know...This is really not what you should be doing as a leader.” (captain)

Later in the interview with Megan, she restated the importance of watching other people:

“Watching what other people have done or do around me. And those that are in my direct chain of command. Kind of seeing what they put out and how they work to mentor me as well.” (captain)

Aerial thinks leaders develop by watching and having other leaders mentor and develop them:

“And when I say mentor and develop, it does not always have to be consciously. Some of the greatest lessons I learned is by watching people do things that I thought oh my god did you really just do that.” (colonel)

Aerial describes the mentor in which she learned a great deal from because she has had the opportunity to have him in her command throughout her developmental years as an officer:

“Because I look at my mentor and I grew up under him. There’s a lot of things he did that I didn’t like but there’s a lot of things he did that I admire. And you always learn, you try to take the good and change the bad.” (colonel)

When Kayla took command no one sat her down and described the duties and responsibilities that were expected of her, she learned these through watching previous commanders:

“You generally know what to expect because you watch the commanders that you had and you try to look at their example and be like is this what it’s supposed to be like, what I’m supposed to do. But no one sits you down before you take

command and says when you're a commander someday make sure you do this."

(captain)

Bethany has had similar experiences when it comes to learning by watching others and shared her experience of trying to comprehend the decisions made by the senior leadership in her chain of command:

"I've learned from leaders that you know I couldn't understand why they made the decisions that they made and I learned from them just as much, if not more than I learned from the great examples." (captain)

Amy tends to lean towards the notion that leaders are born and not made. She expressed her thoughts about watching other people in regard to how she thought leaders develop:

"I think some people have a natural tendency for being a leader and then there are others I think are good leaders and those that aren't as very well developed as others. But through learning I don't think you're ever, you ever stop learning on how to be a leader. I think mine came from watching other people, how I wanted to emulate somebody, their characteristics that I like in them, and what I wanted to instill in myself to be able to have someone else want to emulate me."

(lieutenant colonel)

Amy further elaborated on her own developed in regard to watching others as she recounted her experience in hearing a female four star general speak:

"To hear the four star general speak on some of the things that have, where she has gone, today from where came from. Just hearing other people's experiences

and then knowing that you're not alone in that, I think has been something that has helped me. Being able to draw from that experience and how not their experience but how it affected them and how they were able to overcome it. What I'm going through or what I think I'm going through at the time. The situation that's going on around me... Saying okay, what is the negative of that? What are the positives of that? Where am I right now? And then being able to make the choice on I'm going to react to it." (lieutenant colonel)

Jessica served on active duty and held positions in some of the most prestigious and well sought out units. She was describing her aspirations in wanting to become a commissioned officer and connected her experience with observation of a battalion executive officer in which she worked for:

"...he was so pernicious, he was so uneven, so belligerent with his staff. He showed me exactly what not to do. And in those instances [observations of poor leadership] it cemented my resolve that someday I'm going to do that job. I'm going to hold that leadership position and I'm going to do it better. It absolutely steeled my resolve, sadly it had to be from experiencing and watching others fail, just completely and utterly fail in the positions they were given. Convinced me that I had just enough to not only get there but to do it better." (lieutenant colonel)

Theme 2: Leadership Strategies

Another important theme for the participants was leadership strategies.

Leadership strategies include the effort, commitment and dedication these women exerted over time combined with their life experiences to become leaders and to refine their

leadership roles. In this study, leadership strategies refer to the techniques that the participants reported engaging in as part of their leadership development. The sub-themes of leadership strategies: (1) carrying your own weight while competing in a male dominated organization, (2) experience with formal leadership development programs, (3) getting the best out of situations and opportunities, and (4) perceived skills and qualities most important to leader development.

The first sub-theme of leadership strategies is carrying your own weight while competing in a male dominated organization. All of the participants were aware of the disproportion in gender amongst them in the Minnesota Army National Guard and military as a whole but appeared to be unbothered by the differences. Even though they were aware, they did not discredit the differences and shared their experiences and how they have overcome some of the challenges. Several of the participants either directly indicated there was difficulty at times working in a male dominated organization or their answers led the researcher to believe they had encountered some difficulty through their career(s).

Aerial shared with me her thoughts about being a female leader and the attention that is often associated with being a female leader:

“What’s kind of interesting is the rude awakening of women’s equality. And lean in, lean out, whether you’re doing it yourself. What you’re supposed to do as a female leader. What you’re not supposed to do. I think that the truth is that you got to figure out what works for you.” (colonel)

Megan's response to working in a male dominated environment was "I have probably tried to overcompensate in terms of constantly trying to prove that I'm better than everybody else or feeling like I have to." She went on to describe her own personal desire for success and gives some credit to the fact that she wants to compete in the arena with her male counterpart:

"To pressure myself to be the best at everything that I do. And to probably be a little bit overly critical on myself for a lot of that stuff. But again, I feel like it's just the ratio of males to females and if you really want to set yourself apart. If you don't want to be just a bitch or a slut you have to be just as good, if not better. And nine times out of ten it's going to be you who has to be better than to be seen as equal." (captain)

While deployed, Megan served on a team of all men and found herself constantly trying to prove herself because you "gotta be one of the boys to fit in." She knew she had to gain the trust of her subordinates and acknowledged one of the ways in gaining this trust was by doing what they were doing, but better:

"I mean, I was an alien. It's hard enough just being an officer because you're already kind of secluded...I was alone, alone, alone. And it was a struggle and then once they finally saw me going out on these patrols and I led every patrol. And they saw that I was going out on more missions than they were. First they got mad, then they got jealous, and then we all started working together." (captain)

Kayla knew that as a truck commander on her deployment she would encounter some difficulty with her team of all males. She relied on her mentor to help refine her

confidence and help her feel that she could measure up to all of her peers (which were men). She said “if I can go fight on a gun truck with them, side-by-side there’s nothing else I can’t do with them that I wouldn’t measure up to.” Kayla was very aware of her place on the team and has always made it a point to excel in her positions based on the male standards. She believes “if you can show that you’re carrying more, the same weight as they can” they may respect you more. Kayla further said:

“I become blind to some of it after a while. You very much make excuses for it, too. For just the incremental differences you know. I don’t feel like I’ve been evaluated any differently from my leaders, I think that’s been very fair. But I think just the day-to-day interactions; it’s a culture change that hasn’t taken effect yet. Like we want to be there but just people don’t know how to do it.” (captain)

Bethany’s experience as a young female lieutenant who worked in an office with all male master sergeants was the first time she had realized she was a minority. She was asked if she felt like she acted differently and her response was:

“I don’t know that I did anything that I can point to. There was some uncomfortable times and you know this was when I was in an office with all master sergeants. And they were all male and they were all really hyper-aggressive you know senior NCOs and I’m a brand new lieutenant. And so I just really tried to hold my own in that environment. I really just tried to be the professional. And I just again, it was like just stay true to yourself and don’t try to be anything that you’re not...I don’t have to be more aggressive, I don’t have to try to prove myself.” (captain)

While talking to Brittney, she expressed a very different perspective on being in a male dominated organization and her experience is different from the other participants. Her background and upbringing as a tomboy has led her to feel more like “one of the guys” and fit in:

“You know, I don’t think it affects me like it affects some females. I’ve always been one of the guys...I’m not one of those who thinks women should be treated exactly the same as men. Because we’re different. Women are more emotional, men are not. Do I think there’s positions that would be better suited for females? Yes. Do I think there’s positions that would be suited for a male? Yes. And do I think they should be kept apart? Yeah, I kinda do.” (major)

Aerial indicated her leadership style changed from when she was a second lieutenant. She said as a lieutenant colonel she said she was a “bull in a china shop.” She went on to describe reasons for the way she perceived her personality to take hold due to the environment she was raised in as an officer:

“I am very direct. I have a lot of what they would say is male mannerisms. In how I interact that’s because all my career I’ve been only with male leaders...Everything I’ve seen has been groomed through the male perspective and it has what’s gotten me results. Now that I’m in a senior position that’s not always the same way. I have, I’ve had to learn how to tone some back, some of my mannerisms. Because it’s, I mean for a lack of better words, you’re always going to be a bitch.” (colonel)

I asked Aerial to elaborate on her experience in being viewed in this manner and to discuss the current platform of the environment with regard to supporting female leaders and she said:

“Simple as that, it doesn’t matter how brilliant you are or how right you are. It doesn’t matter, it’s just the perspective of how it gets delivered. But at the same time, I’ve had to be very cognizant of when receiving briefs from junior officers. How I interact with them so they get an opportunity to develop and grow and that they don’t tremble every time they have to brief.” (colonel)

She cautioned to me that you have to be aware of those who are willing to help and those who aren’t. When discussing the changing landscape of more female leaders filling roles and positions previously closed to me, Aerial said:

“I don’t think they’re ready, they’re trying, they’re some that are trying and there are some who say they are trying and they’re not. And that’s the hard part, the hard part is trying to figure out who is genuine and who is just going through the motions because we can no longer politically correctly say that out loud.”
(colonel)

Amy started her career in her Reserve Officers’ Training Corps as one of five females in a class of thirty and attributes her ability to be flexible to working in male dominated organization to her success:

“I’m a flexible person and adapt to the atmosphere. I’ve always been able to maintain who I am wherever I’m at...Just being able to stand up for yourself and not shy away from things that are going on around you. But then not forget who

you are. I was a female in an all-male organization...I did my mission first and then you know I didn't show my emotions and things like that in a war type setting...Show that you're human, you make mistakes but being able to overcome that. Those mistakes and then keep driving on and so previously that was a way you just kind pull up your big girl pants and yeah just keep dredging on through the muck. But not complaining. You do what you got to do and you know you can talk about it sucks but don't complain that you have to do it because everybody else is doing the same thing. And being able to carry your own weight, I think that's how I have been able to continue to move on [in a male dominated environment]." (lieutenant colonel)

Similar to the other participants, Jamie indicated that being authentic is a key piece of the puzzle when operating in the male-dominated environment and always remembering your core set of beliefs even if you are persuaded to change based on your peers:

"You have to go back to authentic, and you can contribute. You know what you're talking about, you're going to help alleviate the work load and you're going to help make the world a better place for everything because you're here. And so you can call it performing in the arena, you can call it being a part of the team, but you contribute and it is tangible..So if the team, the entity, the group or whatever you're dealing with is experience stress when you can come in and help alleviate the stress and help improve conditions. That's when you establish that your purpose and the importance of you being there. And that's when your team

recognizes if you're male or female, blue, yellow... You alleviate the stress that the team is feeling and accomplish something." (colonel)

Although Jessica did not allude to the fact that she was oftentimes faced with being the only female, she was aware of her surroundings and positions:

"Out of 27 troops and companies within the brigade that I was assigned, one I was the only female company commander going into country. Two, I was the only female flight line commander in the aviation brigade. And now we're leaving Fort Hood, Texas to go to war. I'd been in command for three months." (lieutenant colonel)

Later in the same interview with Jessica, she credits her father for his mentorship in teaching her early on some of the pitfalls of being a female leader:

"When I sit in a meeting my posture is a certain way, when I speak up it's a certain way, when I engage others in sometimes a little bit of friction in a discussion, it's a certain way. I don't fall into female traps and stereotypes because he [her father] helped me avoid those things... It's still in my head, those incredible insights he passed to me." (lieutenant colonel)

Finally, while Jessica was describing her experience of going to Air Assault school and having only been chosen as an alternate how the experience impacted her arriving back to her unit with her new wings placed on her uniform:

"I go back to my battalion, I've got brand new wings on my chest. And one of the assistant S3's let it off the leash that the battalion S3 had told him that they wouldn't waste a slot [chosen to attend air assault school because only so many

slots are authorized] on me. Kinda wish he would've never said it. Ignorance would have been bliss instead of knowing that I was no one because I didn't look the part... It's one of those moments where you knew you were being treated different. And it's the traditionalisms that go along with being in a triple dominated male profession. I wasn't so naïve to not know that there would be times along the way like that... The company command thing, that was tough, it was tough to know that I had male counterparts who were gunning for me to fail." (lieutenant colonel)

The second sub-theme comes from the participants experience with formal leadership development programs. In discussing leadership development programs, it was painfully obvious that there was not a standard formula for a formal leader development program within the participants units. Many of the participants discussed their experiences and how their development had been largely contributed to their individual experiences in key leadership roles and training they have conducted over the course of their military career. Their development is more concentrated on these experiences than formal leadership programs. Across all the participants, it was common that there was no formal leader development program within their organizations. Many of the participants discussed particular steps and initiatives they were taking to ensure the soldiers they lead were set-up for success. Oftentimes, the women leaders were creating development tools and engaging in developmental activities because they wish they would have had them as a junior officer. Although there are few formalized programs when it comes to leader development in the experience of the

participants, Kayla recognizes that she has to seize opportunities to develop her platoon leaders and make those opportunities available whenever possible:

“Giving people opportunities to fail or succeed and force them to lead. You know giving them ranges [weapon qualification ranges] to plan...stuff like that. It’s a little tough with the National Guard because you don’t get a lot of opportunities outside of annual training to challenge and observe your subordinates.” (captain)

She knows as the commander, it is her role to develop her platoon leaders and it can be difficult to assess their ability to lead if they are not given the right environment to showcase their talent. Kayla also seeks other ways of engaging her platoon leaders informally.

“My intent with my platoon leaders is just to take opportunities to talk about them when there’s something specific. But just even like on a theoretical basis, or philosophical, I guess about the army. When I come across good developmental leadership white papers on thoughts to kind of conjure or think about or good things to like chew on. So I sent that out to my platoon leaders and I give them a task to write a response and read through the responses and then I would respond with my input to give them sort of feedback and perspective for a couple reasons. To show them that I’m willing to what I’m asking them to do, and secondly, to develop some consistency and let them know my policy is...so its consistent throughout the company.” (captain)

Aerial has been in the service a long time to see the changes between leader development programs geared towards certain jobs or gender. She acknowledges that males and females are different leaders:

“I have a very love/hate relationship with that concept [of developing female leaders]. Part of me is, I don’t want to be difference. I don’t want your special attention... We are different but at the same time, I also know that the traditional mentorship models that have worked for the male senior leaders have not been open or available to the females and so how do we get parity without doing something different to develop them?” (colonel)

Aerial is only one of three female colonels in the Minnesota Army National Guard. She expressed her frustration in developing other females to take the help when she retires and the limited pool currently available across the force:

“But it doesn’t make a difference if there’s no one coming up behind me [in regard to her own achievements and success]. So when I sit at that table, who’s going to take over for me? And there aren’t and it’s very, it’s not only disconcerting but it’s very disheartening.” (colonel)

In regard to her development as an officer, Bethany indicated:

“Nothing has been like, nothing has matched, no training, no education that I’ve had in the field of leadership has, has come close to developing me in the same way that my leadership experiences have.” (captain)

Bethany went on to discuss the science behind motivating the troops she leads which is not part of a formal leader development program:

“You have to figure out what it is that motivates people. Because some people are motivated by rewards, some people are self-motivated, some people are motivated by being challenged, some people are motivated by money... There’s individual motivation and there’s group motivation and I think that’s how you build that group motivation is by building the cohesion of the team and that desire to succeed as a group.” (captain)

In her own battalion, Megan thinks they are just starting to implement a good leadership development program due to the recent change in her battalion commander and his emphasis and focus on leader development:

“They’re now starting to really hone in on this whole leadership development program and leadership development training... I know he’s [battalion commander] really going to hone in on that. Some leaders do it well. But I know that [division commander] is very adamant on certain things and has a lot of oversight on making sure you know that commander’s messages are getting all the way down [the military chain-of-command]... I think it’s all dependent on who’s up at the top [highest leadership]. (captain)

Kayla does not think that formal military training aligns with the skills you need to know to hold positions of increased responsibility:

“I think it focuses on doctrine and it focuses on some regulations that are important to know... But it doesn’t teach interpersonal skills, it doesn’t focus on how to talk to soldiers, it doesn’t focus on how you should develop a soldier. And

I think those personal, interpersonal people skills are far more important than knowing regulation.” (captain)

Jessica has been in the service over 20 years and has had the opportunity to experience the ebbs and flows of formal leadership development:

“I’ve found that leader development tends, at least in my experience across my career, it tends to be reserved for only the superstars. And the superstars look a certain way, they come from a certain background, they have the right name, and they went to the right school...I’ve seen this trend of leadership development is reserved for just a handful of superstars” (lieutenant colonel)

She experienced this firsthand when she was assigned as a company commander while deployed.

“The battalion S3 [operations officer] was an academy graduate who absolutely hated me. He despised me and he wanted me out of command. I didn’t fit his definition of what a leader looks like, sounds like is educated like. It didn’t fit in his contrived definition of who a leader was. And instead of mentoring me to be the best commander in his battalion, in our brigade during our time in country during way, he was more worried about trying to get me moved on so that he could replace me with a leader that fit in his box.” (lieutenant colonel)

Most of the participants did not have someone discuss the duties and responsibilities of a command position but they felt the pre-command course was helpful. The pre-command course is a week long course that focuses on all the technical aspects of command. Kayla said “it’s pretty good and I think there’s a lot of resources. It doesn’t

really tell you how to be a commander but it does give you the resources and access that you need to do your job.” (captain)

The third sub-theme of leadership strategies is officers getting the best out of situations, experience and opportunities. For many of the participants, this included seizing opportunities when they are made available to them and taking advantage of training or assignments when they are presented. Even in the absence of formal leader development programs, the participants recognized the importance of asking for opportunities to attend courses or engaging their subordinates in training events because they understand the benefit of helping them develop. One of the key things Megan learned on her deployment was “knowing when to ask for help and how to ask for help.” Aerial recognizes that a lot of her opportunities came to light because she kept “showing up”:

“I honestly think that a lot of what happens in life is because you don’t give up. In regards to how scared you are, you show up. It’s amazing how many people don’t even show up to the party. And just by showing up and repeatedly showing up its amazing the doors that open. Even if you fall and fail, you keep showing up. And either they think you’re brilliant or you’re just too stupid to realize that you’re failing but you keep just showing up and it works.” (colonel)

Bethany understands that every leader encounters challenges but she doesn’t use her own shortcomings as an excuse to be less of a leader:

“I mean, I’ve overcome a lot of challenges but I don’t feel like any of them were not self-imposed. Or you know having children at a young age and going through

a lot of family stuff that I have is certainly challenging. And having to be away from them and like juggle single-parenthood in the military. But that's something that all, anybody in any job would have that kind of challenge. But I don't see it as a barrier." (captain)

Bethany went on to describe how she personally struggles with criticism and how being aware of your faults helps aide you in dealing with the emotions that can surface when faced with a challenge:

"I tend to beat myself up, yes I do. I tend to be, I am very sensitive to what others think of me that is just who I am as a person. I am very sensitive to that. But you have to have, I mean, you can't let it affect you. That is what I found that it's okay to be very sensitive as long as you can role past it. Because I can't fix it, I cannot make myself not feel upset when somebody criticizes me." (captain)

While on deployment, Kayla was put into positions that would develop her. She may not have realized it at the time, but her leadership often put her into uncomfortable positions to help grow and develop her:

"[My supervisor] would always like to do rehearsals and I would always try to get out of it. I didn't want to do rehearsals. I was like 'I got this' and it was more embarrassing for me to go through the rehearsals but it was really obviously helpful to building my briefing skills and communication skills. And he was like, nope, we have to do it." (captain)

The fourth sub-theme of leadership strategies is the perceived skills and qualities most important to leader development. There were many of the same skills and qualities

that were deemed important to leader development by the participants based on their own experiences or through leader development activities that occurred. The most common perceived skills and qualities were authenticity, character and integrity, communication skills, command presence, intelligence, mental agility and leaders who develop subordinates. Megan understands that nothing is a given and “you have to work hard for them and put in extra time and effort to get where you’re at, nothing is free.”

When talking with Bethany about the skills she thought were most important to her leader development she identified that staying true to yourself was most crucial. The notion of authenticity was brought to the surface with many of the participants. Bethany described her own experience as:

“I found for me, I have found that when I have tried to be someone else as a leader that I thought that someone was expecting of me, I was not successful. And that anytime I tried to make a decision based on what someone else might think was right, it was...I couldn’t own it the way that I did when I was just really true to myself. And I think that, that’s a...it’s an integrity thing, not an honesty thing, but an integrity thing.” (captain)

She went on to describe two more traits she thought were important. These traits came to light most when she was in command and having to deal with her soldiers:

“Being compassionate and respectful. That was something I learned through experience.

When I initially came to command there was a...I felt like I needed to go one direction with it but my gut was telling me to go a more compassionate direction.

And I feel like when I try to act in a way that wasn't true to who I was that it backfired, it failed and I had, within my first couple months of command, I had a conflict with a soldier that didn't need to occur if I had just gone with my gut. So yeah compassion and respect is huge." (captain)

Finally, Bethany identified ambition as a personal competency that significantly contributed most to her development:

"I think that certainly ambition is a big part of it. I think that ambition alone gets a lot of people a long way because it's not just about having the skill, it's not just about being proficient in your job, it's about having the ambition and motivation to continue to advance and challenge yourself." (captain)

Jamie thinks leaders need to be good problem solvers:

"Problem solving. Problem solving I think is one of the most important aspects of a leader. Really accurate, really precise, not analysis, paralysis by analysis, but really, really good problem solving." (colonel)

She continued to describe mentorship as a key component for leader development:

"Mentorship is absolutely essential for development of young officers or developing leadership in our potential young, younger ranks. And it's interesting...the interesting thing about mentorship, and leadership and development is that it happens at the worst possible time. At the worst possible times when things we do and times we don't even recognize it." (colonel)

Jamie continued her thoughts:

“I think it’s about giving them [subordinates] something challenging and ensuring that the conditions are not too stressful. It’s challenging but it’s not abuse. I think you have to balance that so opportunities, opportunities to develop, and opportunities to talk right? Because everybody just wants an opportunity to talk, to tell their story or brief on something you know...It’s really about knowing their [subordinates] strength and weaknesses. You play on their strengths and you can either counsel or mitigate their weaknesses.” (colonel)

Kayla thinks communication is huge and is the number one skill because you need to be “able to talk to people, to understand them and approach them in the right way.” “Someone that can communicate what they want, what they need...Understanding how much that impacts the relationships of people and knowing how to deal with it correctly.” (captain)

Aerial is a very direct leader and recognizes this quality in herself but knows that her subordinates appreciate the directness:

“Be very clear how people are doing and be direct. I don’t like games it cause stress to no end...When as much as people don’t like the fact that I’m direct at times, at the same I’ve had a rash of people say they appreciate it. I know where I stand. I know exactly what it is that you’re thinking and what you want. I think those are the two things that help people succeed. When you’re trying to develop them and when you’re trying to basically just let them know they’re doing a good job.” (colonel)

Jessica was quick to answer when question about what she perceived to be most important to leader development:

“I find flexibility to be huge. If you don’t have an agile mind, if you don’t have the ability to stretch yourself and flex from some of your strengths to other strengths where you move through your military career, where you need to be a generalist, people who aren’t flexible aren’t intellectually agile, and they can’t make that leap.” (lieutenant colonel)

She continued her thoughts on leader development and provided a perspective unlike the other participants when asked the same question:

“As military officers we get asked to do the intangible things like to influence and sway the social side of the force. To sway peoples thinking to influence their behavior in uniform. The more senior I get the more and more focused I am on the tangible side, tacit experiential sort of learning and conveying that version of knowledge...The hard part is using that flexible intellectual skill set to influence and sway behaviors.” (lieutenant colonel)

Amy thinks you need to have care and compassion as a leader:

“People have to know that you care about them in order for them to follow you. I mean they’re going to do it because they’re going to do it but when they want to do it [follow a leader], because they don’t want to let you down that’s when you know that they know that you care and because you care they’re going to do it. Because of that reason, caring and compassion, and I think being genuine.” (lieutenant colonel)

Theme 3: Operational Experience and Assignments

The final theme developed from the nine participants was the impact that their operational experience and assignments had on their development. The women leaders were actively engaged in challenging educational experiences and work assignments both in and out of the military. The three sub-themes of operational experience and assignments: (1) value of a deployment, (2) challenging experiences and positions, (3) key leadership roles: platoon leader and company commander. Of the nine participants who were interviewed, eight out of the nine had deployed at least once, with seven of them having deployed more than once. Many of the participants identified that their mobilization time was more valuable than the activities that generally fall within the parameters of a formal leader development program. Many of them discussed their experiences while being deployed and the impact the period had on them as a leader.

Kayla reflected on her experiences over her two deployments and noted that those positions and experiences contributed most to her ability to hold positions of increased responsibility because the deployment taught her important skills that would follow her throughout the different ranks:

“My first deployment...I was a very young sergeant. And there was this new, you know when you're first an NCO it's like oh my god, I have all this responsibility. I was a truck commander and [my supervisor] shaped me and helped me to develop more courage and confidence in my abilities.” (captain)

Megan's experience while deployed to Afghanistan contributed most to her development as a leader:

“I was a detachment OIC [officer in charge] and it really forced me to work a broad spectrum of things that I was just not familiar with whatsoever. Tactically and technically and everything down to the soldier level. Because it was such a tiny outpost and there was so few people that you had to be proficient in everything.” (captain)

Jamie shared her experience about being put into a position in an all-male unit prior to being mobilized to Kosovo. She was put into a position that was typically reserved for a male counterpart. At first, it was awkward for her because she was out of her comfort zone but later would find it was one of the best experiences for her development:

“I lived with the infantry for a year. And when we were over in Kosovo they put me as a battle captain and so at first I didn't, like I don't know if I wanted to do this. Sitting in the tactical operations center all day..But that really is, what was the best operational experience to understand how a tactical operations center was run. And to learn that war craft and then I could speak the speak and I knew what was important, I knew how they operated, I knew how they worked together, I knew what common operational picture was...In order to be a leader you have to prove that you can continue..So that was a great developmental experience as a captain.” (colonel)

Shortly after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, Jessica was notified that her unit would need to start preparing themselves for a deployment to Iraq:

“In November 2002, one month prior, I got a very ‘hey you’ short notice, you’re going into company command... I had less than a month notice and it was because there was war on the horizon.”

The second sub-theme of operational experience and assignments is challenging experiences and positions. The female participants often held positions of increased scope and responsibility which progressively built upon their experience. These positions were both at the junior and senior officer ranks. There was an underlying theme that the officer’s years of experience contributed most to their leader development and it became more apparent within the senior officer ranks.

While discussing Bethany’s experience with particular situations that have influenced her leadership development, she identified that challenging positions as a key supporter:

“It’s just been being in leadership roles, and being in challenging roles. Every time I’ve encountered a challenge as a leader, I have grown as a leader. It’s having to have those difficult conversations that is where the maximum growth I’ve experience as a leader... If it’s challenging you, it’s developing you. And it’s being terrified, it is overcoming terror. It’s finding yourself in those situations that you don’t want to be in or that you didn’t expect to be in and then getting through those successfully.” (captain)

Brittney does not think formal military training aligns with the skills and abilities that are most often associated with formal leadership roles:

“I think it’s more personal experience and like I said before talking to my peers and my subordinates and learning. I mean I guess those, the formalized training, it gives you a baseline but it gives everybody the same baseline but not everybody learns from that.” (major)

The final sub-theme of operational experience and assignments are the key leadership roles for leader development which were identified as platoon leader and company commander roles. Three of the participants are currently assigned in company commander roles and stated that the position has been the most impactful on their development as an officer. Many of the same officers and officers’ senior in rank identified that being a platoon leader helped groom them for their company command. All nine female officers had a company commander over the course of their career while one held a battalion command (next level) and one held brigade command (two levels up). Company command is a premier stepping stone for officers to own and develop their leadership skills. Command positions are crucial for development because commanders are responsible for not only ensuring their soldiers are tactically and technically competent but also for nurturing the leader attributes and competencies of their soldiers.

While discussing assignments with each participant and what they felt contributed most to their development as a leader, without hesitation Brittney indicated her command time. The unique nature of her assignment into the position created for a challenging transition but the experience overall developed her:

“But thrown into a command position that was really new...I mean, I had been a commander in title once before but I wasn’t able to do my job because the

battalion commander at the time we were deployed wouldn't let me make any decisions. So that was not really a great experience but this last time as the commander was. I had to do it all and I think in that position, it was [referencing a colleague] that helped me the most. I've never had a leadership philosophy...he helped me develop mine. There was somebody else that was supposed to take the unit overseas and about six months before we went out to the door, I was told I would be the commander. I didn't know my people and they didn't know me."

(major)

Bethany identified that her company command has been the most developmental assignment she has held in the military. When she took command she received very little guidance going into the position but understood that she had what she needed once she got there and was immersed in the position:

"I've always had leaders who were available to mentor but nobody is going to go out of their way to set you up for success. You know we work in a very ambiguous environment so I don't think that there's ever, I have never felt fully prepared for the next move. But I feel like once I got there I had everything that I needed, I had people who were willing to support me." (captain)

Kayla deployed as a platoon leader and views that experience as a crucial development assignment prior to her taking command:

"Being a platoon leader and having that responsibility overseas is enlightening and there's a lot that you know going into it... There was some things that we did that was like oh I probably could have done that better. You know even just

individual counseling of soldiers and some of its interpersonal. You can't get around that people have personalities, they just don't mesh well. It was a good developmental opportunity because you're given so much responsibility."

(captain)

A couple years after returning home, Kayla was excited when she was offered company command because she knows it is a highly sought after position. She said "I was very flattered that it was offered." She has used her experience as a platoon leader to help guide her in her role as a commander.

As a commissioned officer, you are often moved from position to position during a two to three year rotation. When you get comfortable and start learning your position, you find yourself taking on a new role and a new set of responsibilities. Brittney reflected on her experience of being moved around:

"I think with officers you're just kind of moved and you're expected to just pick it up as you go. I've told a lot of people that as an officer you're put into a position and just when you're really learning the position you're moved to a new position." (major)

Jessica said that during her formative years as a platoon leader was the most developmental for future assignments:

"To be 23-24 years old to sign for over 20 million dollars' worth of equipment. And to go on missions, and ranges, and training exercises... Was a fast maturation process, you got smart, you got wise, you got experience you sometimes got

consequences to decisions, you had to exert a lot of judgment really fast.”

(lieutenant colonel)

She continued on with the reason why being a lieutenant as a platoon leader was so crucial to development:

“There were catastrophic accidents while I was a lieutenant in the flight line and some of my peers were killed. So we were in a high stress rather dangerous, even in training setting, and this sheer burden of the much responsibility made you wise and cautious fast. But without that exposure as a lieutenant, as a 23-24 year old when you encounter it again in you late 20’S, when you encounter it again in your mid 30’s, when you encounter it again in your 40’s. If you don’t have that in the early part of your career the first time that you’re faced with that level of responsibility and burden some people crumble.” (lieutenant colonel)

Summary

When interviewing one of the participants, she discussed leader development which included all the themes that have been discussed. Jamie said:

“I think it’s a combination of three things: (1) a person’s internal drive that leads to their experiences so you have to have this experience that helps kind of mold and shape you; (2) you have to have that institutional development that gives you those terms of reference. Gives you the larger picture, the explanations, the explicit terms that you have to know. Kind of the war craft of the military; and (3) I think I would tie it into the positions that you’re put in, and of course, it’s kind

of going to feed into the experiences that you face or that you're part of.”

(colonel)

Nine women leaders were interviewed about their personal experiences and how they perceived their professional development in a male dominated organization. The interview data were coded to determine themes. Three themes emerged, each with several sub-themes. The three main themes were: (1) personal and professional relationship, (2) leadership strategies, (3) operational experience and assignments. The themes are all interrelated and help shape my understanding of the lived experience of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Each theme will be analyzed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The intention was to better understand how the lived experiences of these female officers developed their leadership knowledge and skills so the field of leadership can establish a more complete picture of the development of leaders in a military context. The nine participants described their personal experiences and shared their perceptions of their own professional development in a male dominated organization.

The qualitative approach to this study presented rich descriptions of the female leaders with a combined total of nearly 12 hours of recorded experience from all nine of the in-depth interviews. Each female officer that was interviewed was either currently assigned as a company commander or had previously held a company level command and two had held a battalion and brigade level command. Data was collected through audio-recorded interviews of nine female officers who were currently serving in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The protocols utilized during the in-depth interviews with participants can be found in appendices A and C.

The data were coded, analyzed, reviewed, and organized using the phenomenological method comprised of three main core processes, according to Moustakas (1994). The three main processes: 1) the epoche, 2) transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and 3) imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). The first step, the epoche, involved writing down predispositions and prejudices in an attempt

to stay away from the familiarity of everyday happenings, events, and people, which allowed the researcher to see things for what they were. The second step, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, involves several stages. After the preconceived notions were set aside, the next step was to give equal value to each statement; all irrelevant statements were deleted and the statements were grouped into themes. Lastly, a textural description was developed by repeating a pattern of looking and describing what was transcribed from the interview. The final step, imaginative variation, sought the fundamental meaning of the phenomenon by constructing structural themes.

Moustakas' three main processes were used to answer the research question: How do female military officers describe their personal experiences and perceive their professional development in a male dominated organization? Analyzing the data from the interviews yielded three main themes which were presented in chapter 4. The interviews validated that women leaders within the Minnesota Army National Guard, like many other organizations, make experience the cornerstone of their leader development process. Many of their rich descriptions with leader development circled around their experiences.

The interviews started with each woman describing her reasons for enlisting into the United States military. The majority was primarily to serve their country, but also to gain skills, to learn discipline, to determine what they wanted to do next in life, and to gain access to military benefits. Although 8 of the 9 had fathers who served in the military, this was not their primary reason for joining. The women who had a father that

served recognized the presence of the military in their lives at an early age and do not discredit this early exposure as a factor that sparked their initial interest.

Interpreting the Themes

The result of the women's descriptions or narratives was the emergence of themes that improved understanding of the phenomena being explored. There are foundational theories that informed the analysis of the themes from the lived experiences of the women leaders and their development. The major insights from the participant's feedback in an array of factors included: experience, skills, qualities, and self-development. The leadership development process tends to start at a young age and is influenced in their formative years by parental modeling. The development and application of a variety of skills and competencies is shaped by factors such as personal and professional relationships, leadership strategies the participants engage in for their development as a leader and operational experience and assignments.

Leadership training and development programs for women at the early stages of their careers proved to be beneficial as the women advanced through the ranks. It would be beneficial for the military to improve leadership training and development programs for women at the early stages of their careers. Leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard should solicit feedback from women about how to address the challenges they face and work to implement their recommended solutions if they benefit the greater good. There is no greater evaluation of a program than from those who are experiencing it firsthand.

Theme 1: Personal and Professional Relationships

The sub-themes of personal and professional relationships included: (1) development of values instilled in formative years; (2) establishing personal relationships, and; (3) observing interactions and human behavior. These sub-themes demonstrated the dominant importance of relationships to female leader development. Relationships with others (i.e. mentors, subordinates, peers) outside of the participants' parents were equally as contributive to their development. The participants often referred to a particular mentor or person that helped them along the way and they credit these individuals for their development during vital periods of their career.

Development of Values Instilled in Formative Years

Several authors have speculated on the importance of the impact of parents on leader and leadership development, but little empirical research has been completed that is available for review. Of these authors, Avolio (1999) discussed how parents are an important influence as first-line leaders and that managers and teachers essentially fill in where the parents left off. Once they are ready to move into formative areas of their life the separation from parents becomes farther and farther. He used the example of the importance of a mother specifically for well-known leaders as Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela who were all primarily raised by their mothers (Avolio, 1999). These leaders have all been viewed as strong role models within our society and are often referred to for their transformative leadership.

All of the participants referred to their childhood and identified with specific things that triggered the outcome of their development. One or both of their parents were

often mentioned as role models in their lives. For many it was work ethic, sense of discipline, core beliefs, and the value of hard work. These attributes have followed the women through their careers and they find themselves often referencing their childhood subconsciously. When referring to her childhood one participant (lieutenant colonel) said “there was this huge amount of utilitarianism built into it [her childhood]. There was no ‘me’ in my childhood.” The notion that there is a greater good to be served and it is not just about you has served her well in her leadership roles because she understands the importance of putting her subordinates needs first before her own. It can be argued that this leadership trait comes natural to her because she was ingrained at an early age that this is a positive attribute of leadership.

Establishing Personal Relationships

Relationships not only with superiors and peers but also with subordinates proved to be key to the women’s leadership development. Day (2000) conducted a significant amount of research on the impact of mentoring and the correlation between leadership and career development. The military has a formal mentoring program that is designed for every leader to have a mentor to help guide them in their careers; however, many of the practices that occur in the military are informal. Informal mentoring was often mentioned in the interviews with the women and few had experience of formal mentoring by their senior leaders. Day (2000) recognized that many organizations rely on the informal process even though formal processes have been designed within the organization. Some of the formal programs may be in use, but they are not highly relied upon. In a qualitative study on protégés within Day’s (2000) work, Eby and McManus

(2002) found that networking opportunities outside the organization, challenging assignments leading to skill development, and personalized feedback and career strategy were positive mentoring experiences. Several of the participants discussed their strategy in reaching out to mentors and peers from outside of their chain of command. They identified the positives of having a circle of people that you can call to inquire about how they do something, to help solve a problem or to introduce a new perspective on the subject at hand.

McCauley and Douglas (1998) categorized developmental relationships based on the role that the key person played in the leader's development. Specifically to assessment, they posited that it is important for leaders to have a feedback provider, a sounding board, a point of comparison, and a feedback interpreter. They further discussed the roles of dialogue partner, assignment broker, accountant and role model as important (McCauley & Douglas, 1998). They also concluded a support function in leader development finding that leaders need a counselor, a cheerleader, a reinforcer, and a cohort. The participants identified that establishing key relationships with their peers, subordinates and superiors was key to success. Establishing a relationship built on trust is what guides subordinates to follow their leaders. Informal mentoring was at the forefront of many of the participant's development:

“I find that most of where I excel is in informal leadership and mentorship side.

We have a very trite definition of what we idolize as leadership in uniform. It's a very constrained definition of what a military or army specific leader is and what

that person does; it's trite. I'd even go so far as to call it antiquated. Overly traditionalistic and not in alignment with the times." (lieutenant colonel)

Observing Interactions and Human Behavior

The third sub-theme of relationships was observing others and human behavior. The observation of leadership means different things to different people. It is a confounding term because it can be fairly nebulous. Despite the ambiguity, most people know when it is in place or when it is desperately needed. The participants shared in their experience of observing leaders throughout their careers and the ones in which they gravitated towards because they exhibited traits of a 'good' leader.

Counseling, coaching and mentoring are the principal means by which commanders develop leaders (United States Department of the Army, 2012). All the participants stroked one of these three elements of leader development. As previously stated, mentoring occurs through a developmental relationship between a person of greater experience and with a person of lesser experience. Day (2000) indicated that an important aspect of mentoring involves the opportunity to observe and interact with important organizational constituents.

One senior leader observed that mentorship is different for women than it is for men and posits that the mentorship model is different. She is aware that there are not many women in the pipeline to take the helm and who are ready for senior leader position:

"We are different but at the same time, I also know that the traditional mentorship models that have worked for the male senior leaders have not been open or

available to the females and so how do we get parity without doing something different to help develop them? But it doesn't make a difference if there's no one coming up behind me. So when I sit at that table. Who's going to take over for me? . . . It's not only disconcerting but it's very disheartening." (colonel)

Theme 2: Leadership Strategies

Leadership strategies refer to the techniques the participants reported engaging in as part of their leadership development which included the following sub-themes: (1) carrying your own weight while competing in a male dominated organization; (2) experience with formal leadership development programs; (3) getting the best out of situations and opportunities; and (4) perceived skills and qualities most important to leader development. The military consciously works to develop its future leaders through training, experience and a formalized program of professional education. This process can take years and must be supplemented with informal leadership strategies. The participants recognized that there was no formal leadership development program within their units but could identify aspects of a leader development program.

Carrying Your Own Weight While Competing in a Male Dominated Organization

The first sub-theme of carrying your own weight while competing in a male dominated organization did not prove to be an issue for the participants that were interviewed. Over the past 40 years, women have made remarkable progress in the military by overcoming institutional barriers and expanding opportunities. The majority of the participants did not feel directly discriminated against because of their gender. It was difficult to get the participants to verbally admit they had encountered

discrimination; however, their narratives exposed occurrences of discrimination. Some did agree they had periods in their career that discrimination did occur but they did not feel it was streamlined throughout their entire career. The unwillingness of the participants to admit they were discriminated against may be that they feel as if it is a sign of weakness.

Advancing the cause of gender equality has been a struggle for women. Many of the women indicated that their role models were men but identified the need to push for equality. Male leaders must be genuine stakeholders in the process to advance women into senior roles within the organization. The disproportionate number of men in leadership positions can be an advantage as they are in positions to advocate and mentor women in the earlier stages of their careers. Several of the women felt as if the senior leaders in their organizations were doing a good job at developing the next leaders regardless of gender.

Role congruity theory supported some of the women's feedback on their experience in the military with male leaders. Several of the females thought they were successful because they did not exhibit the traditional characteristics of a female and felt they were more in line with masculine traits. Rey (2005) proposed that women who pursue the non-traditional role of a leader reject feminine roles and characteristics and have needs and styles similar to those of male leaders. (p. 5). One of the senior leaders who was interviewed acknowledged that her mannerisms as a female leader are in line with the traditional characteristics most often associated with the female gender. In an

attempt to blend more with her peers, she changed the way she conducted herself in civilian clothes:

“You don’t ever see me with a purse in uniform, I just don’t. because I don’t want anything that prevents me from keeping up with someone else because I’m slumping a purse around or trying to find my wallet... Which is funny because when I see other females and they’re carrying this big honking purse with all this crap in it, I’m like ‘what’s in there?’” (colonel)

Experience with Formal Leadership Development Programs

The second sub-theme that emerged was the experience the participants had with formal leadership development programs within their organization and over the course of their career. All the participants discussed leader development activities but the activities were not necessarily intended to develop the broader range of leadership skills. The activities varied greatly based on content, frequency and perceived quality. In short, there was no theme that could be characterized as a standard or typical leader development program within the Minnesota Army National Guard. The participants recognized portions of leader development programs but were unable to identify a particular program designed to set them up for success as they advance from level to level in different positions within the organization.

Given the array of distinctive situations surrounding different units in the Minnesota Army National Guard, it is not surprising to find a wide variance in content, frequency and perceived quality of leader development activities. Leader development is not an all or nothing program as confirmed by the responses from the participants. The

participants identified that leader development is a continuous process and not a single event or course. Although necessary, the participants generally did not think institutional training prepared them for leadership; however, they acknowledged collectively that the training is necessary to build a foundation on which a more complex operational experience can be understood. One participant summed it up well when referring to the formal military training required by rank:

“We’ve been growing leaders for decades this way. Their generations of officers who have come through these military schools and they have excelled. It’s an easy answer to give when you’re looking at it from that perspective. Would you ask me individually most of my skillsets are definitely more aligned with the informal side of leadership because I don’t see especially my leadings when it comes to the intellectual side? Of that being where the mettle of an officer is really shown. Mettle a word that we don’t use very much in the force anymore.”

(lieutenant colonel)

Getting the Best Out of Situations and Opportunities

The third sub-theme focused on getting the best out of situations and opportunities. The female leaders recognized when an opportunity was presented to them and acknowledged when they should take advantage of the situation and/or opportunity. The participants were not sitting idly waiting for opportunities to be presented to them. They sought out opportunities and challenging educational experiences both in and out of the military. Seeking opportunities contributed to their development. Many of the opportunities presented to the participants were narrowed and they recognized it was for

a reason. The women understood that opportunities sometimes come in the most inopportune times but knew they had to seize the thing put in front of them. A senior officer indicated she believed leader development is only reserved for a select few and certain opportunities are only made available for those in which they want to excel:

“Grooming and leadership development not so much at that level of the organization except for the select few. We’ve got a few people who maybe become fellows. We’ve got a few people who may be able to be a part of a special cohort or group. Usually external to the organization but internal but otherwise monitor from afar not a lot in the senior most ranks.” (lieutenant colonel)

Perceived Skills and Qualities Most Important to Leader Development

The final sub-theme was the perceived skills and qualities most important to leader development as indicated by each of the participants. According to the Army’s leadership requirements model there are many attributes and competencies besides domain knowledge, such as values, empathy, discipline, resilience, confidence, mental agility and interpersonal tact (United States Department of the Army, 2012).

Commanders and leaders play a crucial role in ensuring the leader attributes and competences are being nurtured in the soldiers. This is a critical role in leader development. The women identified with leadership qualities of character, integrity, communication skills, development of subordinates, empathy, humility, and those who are guided by a moral compass as important skills for leaders to possess and are directly connected to leader development.

The skills and qualities most often associated with leader development by the participants can be directly related to authentic leadership theory. Avolio et al. (2004) defined authentic leaders as “those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ value/moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character” (p. 4). The participants all recognized that authentic leaders are able to enhance the engagement, motivation and involvement required from followers. Day et al (2014) posited that authentic leaders are expected to consider multiple sides and multiple perspectives of an issue, and gather related information in a relatively balanced manner (p. 69). The participants demonstrated through their interviews that this was a part of who they are as a leader.

Theme 3: Operational Experience and Assignments

The participants frequently discussed the value of their operational experience and assignments that contributed most to their leader development. The overwhelming response from the participants was that they believed a very significant contribution to their leader development was derived from their experience in operational assignments. The sub-themes of operational experience and assignments are: (1) value of a deployment; (2) challenging experiences and positions; and (3) key leadership roles for leader development: platoon leader and commander.

Value of a Deployment

The participants regularly used the experience from their deployment(s) and indicated that the operational experience itself was the most effective form of leader development. They associated the relationships they had on the deployment with role models, mentors and peers as a successful element of their development. In the National Guard, leaders are only observed one weekend a month and two weeks a year on their performance. During a deployment, it expands upon the opportunity to be evaluated over an extended period in a high stress environment and allows leaders the opportunity to flourish and excel. The female leaders expounded upon their deployment experience and often discussed the challenges they encountered with leaving their families behind. The female leaders were balancing the demands of leading while trying to maintain open communication at home with their children and loved ones. It was not unusual for the female leaders to feel distracted while deployed because their minds were pre-occupied with concerns from home.

Challenging Experiences and Positions

Generally, military careers are designed around a series of assignments of increasing scope and responsibility that progressively build experience. The participants felt as if they were postured for positions of higher rank based on the assignments they had been given. Most women serve in support roles but there are also quite a few women who have borne the weight of battle in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other combat operations over the past 13 years. Even though women were excluded from combat positions during these wars, the parameters of the war put women in these situations. Of

the participants interviewed, 3 of the 9 were directly involved in combat operations. All the women gave tribute to their overseas service as a significant key player in their development as a leader. The combat exclusion has barred some women from a number of key assignments that are considered important for upward mobility. The requirements to hold key leader positions are weighed heavily on combat experience.

Key Leadership Roles for Leader Development: Platoon Leader and Commander

Operational experience for lieutenants and captains can lay the foundation for an entire career and thus has major influence on shaping the next generation of senior leadership. The participants identified the key leadership roles which postured them for positions of greater responsibility were in positions as a platoon leader and as a commander.

One of the goals of the Army leader development is “competent and confident leaders capable of leading trained and ready units” (United States Department of the Army. (2012). Leaders do not expect that lieutenants will show up at their units prepared to lead based on the instruction they received at their initial basic officer leadership course training but they do expect they will arrive needing and wanting to be radical learners. The platoon leader position is often the first position that lieutenants are exposed to after commissioning into the United States Army. This position allows for the most growth and is an environment that is low risk.

As discussed by the participants, the second most valued position in the military during the development years is the company command level. The senior officers I interviewed often circled back to their time as a commander and the invaluable lessons

they learned. During an officer's career, this is where the rubber meets the road and never again will an officer be so close to troops. Although it been over ten years since some of the officers interviewed had been in company command they identified the position as the most developmental to their career and prepared them for positions of increased responsibility and for promotion to the next rank.

Summary

Leader development is prevalent in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The interviews revealed that it is clear that content, frequency, and perceived quality vary significantly. At large, the military is a learning organization and it is evident the officers who were interviewed understand the importance of leader development. They demonstrated this by their strong commitment to embracing the notion that self-development is fundamental to the profession. Two of the consistent findings throughout the interviews was experience and relationships. Overall, lessons learned from the interviews is that leaders are made, not born. Leader development requires a complex mix of training, education and experience throughout an entire career and not just from one assignment. The professional development of subordinates is the responsibility of both the organization and the chain of command. And lastly, leader development must be a top organizational priority.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Implications, Suggestions for Future Research

This chapter begins with a summary of the research and then discusses the conclusions that have been reached as a result of interviewing nine women leaders from the Minnesota Army National Guard. The conclusions are organized by the three major findings: (1) relationships, (2) leadership strategies, and (3) operational experience and assignments. Next I will describe the study's limitations. Then, I will make suggestions for further research. The chapter concludes with concluding thoughts and an epilogue of my experience with the study.

This phenomenological study was designed to investigate the lived experiences of women leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The study was qualitative in an effort to understand the nature of a setting and the experiences of others within a military context (Merriam, 1998). I used phenomenological inquiry through personal memos-to-self and in-depth interviews (see Appendix A) to understand the lived experiences of nine female leaders. Through the use of qualitative methodology and analytic theory I found meaning in the interviewees' narratives that provided understanding of their lived experiences. The study provided a deeper understanding of how nine women described their personal experiences and perceived their professional development in a male dominated organization.

Conclusions

There may or may not be differences in the developmental process of male and female leaders, examining their lived experiences as a previously untouched source of knowledge can only add to the understanding of the leader development process for both

genders. It appears that regardless of gender, officers develop through the same process but their paths to development are sometimes not the same. All officers interviewed had different experiences in regard to leader development. In short, there is no set of activities that could be characterized as a standard or typical leader development program. Based on the women's leader development, activities, exercises and training designed to focus on the broader range of leadership skills vary greatly in content, frequency, and perceived quality.

The leader development process tends to start at a young age which is most often influenced by parental modeling. It involves the development and application of a variety of skills and is shaped by factors such personal and professional relationships, leaders strategies, and operational assignments and experience. Most organizations, and the military is no exception, are interested in learning how to best incorporate leader development activities within all levels of the organization. What is of most interest is not what leadership theory, model or program is 'right' but how it is that leaders are developed. As such, this is an important area of scholarly research and application with a myriad of questions to pursue.

Implications for Practice

Developing new leader development programs or continuing to impose established programs are not sufficient. It would be beneficial for the military units to build upon the processes that are already working. One of these strategies is allowing officers to learn to do leader development from role models, mentors and peers. The Minnesota National Guard is committed to diversifying the force and understands the

importance of making this a priority. The organization recognizes that empowering female leaders leads to increased talents, capabilities and strengths for the good of organizational effectiveness. Over the last two years the Minnesota National Guard has focused on having a training event that concentrates on the development of female leaders. These events allowed for a public dialogue between the most senior military leaders on improving women's leadership and career development.

In March 2014, the Minnesota National Guard held a seminar that focused on career development for the noncommissioned officers but was open to all ranks. The seminar brought in a panel of senior noncommissioned officers and commissioned officers to discuss their experiences and share in their thoughts on how to pave their career based on where they want to go. It was a discussion amongst the group and allowed for an open discussion for the lower enlisted to ask questions of the leaders who have been successful in their careers.

In April 2015, the Minnesota National Guard hosted a Joint Female Professional Development Training Symposium which included both the Army and Air National Guard. The focus shifted to all female leaders (commissioned and noncommissioned) and was open for male leaders to attend as well. The emphasis was on *building the bench* for the future of the Minnesota National Guard. The facilitators of the breakout sessions encouraged the participants to reflect on the tools and resources provided in the training: effective and impactful leadership, competing in the arena, and building relationships. A goal of the symposium was for both male and females to learn from the experiences of others and take the opportunity to network, collaborate and learn together. Through

positive feedback from the participants, this training event was highly regarded by the attendees indicating they learned more from the experiences of others than any textbook could provide. The success of these two leader development training sessions validates the importance of executing out of the box kind of development for military leaders.

Women looking to develop their leadership ability can learn from the findings of this study. Women leaders should seek to build relationships with their mentors.

Additionally, young leaders should seek out opportunities and challenging experiences both within and outside the military to help grow them personally and professionally.

While the focus of this study was primarily on women, it is likely the same approaches to leader development may be as effective for male leaders in the military. Many of the complexities and processes were evaluated in this study and can provide a baseline for future research. The military is changing the platform in regard to leader development with the emergence of female leaders to key roles.

Limitations

This study was limited by several factors. The implications of the research are limited to the context in which it was discovered and by the leaders who served as participants in the study. First, I disclosed the research procedures and purpose of my study to the participants. I personally knew all nine participants from having served alongside them in the Minnesota Army National Guard. The participants were either of equal rank or higher rank than me. I have built strong and close relationships with some of the participants and have identified them as mentors in my own military career. It is likely that some participant anecdotes have the potential to be recognized by other female

commissioned officers. This may have caused the leaders not to disclose some personal information for fear that someone might be able to recognize them through their story and fear that it will impact their career for bringing forward some honest assessments based on their experiences.

The focus of this research was limited to the perspective of female commissioned officers and does not include senior enlisted male or female soldiers which could add value to future studies. It would add value to interview the personal experiences of male leaders who hold or have held similar positions to understand their thoughts and perceptions about female leaders. Many of the males within the organization have been in the same situations but their perspectives may be different. My own experiences may impose a bias that has the potential to place limitations on my analysis but I was cognizant of my biases while doing the research.

Additionally, the research was limited to female commissioned officers in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Broadening the view of commissioned officers from all 54 state and territories may reveal different perspectives on leader development due to different state processes and emphasis placed on the development of leaders. The Minnesota National Guard places great emphasis on leader development by creating processes that help aide leaders to excel. Even though the military trains, mentors and guides based on one model, it is likely that officers from different states would bring forward a unique perspective.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research can provide a basis for future research that can be conducted on the same phenomenon explored through different methods and designs. There are some significant opportunities for future research to examine the impact of personal and professional relationships, leadership strategies and operational experience and assignments as they relate to leader development. Using this same method and design, future research may be conducted to include senior noncommissioned officers. The study could be expanded to all 54 states and territories to determine if leader development is different across the different National Guard units. A new study could include the same interview questions with male participants in order to gain insight as to their own leader development and to determine if they have the same issues as the women leaders.

Personal Reflection

Prior to interviewing the participants, I completed the questionnaire based on my own experience. I reflected deeply on my career over the last nine years and put a lot of thought into my answers. After interviewing all the participants I revisited my own answers and evaluated how my responses compared to their individual experience. I found that many of my own beliefs and experiences were in line with those of my peers and senior leaders who were of higher rank. I was not surprised to find that I had similar experiences and backgrounds of those who participated in my study. Reflecting back on my interviews and reading the notes I had written in the margins, I found myself relating to their answers more and more. All three of my peers that I interviewed are currently in

command positions and during the interviews we sometimes veered off track to discuss things more in-depth.

Personally, it was comforting knowing that I was not alone in my experiences with my leader development. I learned some lessons from both my peers as well as my superiors. I feel as if my knowledge, experience and time in service added value to the interpretation of the data and exploring follow-on questions. Some of the females looked to me during the interviews to agree with their assessment and expected some feedback and advice from my own experience. I will certainly take forward their own experience as I move through the ranks in my military career. More than ever I realized the importance of identifying those officers who exhibit great potential and the value of mentorship so they are ready to follow our lead when it is time to take the helm. I am thankful to have been afforded the opportunity to conduct this study as it was eye opening as I reflect on my own leader development and the way I develop my subordinates.

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Table 1: Demographic Data of Female Officers

Name	Age	Rank	Commissioning Source	Total Years Served	Highest Level of Education Completed
Megan	32	Captain	ROTC	9	Baccalaureate Degree
Bethany	36	Captain	OCS	11	Master's Degree
Kayla	30	Captain	ROTC	12	Baccalaureate Degree
Brittney	44	Major	OCS	21	Baccalaureate Degree
Laura	37	Major	OCS	16	Baccalaureate Degree
Amy	50	Lieutenant Colonel	ROTC	27	Master's Degree
Jessica	40	Lieutenant Colonel	ROTC	23	Master's Degree
Jamie	44	Colonel	OCS	26	Master's Degree
Aerial	42	Colonel	OCS	24	First Professional Degree

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Appendix B: Information Sheet for Research

Appendix C: Officer Questionnaire

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What led you to joining the military?
2. Can you tell me about how your family impacted who you are today?
3. Why did you want to be a commissioned officer?
4. How do you think leaders develop?
5. What skills do you perceive as most important to leader development?
6. Prior to being moved into new assignments, did anyone in your chain of command discuss the requirements of the upcoming duty assignment and expected standards with you? Did they provide the resources, guidance and mentorship for you to be successful in the position?
7. Over the course of your military career, what assignment(s) do you feel contributed most to your leader development to hold positions of increased responsibility?
8. How do you develop your subordinates?
9. How do you motivate the people you lead?
10. What contexts or situations have typically influenced your experiences in regard to leader development?
11. Can you name a person who has had a tremendous impact on you as a leader? Maybe someone who has been a mentor to you? Why and how did this person impact your development as a leader?
12. Have you had the opportunity to develop those around you? Can you give me an example of a time you provided mentoring to someone?
13. How have you dealt with working in a traditionally male dominated organization?
14. What are some barriers you have faced during your time as a leader? Do you feel like any of these barriers are related to your gender?
15. From your experience, what specific personal competencies and skills contributed most to your career development and advancement?
16. What military training has assisted most in your development as a leader?
17. Based on your experience, do you think your military training aligns with the individual-based knowledge, skills and abilities most often associated with formal leadership roles?
18. What do you think the leaders within the organization are doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as an effective leader?
19. How do you take ownership of your own leader development?
20. What is one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?
21. Anything else you want to comment on that you feel is helpful in your development as a leader?

Appendix B: Information Sheet for Research

**INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

Exploring Female Leader Development:
Women and Leadership in the Minnesota Army National Guard
REFERENCE – Institutional Review Board #1502E63382

I am conducting a study to understand the lived experiences of women military officers and their leader development in the Minnesota Army National Guard. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your background as a woman leader in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

This study is being conducted by: Amber Manke, College of Education and Human Development (CEHD).

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of women military leaders in the Minnesota Army National Guard to gain a better understanding of leader development.

Procedures:

I will ask you to do the following if you agree to participate in the study: provide your perspectives through a digital audio-recorded 45-60 minute personal interview. After the interview has been transcribed, I will also ask you to review the transcriptions from your interview to determine the accuracy of your statements. An interview will be scheduled at a time of your convenience.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University policy for protection of confidentiality. Written and audio research records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office. Digital auto-recordings will be uploaded to my personal password protected computer and backed on a secure external hard drive. Only my dissertation advisor, Dr. Rosemarie Park, and I will have access to the data. Pseudonyms will be used through the research to help protect the anonymity of participants. Confidential information will not be shared with anyone outside of the dissertation committee.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. I will not use any of the data collected about you should you decide to withdraw from the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Amber Manke. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 320-266-0328 or by email at mank0082@umn.edu. The researcher's advisor is Dr. Rosemarie Park and can be reached at 612-625-6267 or by email at parkx002@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher or her advisor, **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Officer Questionnaire

1. Name _____ Rank _____ Age _____

2. Total Months in Military Service by Component and Rank:

Rank	Active Duty	Army National Guard	Army Reserves	Other Branch	Total Months
PV1 - SPC					
SGT - SSG					
SFC - MSG					
SGM - CSM					
2LT					
1LT					
CPT					
MAJ					
LTC					
COL					

3. Commissioning Source and Year:

Year	ROTC	Accelerated OCS	Federal OCS	State OCS	Direct Commission	Military Academy

4. Highest Level of Civilian Education Completed: _____

4a. Civilian Education Discipline Studied: _____

5. Military Branch(es): _____

