The Journey through the Labyrinth: A Phenomenological Study of the Lives of Air Force Women General Officers During Their Military Careers

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Dedication

To the amazing women who have been with me on my Journey Through the Labyrinth:

my friends, aunts, coaches, teachers, mentors and wingmen

and most importantly, my mom, Sandy Doubleday

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First and foremost is Dr. Maria Cseh. She always kept me going even when I was ready to give up and move on. Her steady, never wavering leadership in the dissertation process gave me the advice and encouragement I needed at each and every turn. Her support is cemented into the very bones of this dissertation from start to finish. Words cannot adequately describe the ups and downs she supported me through to get to the finish line. Thank you, Dr. Cseh.

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Without the stories of the 11 Air Force women general officers, sharing their experiences of working their way up the chain of command of the U. S. Air Force, this dissertation would not have been possible. Each one took my request for the details of her

experiences seriously and respectfully. I anticipated some of their interview answers, but there also were surprises along the way. I suspect that while I was learning about them and their journey, they were learning some things about themselves as they reflected on their careers. Thank you to these 11 extraordinary accomplished trailblazers.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the patience and love of my family and friends as they traveled with me through the process. They never gave up on me. They bolstered my confidence and encouraged me to keep putting one foot in front of the other to the very end. I am the first in my family to earn a doctorate degree. A special thank you to those who continually support me in everything I do. This is for all of us.

Abstract of Dissertation

The Journey through the Labyrinth: A Phenomenological Study of the Lives of Air Force Women General Officers During Their Military Careers

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Air Force women general officers (GO) have experienced navigating their military careers. This study was informed by identity theory, role conflict theory and work/life conflict. One-on-one, in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 active-duty Air Force women GOs resulted in rich narrative data describing their lives as senior leaders in the Air Force and how they find work/life harmony in relation to their roles as mothers, wives, and women. The women participating in this study had similar structure in their lives. They employed a variety of different strategies to navigate the labyrinth of family and leadership life while maintaining healthy relationships, taking care of themselves and performing the mission of serving others as Air Force officers.

The findings of this study were captured in two overarching categories with associated themes: *Being an Air Force Woman General Officer* (Theme 1. Role Navigation, Theme 2. Part of Something Bigger and Theme 3. Vocal Change Agents) and *Work/Life Harmony Secret to Success* (Theme 1. Work/Life Structure and Theme 2. Healthy Relationship Maintenance). What was truly unique about the women in this study was how they saw each role as being interwoven with natural amounts of give and take regarding time and energy. Achieving work/life harmony was crucial in the successful navigation of their careers and was directly tied to the amount and types of support they received from family and friends. The women in this study employed many strategies to minimize the chaos in their lives, but one of the most important was

investing the time to take care of themselves and make their mental and physical health a priority. Unconscious bias was prevalent in the experiences of the women GOs navigating their careers; however, the women in this study made sure their voices were being heard as they continued to fight and educate others to raise awareness. Finally, figuring out how to be the voice for women's issues while paving a roadmap to maintaining healthy marriages, raising a family and progressing in their careers was essential to help guide future women Air Force officers.

Recommendations identified for future research include: replicating this study with women GOs from other services; conducting a study to understand how male GOs navigate their careers and how they perceive women GOs as their equals; studying how women lead differently than their male counterparts; investigating the culture of the Air Force that allows for unconscious bias and, finally, studying how trailing spouses and the children of Air Force woman GOs perceive career navigation as part of a military family.

There were also policy and practice recommendations for the Air Force to help with work/life balance and retention programs. When developing new policies, focus needs to include options and benefits for non-traditional family models that may include single parents, same sex parents and required generational care. Air Force leadership should upgrade mentoring programs for all levels of supervision using guest speakers, small group workshops and book reviews that focus on philosophies and tactical tips to mentor all different ranks, job specialties and genders. In the same spirit, training on how to identify individual and group unconscious bias should be instituted. Finally, HAF/A1 and local wing commanders should establish formal male spouse support groups and host discussion panels to get the perspective of a growing population of dependents.

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Definition of Key Terms

The following terms as defined below were used for this research study.

A **general/flag officer (GO)** is a military member who has achieved the rank of O-7 to O-10 in one of the military services. In the Army, Air Force and Marine Corp active-duty, guard and reserve forces, these members are called generals. In the Navy and Coast Guard, they are referred to as admirals. Ranks are also referred to by the number of stars: 1-star (O-7, Brigadier General); 2-star (O-8, Major General); 3-star (O-9, Lieutenant General) and 4-star (O-10, General).

The term **Airman** has historically been associated with uniformed members of the U.S. Air Force (officer or enlisted; regular, reserve, or guard) regardless of rank, component, specialty or gender (in this context, the word "man" means "human being" or human resource). Today, Department of the Air Force civilians and members of the Civil Air Patrol, when conducting missions for the Air Force as the official Air Force Auxiliary, are incorporated within the broader meaning of the term (Air Force Glossary, 2015).

The **Air Force diversity** is broadly defined as a composite of individual characteristics, experiences and abilities consistent with the Air Force Core Values and the Air Force Mission. Air Force diversity includes but is not limited to: personal life experiences, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural knowledge, educational background, work experience, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical and spiritual perspectives, age, race ethnicity, and gender (Air Force Policy Directive 36-70, 2018, p. 2).

Identity is defined as "the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3).

Role conflict is defined by Kahn et al (1964) as "simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" (Greenhause & Beutell, 1985, p. 77).

Work/life conflict is referred to as work/family conflict in most previous research. Throughout this paper both terms used; however where possible work/life conflict was used to encompass those individuals who do not have children. Work/life conflict was defined as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). In 2006, Greenhaus, Allen and Spector expanded the definition to include conflict that occurs when one role interferes with an individual's effectiveness in the other role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three forms of work/life conflicts: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. Time-based conflict occurs when the time required by one role interferes with participation in another. Strain-based conflict occurs when the stress created in one role carries over and interferes in another role. Behavior-based conflict occurs when certain behaviors are inappropriately transferred from one role to another.

Work/life balance is defined as "the extent to which an individual is equally engaged in – and equally satisfied with – his or her work and family role" (Greenhaus et al, 2003, p. 513). Greenhaus et al. (2003) also proposes three components of balance:

time (equally divided between roles); involvement (equal psychological involvement) and satisfaction (equal satisfaction gained from both roles). Actual balance where an individual is ***equally engaged*** may be an unrealistic definition for Air Force women general officers. So, this research used the Grzywacz & Carlson (2007) definition of work/life balance of "the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in work and family domains" (p. 458).

Work/life harmony is a construct that is defined as "an individually pleasing, congruent arrangement of work and life roles that is interwoven into a single narrative of life" (McMillan et al., 2011, p. 15). With this definition, "balance" can still be obtained as long as an individual's roles are integrated in a manner that is in line with the individual's values and a fit for the family regardless of the amount of time allocated to each. It is also a more encompassing construct that can be inclusive of those individuals without traditional family demands yet have other entities that create a similar pull and drain on their time.

Dual career couples are characterized by commitment of both partners to professional occupations (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005). Such occupations usually require advanced degrees and specialized knowledge making it difficult to change career fields and reinforcing the development of a strong professional identity (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005).

Chapter 1: Introduction

> *With continuing change, the obstacles that women face have become more surmountable, at least by some women some of the time. Paths to the top exist, and some women find them. The successful routes can be difficult to discover, however, and therefore we label these circuitous paths a labyrinth.*
>
> - *Through the Labyrinth, Eagly and Carli (2007, p. 6)*

Women have been serving officially on active-duty in the United States military since 1901. To date, there are almost two million female veterans (NCVAS, 2018) in addition to more than 1.3 million female members who currently serve on active-duty (DMDC, 2018). These women make up 16.3 percent of the current military force including several women who have reached the rank of flag or general officer which was defined for this study as having obtained the military rank of O-7 or above (DMDC, 2018). Women first became eligible for the flag/general officer rank in 1967 thanks to President Lyndon B. Johnson who signed Public Law 90-130 which modified the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. The modification in the law lifted ceilings for other officer ranks and removed the 2 percent ceiling on the number of active-duty women who can serve (Manning, 2013). This change in 1967, in addition to opening up mainstream combat occupations in aviation, surface warfare and long-range air defense artillery to women, has increased significantly the numbers of women officers in the senior ranks. For example, in 1972 only 0.4 percent of the general officers were women, but by 2009, 7.1 percent were women including the first four-star female military general officer, Army General Anne E. Dunwoody (DMDC, 2018). Ten years later, the percentages have stabilized with 8.3 percent of the general officer core consisting of 68 women. Although General Dunwoody has retired, there have been five additional four-

star general/flag officers who served in high profile command positions in the Air Force and the Navy since she broke the glass ceiling (DMDC, 2018).

The Army may have been the first service to promote a woman to its highest rank, but the Air Force has long been considered a more female-friendly organization in regards to professional development and career progression. The Air Force was the first service to open the Reserve Officer Training Corp program to women and also to allow pregnant women to remain in the service (Manning, 2013). Even though the other services allowed women to fly non-combat aviation aircraft earlier, the Air Force has a much larger flying population. By lifting the restriction, it cleared the way for women to make rank following the same path as their male counterparts. In 1993, a major obstacle was removed when women were allowed to fly combat aircraft leaving only a few specialized career fields closed to women (Manning, 2013). This claim is further evidenced by an Air Force study done by Baldwin (2000) that found women get promoted at a higher rate than men to the ranks of lieutenant colonel and colonel which is the exact opposite of the promotion trends in the Army and the Navy. He credits the Air Force's "narrow interpretation of the combat exclusion policy" and increased opportunities for Air Force women for these results (p. 123).

In 2012, the Air Force promoted its first woman to become a four-star general officer, General Janet Wolfenbarger. General Wolfenbarger was no stranger to being a trailblazer having been a member of the Air Force Academy class of 1980, the first class with women (Thompson, 2012). In 2014, the Air Force promoted a second female four-star to be the first military commander of combat forces when General Lori Robinson was assigned as the Commander of the Pacific Air Forces (Kakesako, 2014). In 2016,

General Robinson became the first woman to lead a Unified Combatant Command when she was selected as the Commander for U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM)/ North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) (Losey, 2016a). In this position General Robinson was the highest-ranking woman in the military and led a cross section of services and civil agencies to secure and defend the United States homeland and its interests (USAF Biographies, 2018). General Robinson retired in July of 2018 leaving a short period where there were no women four-star general officers. However, in September of 2018, General Maryanne Miller, the first women to command the Air Force Reserves, received her fourth star when she was chosen to lead Air Mobility Command (USAF Biographies, 2018).

One of the keys to progression in any service is having the opportunity to be successful in the most challenging, promotable positions. In January 2013, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta announced the end of the direct ground combat exclusion rule for female military service members and directed all of the services to evaluate each and every position in their respective organizations. This change in policy opened up approximately 237,000 positions previously closed to women (Roulo, 2013). The deadline of 2016 was met and women were allowed to compete for any position for which they were physically qualified (Swick & Moore, 2018).

Since the elimination of the Combat Exclusion Act, women have been accepted to the most challenging military training courses to include: Army Ranger School, Navy Seal Training, Tactical Air Control Party training and the Infantry Officer Course (Swick & Moore, 2018). Although the number of women who have successfully completed their training and gone on to serve in integrated units is small, the groundwork has been set for

more women to capitalize on similar opportunities. Being allowed to develop the same skills from leading front line combat units as their male counterparts makes women equally promotable to all ranks including general officer.

A lot of significant firsts have happened since 2008 when General Dunwoody received her fourth star. However, as outlined in Tables 1 and 2 below, there has not been a significant change in the overall percentage or balance of representation since the four-star glass ceiling was broken.

The United States Coast Guard (Department of Homeland Security) general/flag officer data is not included in these statistics because DMDC only tracks Department of Defense information.

Table 1. United States Military General Officer Population in 2009

	United States Military General Officer Population in 2009[1]									
	All Services		Air Force		Army		Navy		Marines	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
General/Admiral	39	1	14	0	10	1	11	0	4	0
Lt Gen/Vice Admiral	146	4	38	1	51	1	40	2	17	0
Maj Gen/ Rear Admiral (U)	270	22	96	10	91	4	61	7	22	1
Brig Gen/Rear Admiral (L)	434	41	139	17	150	13	105	10	40	1
Total General Officers	889	68	287	28	302	19	217	19	83	2
% Women Generals		7.1%		8.9%		5.9%		8.1%		2.4%
% of Women by Service		14.1%		19.7%		13.0%		15.4%		6.5%

Note: Derived from Defense Manpower Data Center Active-Duty Military Strength Reports, 2001 - 2018.

Table 2. United States Military General Officer Population in 2018

	United States Military General Officer Population in 2018[1]									
	All Services		Air Force		Army		Navy		Marines	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
General/Admiral	38	1	11	1	14	0	8	0	5	0
Lt Gen/Vice Admiral	135	13	39	5	41	3	36	4	19	1
Maj Gen/ Rear Admiral (U)	274	15	85	5	110	7	55	3	24	0
Brig Gen/Rear Admiral (L)	398	41	135	17	126	13	96	10	41	1
Total General Officers	845	70	270	28	291	23	195	17	89	2
% Women Generals		8.3%		9.4%		7.3%		8.0%		2.2%
% of Women by Service		16.6%		20.6%		15.3%		20.1%		8.6%
Retired 4-star women		5		3		1		1		0

Note: Derived from Defense Manpower Data Center Active-Duty Military Strength Reports, 2001 - 2018.

According to data from the Defense Manpower Data Center (2018), since 2009 the overall population of women on active-duty in the military has risen by over 12,000

personnel with an overall percentage increase from 14.3 to 16.7 percent (a 2.4 percent increase). In comparison, the percentage of women in the general officer ranks has increased by 1.4 percent (one additional women) during this same time period. The overall military general officer population was reduced by 5 percent during this time period with the Air Force experiencing the biggest reduction of 7.6 percent. Air Force women general officer percentage increased, although the population of 28 remained the same. What is not represented with the above snapshot is the inconsistent progress the Air Force General Officer population experienced. Between 2001 to 2009, the Air Force Women General Officer population steadily grew from 10 to 28 women, almost tripling their representation at the highest ranks (DMDC, 2018). During the period of growth, there was a steady influx of women at the Brigadier General rank to grow into the upper ranks which at the time maxed out at three-star general. Table 3 shows the pattern continued until 2014 when the brigadier general (and overall number) began to drop significantly.

Table 3. United States Air Force General Officer Population from 2009 to 2018

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total USAF Women GOs	28	26	28	27	27	24	19	23	23	28
General (4-star)	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Lieutenant General (3-star)	1	1	3	3	5	5	2	5	5	5
Major General (2-star)	10	11	13	12	11	10	10	9	8	5
Brigadier General (1-star)	17	14	12	11	10	8	5	7	8	17

Note: Derived from Defense Manpower Data Center Active-Duty Military Strength Reports, 2001 - 2018.

In 2012, the first four-star Air Force Woman General Officer was promoted and for several years the Air Force had more than one four-star woman. However, as the number of four-star generals increased, the promotion rate of women to the brigadier general rank dropped or didn't happen at all as was the case in 2014 (Krieger &

O'Hanlon, 2014). This inconsistency created gaps in career progression and a decrease in the overall Air Force Women General Officer representation. In 2018, the number of women promoted to brigadier general jumped significantly and depending on how rapidly these women are promoted, the continuous career progression pipeline should be restored.

Nelson et al. (2014) found the Air Force's promotion system was applied equally to men and women. Traditionally, general officers are promoted at quicker rates throughout their careers than their counterparts. Baldwin (2000) studied these below-the-zone or early promotion rates and found men and women are promoted at equal rates from major (O-4) to lieutenant colonel (O-5). There is evidence that women between the rank of lieutenant colonel and colonel (O-6) leave the service at a rate twice that of men (Baldwin, 2000, Losey, 2015). However, the women remain experience a substantial increase in promotion rates from lieutenant colonel to colonel, the rank prior to general officer (Asch et al., 2012; Baldwin, 2000).

The Air Force has the ability to grow its own general officers through rewarding jobs and a variety of leadership development programs (Air Force Instruction 36-2640, 2018). The Air Force Personnel Center (n.d.) states, "Deliberate development ensures the Air Force has the uniformed and civilian Airmen it needs for a highly contested future. Lifelong education and training are critical in preparing Airmen to meet emerging challenges."

However, the low representation at the highest levels of leadership, shows that the Air Force has challenges enticing a large enough pool of qualified, diverse candidates to

not retire once they are eligible and instead remain in the Air Force to possibly get promoted to general officer.

The desire to retire after 20 years of service is understandable considering upon retirement, every active-duty officer immediately begins collecting a monthly retirement check based on the rank they retired with and the number of years served (Air Force Benefits, n.d.). Being able to begin a second career that is supplemented by a monthly retirement check can be an attractive option. This is especially tempting for high potential officers (officers being groomed for the general officer ranks) in their early 40s who can easily transition to the corporate world and begin a high-paying second career.

Unlike corporate or other government organizations, human resources cannot just go out and hire a diverse group of mid-level people to help infuse different perspectives into the conversation (Nelson et al., 2014). The military system is a closed organization that has to grow and develop its own general officer corp. A talented, experienced woman cannot be hired from outside the Air Force, not even from another military service, and serve in a general officer position. As a result, it is imperative that the Air Force develop and retain a talented pool of women who have skills and desire to be promoted and flourish as general officers.

The importance of diversity in the Air Force was given an extra boost while Secretary Deborah James was in office. In a speech given during the Air Force Association's Air Space Cyber Conference in September 2016, she emphasized:

> Make no mistake, we are in a battle for talent . . . It's about recruiting and developing and retaining the best among them. It's about the quality of their experience in the Air Force. And for me, at least, it's also been about paying

special attention to certain communities that have required some special attention (Losey, 2016b).

In March 2015, she unveiled nine initiatives to boost the careers of women, minorities and enlisted service members. Several of the initiatives are specifically aimed at increasing the retention of female officers so there is a larger pool of qualified members who can ascend to the higher ranks. One of the key initiatives is the creation of the Career Intermission Program which allows 40 Airmen a year (male or female) to take up to three years off for education, family or other work/life balance issues. Upon return, Airmen have a commitment that is double the amount of time they were in the program (Losey, 2015). Two of the other initiatives are aimed at increasing the initial pool of female officer applicants through more strategic recruiting both internally from the enlisted force and partnering with organizations that mentor and advocate for young women (Losey, 2015). In 2017, the nine initiatives grew to 13 with the goal to enhance the ability to recruit talent from a wider demographic and solve the toughest challenges with an innovative force. The expanded initiatives focused on efforts to: 1) provide additional support to geographically-separated military spouses, 2) lengthen the separation decision window for female Airmen having children, 3) establish diverse candidate pools for key military development positions, 4) promote civilian participation in professional development programs, and 5) improve marketing of career fields lacking diversity to female and minority populations (AFPC, 2017). In 2018, Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson and Chief of Staff of the Air Force David Goldfein continued to support the diversity initiatives with a special focus on women's safety and readiness issues to

include redesigning uniforms, body armor, combat vests, G-suits and flight suits specifically for women (Pawlyk, 2018; Schogol, 2018).

There have been many changes made during the last couple of decades regarding opportunities for Air Force women. Air Force military leadership recognizes the importance of diversity and is making changes to increase retention of all Airmen. The challenge now is to entice more women to successfully navigate the Air Force labyrinth and shoot for the stars.

Statement of Problem

Representation of women at the highest levels of leadership within the Air Force is imperative. Ensuring the percentage of women officers remains consistent as the year groups progress to higher ranks is critical to maintaining Air Force readiness and providing a diverse voice represented at all levels (Baldwin, 2000; DACOWITS, 2019).

Although there have been small increases through the years in terms of the number of women serving, especially at the general officer level (O-7 to O-10), the numbers do not provide an equal representation by percentage of the service at large in the senior ranks. In 2018, women represented 20.6 percent of the Air Force population. In the officer ranks, women represented 21.3 percent of total; 21.7 percent of officers in pay grades 0-1 (second lieutenant) through 0-5 (lieutenant colonel), but only 14.4 percent of officers at the 0-6 level, and only 9.4 percent of officers at brigadier general (0-7) or higher (DMDC, 2018; Matthews, 2018).

As in many professions, the career progression to achieve the rank of general in the Air Force is very similar for both men and women. Everyone has to meet all the same requirements, have the same jobs, and fill the same squares (Air Force Instruction 36-

2640, 2018). However, women have some unique challenges especially in regards to starting a family (Asch et al., 2016; DACOWITS, 2019). Many women are concerned about how to time parenthood to minimize any negative effects on their career progression. It is especially critical for women pilots because they are grounded and unable to fly while pregnant. The women who choose to potentially become mothers have to factor in deployment opportunities that may be lost because they lose their worldwide deployability status while pregnant (Air Force Instruction 44-102, 2015).

Besides pregnancy and the pressures of rearing a family, the demands of dual career military couples are most often the catalyst for separation and early retirement of young women (Asch et al., 2016; DACOWITS, 2019; Iskra, 2010). Unlike civilian counterparts in the corporate world who can return to their job after a pregnancy leave, if a person leaves the service, resuming an active-duty military career once the children go to school is not an option. The military is a demanding profession that places more hardships on its personnel and family members. It is especially difficult for dual-military spouse/dual career couples due to potential family separations because of job and geographic mobility requirements in some cases in foreign countries (Iskra, 2010; Segal 1986). Many officers have to make difficult career choices when faced with the possibility of separate assignments or long deployments, especially when children are involved (Clever & Segal, 2013; Iskra, 2010; Segal 1986). In many cases, a couple has to have the tough conversation about if one person is going to end his or her career and become the civilian or reservist spouse (Asch et al., 2016; Iskra, 2010). Studies have shown that women leave the Air Force at a higher rate than men, more often it is the wife who separates (Asch et al., 2012; Asch et al., 2016; Baldwin, 2000; DiSilverio, 2003;

MLDC, 2010). When several of the current generation of women generals were faced with this decision, it was the husband who decided to retire early and assume the traditional house spouse role (Monson, 2015; Thompson, 2012).

There is a limited amount of research on female military leaders and what is available is primarily focused on career progression and professional skill and leadership development (Doll, 2008; Williams et al., 2017). There are a few studies that examine work/life balance issues and coping mechanisms but these studies are not specific to the Air Force or women general officers (Iskra, 2010; Vealey et al., 2014).

Young officers understand the career path they must take to develop the skills required to get promoted and progress in their development. However, what is needed is a roadmap of how to navigate the labyrinth of a military career derived from lived experiences of women generals in the Air Force.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Air Force women general officers have experienced navigating their military careers. This study was guided by the question:

What was the lived experienced of Air Force women general officers navigating their military careers?

Statement of Significance

For many women general officers while they were progressing through the ranks, there was no one above or around them who had similar experiences to share (Dillon, 2017). The lived experience of the women general officers who participated in this study might help women in the Air Force understand the sacrifices, challenges, and rewards

that accompany a general's lifestyle as they make decisions concerning their career paths. The findings of this study will also help the Air Force Personnel Directorate (AF/A1) shape future practices to support women's advancement into the senior ranks in the Air Force.

Theoretical Framework

The theories guiding this study were identity theory and role conflict theory with associated work/life conflict. Identify theory was chosen to provide a framework to understand how the identities of women general officers are activated, accumulated and structured within a salience hierarchy (Burke, 2003; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Thoits, 2003). This study was positioned from the lens of 'self' and focused on role identities. Role conflict was chosen to provide a framework to understand the pressures that occur when multiple identity roles have to be managed. Of specific interest was the positive or negative affect of role accumulation and the type of strain created. Work/life conflict is a natural extension of role conflict theory and informed this study because many of the challenges Air Force women face revolve around marriage, family and other competing interests. These three theories in combination with research available on women in the military provided the framework to capture the navigation through the labyrinth during a military career of the participating Air Force women general officers.

Identity Theory

Identity is defined as "the set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3). Identity theory can be used to study collections of identities that individually

occupy a particular role (Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Burke, 2000). These individual identities often are referred to as role identities that have a set of associated meanings and expectations for the self that influence behavior (Burke & Reitzes, 1981).

There are two "strands" of identity theory that focus on the individual roles and the behaviors that make up the self (e.g. wife, mother, general officer). Both are rooted in structural symbolic interactionism and the original writings of George Herbert Mead from 1934 whose framework in its simplest form is "Society shapes self, self-shapes social behavior" (Stryker, 1968). True to Mead's framework, both versions have the same underlying goal to understand and explain how social structures affect self and how self affects social behaviors (Stryker & Burke, 2000). However, Stryker's strand emphasizes social structure and identity salience while Burke's version emphasizes social-cognitive systems, identity maintenance processes and the content of identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

For this study, the concept of identity salience was central to answering the question of how important and committed a person is to a role. The hierarchy of identities that comprise the self can depend on several factors including the number of activated roles, the ranking of the roles and the timing of the activation (Stryker, 1968). The salience attached to an individual's identities influences performance and how much time, energy and emotion is put into each role (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Commitment to a particular role identity is high if a person perceives that many important social relationships rely on his/her occupancy of that role (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Conversely, a person makes a less deliberate effort to expend resources to a role that is not a significant source of self-identity (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

The salience of a particular identity is not only determined by the person's commitment to a role, but also reflects how others who are important to the self, view or value the role being occupied by the person (Thoits, 1991). Additionally, successful performance in a highly salient role is more likely to enhance the well-being of a person than performing well in a less salient role, because highly salient role identities provide greater meaning and purpose (Thoits, 1991).

Role Conflict Theory

There are two contradictory schools of thought concerning role conflict in working women in the literature. The first emphasizes the negative affect of the increased potential for stress that the combination of fulfilling multiple roles creates. This is often referred to as role overload. Role conflict theorists "argue that accumulating a large number of roles is associated with negative affective and behavioral outcomes for individuals" (Tompson & Werner, 1997, p. 583). The result is often a feeling of being unable to escape the conflict and strain associated with juggling multiple roles. Some organizations recognize the negative impact of this conflict and are beginning to stress a greater balance between work and family life and ensure there is less pressure from managers and organizations to achieve success at work at the expense of success in other roles (Tompson & Werner, 1997).

The other school of thought originates from a role expansion perspective and argues that managing multiple roles may actually increase opportunities for social interaction and personal development (Gill & Davidson, 2001; Tompson & Werner, 1997). Researchers from this school have found that obtaining multiple roles has a positive rather than a negative outcome and is associated with improved well-being and

decreased psychological distress. The roles gained can give an individual access to certain privileges, increase their status and security, and provide a buffer so that failure in one role can be compensated by success in another one (Tompson & Werner, 1997).

In both schools of thought, the critical component that determines whether juggling roles is positive or negative is the total workload required rather than the number of roles attained. Conflicting demands among roles (time, lack of energy, incompatible behaviors) in conjunction with managing multiple roles lead to personal conflict as it becomes more difficult to perform each role successfully (Gill & Davidson, 2000; Madsen, 2001; Tompson & Werner, 1997).

Work/Life Conflict

Work/life conflict (WLC) is defined as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77). Studies found that work\life issues impact everyone regardless of individual demographics, social economic status, or family structure (Frone, 2003; McMillan et al., 2011). Even though research results vary, there is some consistency that indicates many U.S. women perceive greater levels of WLC than their male counterparts/spouses because women assume a disproportionate amount of the family responsibilities even in dual-career professions (Burlew & Johnson, 1992; Gill & Davidson, 2001; Madsen, 2001; Segal, 1986; Tompson & Werner, 1997).

The primary factors that determine the level of WLC that are experienced is often influenced by the satisfaction level of childcare arrangements, job security/insecurity, work involvement, perceived flexibility, partner's WLC and family involvement, perceived control and goal progress (Hammer et al., 1997; Madsen, 2001). In 2006,

Greenhaus et al. expanded the definition to include conflict that occurs when one role interferes with an individual's effectiveness in the other role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three forms of work-family conflicts: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. According to Hill et al. (2007), the concept of balancing work and life is a zero-sum game where committing resources to one domain is seen as taking away resources from the other, resulting in constant contention between the domains.

For those women who take on the challenge of working in traditionally male professions, it is even more difficult because those jobs are structured to be compatible with the traditional responsibilities of men rather than women in the family (Burlew & Johnson, 1992). Several factors were identified as contributing factors to increasing WLC in women. These roles included: gender role attitudes, family climate, cooperation regarding domestic responsibilities and perceived attitudes of gender roles of people close to the individual (Burlew & Johnson, 1992).

Summary of Methodology

The phenomenological research methodology was selected for this research study to capture the essence of the lived experience of the military careers of Air Force women general officers. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence -- a "grasp of the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

The participants in this study were selected based on the following criteria: 1) being a woman in the United States Air Force and 2) serving in the military grade of O-7 or above (general). At the start of this study, there were 28 active-duty Air Force women

general officers who met these criteria. An invitation email was sent to each of the women who qualified for this study. Three general officers did not reply to the email, four declined the invitation, and 10 could not participate because of scheduling conflicts. The 11 women who participated had experience that varied across multiple career fields in the Air Force from both operations and support specialties.

Data was collected through face-to-face or telephonic, one-on-one, semi-structured in-depth interviews. Seidman (2006) recommends a structured protocol that consists of three, 90-minute interviews. Seidman (2006) acknowledges the structure can be altered if necessary as long as "a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives" (p. 21). To respect the busy schedules of this group of participants, the interview structure was adapted to one 90-minute interview with the participant that covered life history, experience detail and reflection of meaning in one sitting. Interviews were transcribed and participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy.

The primary data sources for this study were the transcribed interviews and publicly available, official Air Force biographies. A multi-phase approach was used to analyze over 250 pages of data to identify the essence of the study phenomenon.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited in that it sought solely to examine the military careers of Air Force women general officers. All general officers go through a tremendous amount of public affairs training and are accustomed to answering interview questions and public discussions with the focus on the Air Force mission and vision. As a result, building rapport was critical to create an environment where the women were comfortable sharing

their unscripted stories. Additionally, in-depth qualitative interviews used to study the human experience are limited by respective recall and the ability of the participants to remember and communicate their experiences.

With regards to delimitations, the findings of this study might be applicable to military members in similar situations. These delimitations were set by the design of the study and the selection criteria from the Air Force women general officer population.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

"There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women."

- *Madeleine Albright (2006)*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Air Force women general officers have experienced navigating their military careers. This study was guided by the question:

What was the lived experienced of Air Force women general officers navigating their military careers?

This chapter presents the literature review in a building block construct beginning with some overarching demographics of women in the workforce and specifically the military population. The second section provides an overview of the informed theories of this study: identity theory, role conflict theory and work/life conflict. With the theoretical foundation established, the third section provides a bridge linking the concepts together using literature reviews and empirical studies.

Literature Review Methodology

Although the literature review showed research on multiple role identities, role conflict theory and multiple aspects of work/life balance in business context, there was very little research that addressed military general officers, studies on military women of varying ranks and branches of service. To compensate for the lack of research on military women general officers, research on the lives of women executives, especially those working in the C-suite, were reviewed because of the similarity to the lifestyle demands of this population and those of a woman general officer.

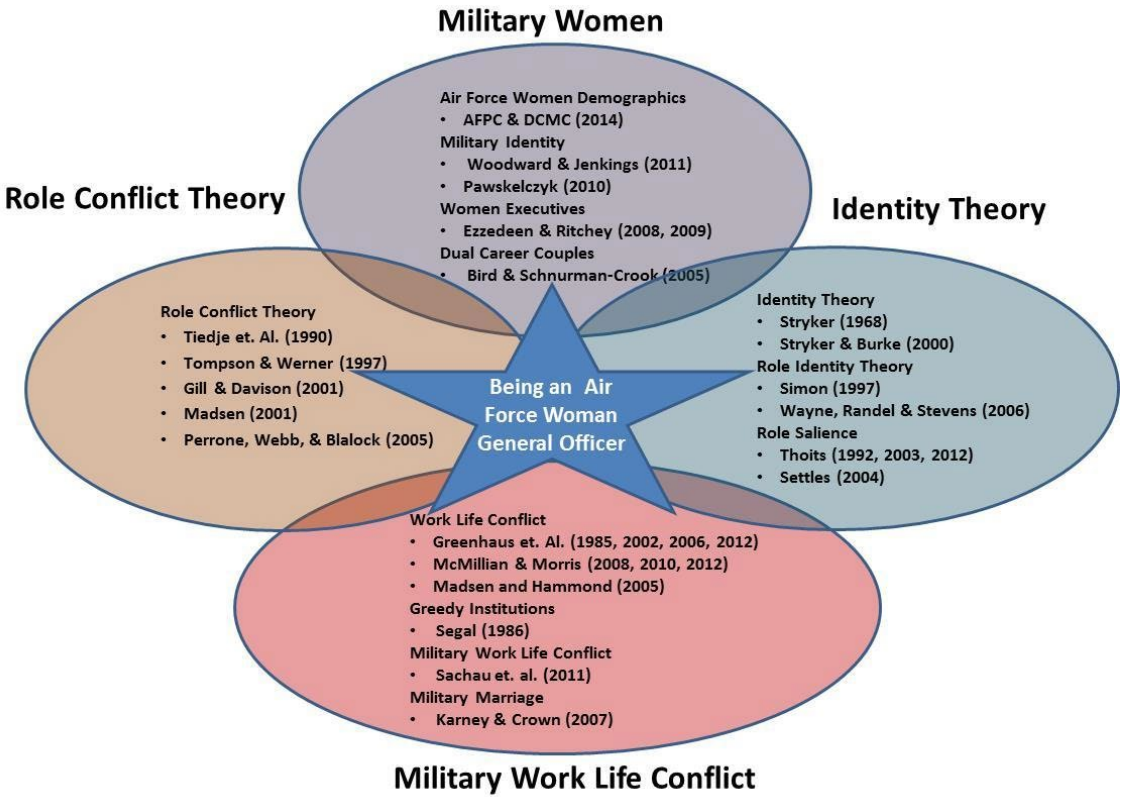

Figure 1. Map of Literature Reviewed for Study

As illustrated by the literature map in Figure 1, the primary theories guiding this study were identity theory and role conflict theory with emphasis on women in the military and their associated work/life conflict. The literature review was constructed primarily from theoretical and biographical books, government sponsored data bases, and both empirical studies and theory-based articles from peer reviewed publications. The search was conducted using Scholar Google, EBSCO, ProQuest and ArticlesPlus search engines/databases using the following key words and their combination: Air Force general officers, women general officers, work/family conflict, work/life balance, work/life harmony, identity theory, role conflict theory, Air Force women, dual career couples, and women executives.

These terms were selected to try and capture all the possible ways the concepts were described in management, psychological, sociological, gender and military research studies. The addition of Air Force and/or general officer into any combination was searched to showed evidence of the limited research being accomplished on Air Force women general officers and thus reinforcing the perceived gap.

Identity and Roles of Women

At the center of the challenge of navigating the labyrinth for talented women in the Air Force are the multiple roles a woman acquires and the changes she experiences in her identity. Individual's identities changes over time, but for most people, the changes are small and slow and accumulate over time (Burke, 2006). Dramatic change is less common and usually only occurs under unusual circumstances like when individuals are interned in POW camps or join religious cults (Burke, 2006). A far more likely influence of identity change is the continual increase in the number of roles a woman accumulates as she matures (Thoits, 1991). And in this case, not all change is bad. Research has long supported that increased numbers of roles comprising one's professional identity enhances an individual's resources, social connections, power, prestige and emotional gratification (Barnett & Hyde 2001; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000; Thoits, 1991).

People seek ways to establish and maintain situations and relationships in which their identities, and all of the people related to those identities, are verified and operating within set standards and meanings (Burke, 2006). In this view, identity systems reside in a hierarchical structure (Burke, 2006). When there are disturbances in this structure, change will occur in the role performance in order to try and counter the discrepancy (Burke, 2006). Additionally, changes to meaning of the identity standard will occur in

order to bring the structure more in line with the disturbance. This change in identity standards redefines who one is (Burke, 2006).

Identity changes when an individual becomes a parent. Burke and Cast (1997) conducted an empirical, longitudinal study primarily focused on investigating marital dynamics during the first few years of marriage. During this three-year study, they analyzed 313 couples (or 626 individuals) from two medium-sized communities who were married between 1991 and 1992. Data was gathered through several sources including: a yearly 90-minute face-to-face interview; four one-week daily diaries kept by respondents; and a 15-minute videotaping of couples' conversations about areas of disagreement. To analyze the results, the Burke-Tully gender identity method was used in order to ensure the identity meanings held by the couples resulted rather than sample meanings defined by the researcher or other outside sources. There were two hypotheses in this study (p. 281):

> **H1**: The birth of a child will shift men's gender identity standards in the masculine direction and women's gender identity standards in the feminine direction.
>
> **H2**: The greater the role taking for husbands and for wives, the more husbands' gender identities will become feminine and the more the wives' gender identities will become masculine.

The researchers found that the husbands' gender identity became somewhat more masculine over the year following the child's birth while at the same time wives became somewhat more feminine. “The presence of a child changed the meanings in the interactional setting in a way that was not easily changed back or countered; thus a continuing discrepancy was present between situationally self-relevant meanings and the meanings contained in the couple's identity standards” (Burke & Cast, 1997, p. 285). As

predicted, the new role of parent caused each of the identities of the couple to change slowly over time until they matched the perceptions of their new self-relevant meanings of being a parent.

The Burke and Cast (1997) study examined change in identity, but how does one attach meaning to a role in the first place? Simon (1997) completed an empirical study that examined the meanings individuals themselves attach to spouse, parent, and worker identities. Her study was a continuation of a previous project that used a mixed method design. The quantitative portion of the research was based on a two-wave prospective community panel that studied stress, identity, and mental health among 354 married Indianapolis adults. Structured personal interviews were administered in 1988 to a representative sample of the population based on random-digit dialing. A secondary interview was completed in 1990 with 289 located persons.

Simon (1997) chose the qualitative research portion for her study which was comprised of a subset of 40 full-time employed married parents who had dependent children at home. These in-depth follow-up interviews were conducted in 1991. The researcher had four primary findings from her study:

1. There was considerable variation in the meanings people attach to their role identities.
2. Various meanings individuals assign to role identities were based on their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of role involvement.
3. Although most meanings are shared by men and women, there were gender differences in some meanings which reflect gender differences in the perceived benefits and costs of role involvement.
4. The meanings men and women themselves attach to their role identities were associated with psychological symptoms and were involved in gender differences in distress (Simon, 1997, p. 256)

These findings highlight the need for researchers to be cautious with assigning and studying role definitions because the meanings vary among individuals and genders.

Although the meanings individuals assign to their identities can be similar and consistent throughout society, the priority or salience of those identities is a very personal process. Thoits (1992) conducted a study using structured interviews on a stratified random sample of 700 married and divorced urban adults to develop a list of 17 self-reported role-identities. In this study, she hypothesized:

> The salience or importance of various identities should differ systematically by gender and marital status; highly salient identities should have greater impacts on psychological symptoms than less salient identities; and identities that are more salient to particular gender-by-marital status subgroups should benefit those subgroups more than other subgroups (p. 236)

However, she unexpectedly found the identity hierarchies of married and divorced men and women were remarkably similar. In most comparisons, identities valued more highly by one group than another were of less benefit to the group that gave the role a higher value. Additionally, the salience of an identity did not reduce psychological symptoms. Instead, voluntary identities which are easier-to-exit such as friend or churchgoer reduced symptoms. Difficult-to-exit identities like parent or wife/husband only reduced symptoms when the stress experienced was low. The researcher concluded that psychological well-being did not depend on the number or salience of particular identities that individuals hold, but that the psychological impacts of identities depended on their combinations and differed by gender (Thoits, 1992).

Research has consistently demonstrated that role accumulations can have beneficial effects on physical and psychological well-being especially when the roles are of high quality (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000; Thoits, 1991). Theoretically, the more role-identities people hold, the more purpose, meaning,

behavioral guidance and positive self-appraisals they should obtain, generating better mental and physical health in contrast to persons with few or no roles (Thoits, 1991). Individuals who participate in and are satisfied with work and family roles experience greater well-being than those who participate in only one of the roles or who are dissatisfied with one or more of their roles. Additionally, participation in multiple roles provides a buffer for individuals from distress stemming from one particular role, much like a "diverse financial portfolio protects an individual's financial well-being from declining performance in one segment of the economy" (Thoits, 1991, p. 103). Conversely, positive experiences in one role can influence positive experiences and outcomes in other roles. Positive experiences from the participation in some roles can create energy that can be used to enhance experiences and increase the likelihood of being highly engaged in other roles (Marks, 1977).

Through the years, Thoits has built upon her accumulation hypothesis by refining the standard and increasing the focus to include an increasingly larger number of roles (first eight and then seventeen). In all of her studies, she found that increased numbers of roles were associated with lower levels of psychological distress and lower anxiety and depression for both men and women (Thoits, 1991, 1992, 2012).

Perrone et al. (2005) surveyed 35 male and 60 female college graduates (who were part of a separate longitudinal study on career and life development) to examine the impact of role congruence and role conflict on work, marital and life satisfaction in relation to gender roles. Seventy-eight of the participants were married and 66 percent had children. The five major life roles that were measured were: home and family, work, leisure, community and study. Participants were asked to report the ideal amount of time

they would spend on these activities versus the actual amount of time spent. The authors found that life satisfaction was positively correlated with marital satisfaction, work satisfaction and overall role congruence. This supported both their hypothesis and previous research. Of interest, work-family conflict was significantly related to marital satisfaction but not to work satisfaction indicating that conflict may affect family relationships more than it affects work performance.

Consistent with previous research, women in this study participated more in parenting and housework (including those whose salary was higher than their spouse's) than the men in the study who participated more in career and leisure activities. Both men and women reported that the parent role was their most rewarding role, however they differed in what they reported to be their most stressful role. As predicted, women felt the parenting role was the most stressful, and men felt the career role was most stressful (Perrone et al., 2005).

Research has also shown that although the intense demands of managing multiple roles may increase strain, strong support from family and colleagues can mitigate the negative effects. Both received and perceived support (the extent to which support is seen as being available) are important in addition to affective support (listening, encouragement), informational support, and all other tangible types of support (Perrone et al., 2005). To study how women who combine the roles of mother, spouse and professional perceived their multiple roles, Tiedje, et al. (1990) studied 158 married women with preschool children who were employed full-time (either as college professors or middle level managers). Their sample was extracted from an ongoing longitudinal study based on specific requirements. Contrary to previous literature and the

authors' proposed role hypothesis, they found that conflict was not an inevitable consequence of occupying these three demanding roles. In fact, compared to national norms, the women in this sample were especially satisfied with their parenting role and felt they were doing a good job at work. From the opposite perspective, the authors also found that balancing multiple roles did not always lead to perceptions of enhancement. Regardless of perceptions of enhancement, women who perceived their roles as conflicting were more depressed and less satisfied as parents.

Women in the Workforce

The mantra for women during the 60's and 70's was the desire to become a 'Super Woman' -- the perfect wife, mother, and career-person all rolled into one (Herkelmann et al., 1993). But, harsh reality set in as divorce rates began to rise, children became latch key kids and careers had to be sacrificed as women had to realize it was impossible to be 'all things to all people' (Herkelmann et al., 1993). Today, woman who are embracing new ideas like 'you can have it all, just not right now' and striving for work/life harmony have relieved some of the pressure for career women to be all things to all people (Slaughter, 2012). They still juggle all the traditional roles women have taken in the past (wife, mother, homemaker, part-time or full-time career person), but through a variety of paths women are learning and demanding to have a balance in their lives.

Much of the literature reviewed for this study cited United States Bureau of Labor Statistics to illustrate the change in the labor force and its effect on women (Burlew & Johnson, 1992; Hammer, et al. 1997; Herkelmann et al., 1993; Madsen, 2001). The data included in Table 4 was derived from the U.S. Bureau of Labor's *Women in the Labor*

Force: A Databook to show a more comprehensive and current picture of these noteworthy statistics:

Table 4. Women in the Labor Force

Married - Couple Wage Earner (Percent based on total employed)				Women in the work force (Percent based on total population)			
	Husband Only	Wife Only	Both	Total	Working Full Time	Children Under 18	No Children Under 18
1975	30.0%	2.9%	46.7%	42.0%	72.4%	47.4%	45.1%
1995	16.2%	4.4%	59.6%	55.6%	72.6%	69.7%	52.9%
2005	18.2%	5.3%	57.3%	56.2%	74.8%	70.5%	53.5%
2010	18.7%	6.8%	54.1%	53.6%	73.4%	71.3%	53.0%
2015	18.5%	6.2%	53.6%	53.7%	74.8%	69.9%	51.7%
2018	18.6%	6.3%	52.9%	54.9%	76.2%	71.4%	52.3%

The natural result of this increase of women in the workforce (most notably women with children under 18) was the change in the number of dual-career couples and women participating in traditionally male professions and nontraditional family arrangements (Boles et al., 2001; Burlew & Johnson, 1992; Madsen, 2001). In the Labor Report from 2018, 40.1 percent of the workforce was categorized as management, professional and related occupations. Interestingly, 44 percent of women fell into this category in comparison to 36.6 percent of men. Additionally, in 29 percent of dual income married couples, the wife earned more money than the husband (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019, 2017).

Table 5 is a chart depicting the Air Force active-duty workforce with data similar to the statistics in Table 1 (IDEAS, 2018). Unfortunately, the data in Table 4 does not include this study's focus area of general officers but it does depict the population from which those general officers are chosen. The sector that most closely reflects this study's target population is the "cols only" line since that is the year group prior to becoming a general officer.

Table 5. Women in the Military Labor Force

	Married Military Officers (Total population excluding generals)					Women Military Officers (Total population excluding generals)			
	Total	Active Duty Men with Civilian Spouse	Active Duty Women with Civilian Spouse	Air Force Military Married to Military	All Other Military Married to Military	Total	Single	Married with Children	Not Married with Children
2018	42,658	73.9%	10.1%	12.0%	3.9%	13,246	42.5%	29.4%	3.1%
Capts Only	13,730	68.7%	10.8%	16.5%	4.0%	4,989	41.8%	25.8%	2.4%
Cols Only	3,001	84.1%	9.9%	3.1%	2.9%	458	22.7%	52.2%	3.5%

Note: For all-inclusive data on Air Force officer marital status/children in the household see Appendix A.

The "captains only" line was included because this is one of the critical career decision making points for young female officers. Several studies have found that women leave the Air Force at a higher rate than men (Baldwin, 2000; DiSilverio, 2003; Losey, 2015; MLDC, 2010). The continuation rate of both men and women is similar during the first four years of service then it begins to gap significantly when the continuation rate of women begins to sharply decrease. The largest difference occurs between the 10- and 19-year points. At the 20-year point, the gap begins to rapidly close to where it is almost back to equal by the 29-year point (DiSilverio, 2003; MLDC, 2010). Air Force members traditionally get promoted to the rank of captain at four years and are eligible for retirement at the 20-year point. Critical decision points to remain in the service or separate occur once an officer's initial commitment is completed (between the 4 to 10 year point depending on your job choice) and once they have enough years for retirement.

Since the Air Force has to grow its own general officers, retention of the most talented officers at these critical decision points is crucial. Many factors go into a person's decision to push towards retirement or separate. In a 2009 study, Heilmann et al. examined the work and family influences on military officers' retention. A survey was sent to all 251 Air Force officers stationed at Vandenberg Air Force Base, California;

F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming and McChord Air Force Base, Washington with one to eight years of total military service. Once all incomplete questionnaires were discarded, the researchers ended up with 75 participants for a 29.9 percent response rate. The typical participant was a 30-year-old married male who had served in the Air Force for approximately seven years.

The survey assessed 10 dimensions (work experience, work overload, career development opportunities, advancement aspirations, advancement expectations, family responsibilities, family involvement, perceived family satisfaction with military life, work/home conflict (WHC), and turnover intention). From these dimensions, the following four hypotheses were developed and analyzed using a hierarchical linear regression (H1-H3) and a nonparametric test for difference in means (H4) (Heilmann et al., 2009, p. 88-89):

> **H1:** WHC would account for variance in turnover intention beyond that accounted for by work overload, advancement expectations, and stress such that effects on turnover intention will be greater for participants who report higher levels of WHC.
>
> - Hypothesis was not supported.
>
> **H2:** Work overload and family involvement will positively affect WHC, whereas family satisfaction with military life will negatively affect WHC.
>
> - Not entirely supported by the results of the regression analysis, but the predicted effects of both work overload and family satisfaction with military life on WHC were supported.
>
> **H3:** Controlling for work overload and advancement expectations, family satisfaction with military life will moderate the relationship between WHC and turnover intentions such that the interaction between family satisfaction with military life and WHC will decrease turnover intentions.
>
> - Hypothesis was not supported.
>
> **H4:** Parental status will positively affect WHC such that married, divorced, legally separated, or widowed individuals with children living at home will

report a higher level of WHC than married, divorced, legally separated, or widowed individuals with no children living at home.

- Hypothesis was not supported.

Interestingly, traditional predictors of turnover intention found in previous studies conducted in corporate America did not translate to this military study. Although this study did not support a direct influence of WHC on turnover intention, it did help expand the understanding of the construct and the role family plays in a young officer's decision to continue his/her career. The findings suggest that WHC, stress work overload and advancement expectations do not significantly influence the decision to separate from the Air Force (Heilmann et al., 2009). Instead, it appears, most members take into account their family's satisfaction with military life above their own work-related attitudes. There was a significant relationship between the perceived family's satisfaction with military life and the decision of the individual to separate. Those officers who perceived higher levels of family satisfaction with military life reported lower levels of WHC and had a lower intention to leave the service (Heilmann et al., 2009).

Unfortunately, this study did not separate results by gender so it does not provide a direct link to the decision-making process of young women. However, these results can be generalized and give us insight into the strong influences family has on the desire to stay in the military and obtain the highest ranks in the Air Force.

Military Women

Most of today's military women who are in high pressure, time consuming positions have figured out how to balance competing roles and succeed. Patten (2011) did a report for Pew Research on the military woman and discovered several key factors influencing the makeup of the military populations. First, one major observation was the

growing presence of women on active duty. From 1973-2010 the number of women in the armed forces has almost quadrupled even though the military as a whole has been reducing in end strength numbers. While there is an overall smaller number of women in the armed forces, a slightly higher percentage are officers (17 percent women to 15 percent men).

Today's Air Force woman is also more diverse than her male counterpart. Thirty-one percent of active-duty women are black compared to just 16 percent of men. They are 12 percent less likely than their male counterparts to be married, but if they are married it is most likely to another active-duty military member. When compared to all veterans, only 15 percent have experienced combat compared to 35 percent of men. But when segregated for post-Gulf War service, the number jumps to 24 percent (Patten, 2011).

There is minimal research related specifically to Air Force women and work-family conflicts. However, Vinokur et al. (1999) conducted an empirical study of 525 Air Force women from the active-duty, reserve and guard forces utilizing survey results from a 1993 DMDC study containing records for all 88,415 Air Force women who served during Desert Shield/Storm. Of the 525 respondents, 370 (70.5 percent) were enlisted and 155 (29.5 percent) were officers. The average years served was 8.72 years with an average age of 33.9 years. Twenty-one percent (110 respondents) had never been married. At the time of the study, 287 (55 percent) were married, 28 (5 percent) were separated, 97 (19 percent were divorced) and 3 (.06 percent) were widowed. Fifty-eight percent (298 respondents) were identified as primary caregivers for an average of 1.74 children. Respondents were initially contacted by mail with a letter describing the general purpose of the study with a 25 minute follow up telephone interview. Immediately,

following the telephone interview, the respondent was mailed two self-administered questionnaires. The respondents were paid for their participation (Vinokur et al., 1999).

The goal of this study was to replicate Frone's comprehensive work/life model using the following variables: job involvement, family involvement, job stress, family stress, work-family conflict, family-work conflict, job distress, family distress and depression. Similar results were observed even though the original model was used on a population that included both men and women. The Vinokur et al. (1999) extended model demonstrated a direct work-family conflict effect for women who occupy both parenting and occupational roles. Both job, marital distress and family-work conflict had an independent adverse effect on mental health and increased depression. In contrast, job and parental involvement had a beneficial effect on distress and had an adverse effect on work-family conflicts (Vinokur et al., 1999).

To provide insight and context to the way women narrate their experiences, Pawelczyk (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of female war veterans' narrative of their experiences in military conflicts and operations. The purpose of the study was to examine the interactional dynamics of the construction of professional military identity by analyzing achieved interviews in which women veterans shared stories of their military experiences. The subject videos were obtained from the Veterans History Project (VHS). VHS is run by the Library of Congress and "collects, preserves and makes accessible the personal accounts of American war veterans so that future generations may hear directly from veterans and better understand the realities of war" (Pawelczyk, p. 90, 2014). The collection features both female and male veterans and is a collection of interviews that are conducted by anyone with an interest, not just researchers or

professional interviewers. This study analyzed two interviews with female war veterans who have been in the Army since 2001 and both veterans in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The analysis methodology utilized aspects of conversation analysis and membership categorization analysis as well as the notion of double voice discourse to determine the dynamics and patterns of professional military identity construction in the course of an interview. The first part of the data analysis section looked at the exchanges in which the category of gender was explicitly or implicitly invoked. The second part of the study identified five discursive strategies used by the female interviewees as means for establishing legitimacy and constructing professional military identity. The five strategies were: an account of professional involvement; displaying expertise; soldiers are tough and agentive; distancing oneself from the category of women; and rejection of mental disorder.

The author concluded that female war veterans' answers contributed to the dominant construction of the soldier as male and masculine yet they also actively resisted and even challenged normative categorizations imposed by the interviewers. American female war veterans drew on selected aspects of symbolic masculinity and symbolic femininity in constructing their professional military identities. Both of these symbolic constructs allowed them to project their lived subjective experiences and the voice of the institution. Consequently, the female war veterans actively engaged in the process of redefining the symbolic category of 'soldier' which has traditionally been associated with tactical and instrumental qualities. The emotional voice of the female war veterans was strongly preferred and pursued in the interviews. It is worth emphasizing the female war veterans relied on the emotional aspects of their war experiences to interactionally build

and strengthen their professional identity. The analysis showed the interviewers were frequently interested in pursuing the women's emotional voice to expose the challenge that military conflict poses to women while female war veterans used the emotional voice to build their professional military persona. During the interviews whether explicitly or implicitly invoked by the interviewers, gender was both distanced from and relied upon by the female war veterans to build their professional identity further testifying to the existence of structural ambiguity for women soldiers. In addition, female war veterans depended on a number of strategies typically associated with the symbolic discourse of masculinity. Their reliance on these strategies reveals that the professional identity of a soldier is still comprised of activities and characteristics commonly ascribed to men and thereby demonstrating the continuing presence and significance of hegemonic masculinity in the context of the military (Pawelczyk, 2014).

Consistent with civilian research, service members who married at an older age have a reduced risk for divorce. Similarly, a marriage with children is at a reduced risk of dissolution (Karney & Crown, 2007). Unlike in the civilian community where the divorce rate is nearly twice as high for blacks, in the military it is only slightly higher. Sustained deployments effect the rate of divorce, but differently than the popular press might lead the public to believe. There is very little evidence that the demands of military service and deployments account for negative outcomes in military marriages. The stress hypothesis as it is called can only be found among active-duty Air Force where the longer the service member was deployed there was a correlated higher risk of divorce. However, in the Army, Navy and Marines the longer the member was deployed the lower the subsequent risk for divorce (Karney & Crown, 2007).

Several studies suggest that compensation offered by all of the military services entices members to marry earlier when they might otherwise delay walking down the aisle or not marrying at all (Hogan & Seifert, 2010; Karney & Crown, 2007; Lundquist & Smith, 2005). Military compensation and benefits packages for military personnel who have dependents provide greater financial value and intrinsic benefits compared to similar personnel who do not have dependents. For example, the non-taxable housing allowance offered to a married person is about 25 percent greater than those members with no dependents (Hogan & Seifert, 2010). Karney and Crown (2007) called this motivation to marry the selection hypothesis which supports that once members are in the service, they marry younger and have children sooner than their civilian counterparts. In addition to the everyday benefits, they also suggest that members with pending deployments enter marriages that they might not otherwise enter and are at greater risk of subsequent dissolution.

Hogan and Seifert (2010) further researched the marriage and the military question by using the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey. The purpose of the study was to test the hypothesis that people with active-duty military service marry earlier than otherwise comparable civilians. The population included both men and women who had either served or not served in the military. All were at least high school graduates and between the ages of twenty-three to twenty-five years old. Two samples were drawn for analysis. The "primary" sample was of 2,487 veterans who had two or more years of active military service in comparisons to 76,456 people who had not served. The second sample differentiated which type of military service and included all the veterans and civilians from the primary sample in addition to 625 Reserve or National

Guard members and 925 veterans who served as active-duty members but had less than the two-year requirement. Cross-tabulations and chi-square statistics were computed to compare veterans with at least two years of service to nonveterans. To examine whether serving in the military encourages marriage, a series of logistic regressions were estimated. A similar logistic regression was estimated on the probability of getting divorced (Hogan & Seifert, 2010).

The results of the logistic regression analyses indicated that those who have had two or more years of active-duty service are significantly more likely to be married when compared to similar civilians who have not served. For those who have married, the probability of divorce is significantly greater for veterans. Since the hypothesis is that the military compensation and benefits system provides an incentive for early marriage, the second sample with mixed types of veterans and civilians was used to compare. The results indicate those who served in the military for less than two years have a higher probability of ever getting married than those who have never served, but they were still less than those who served more than two years. The same held true for the probability of divorcing. The authors recommend the Department of Defense should examine its compensation and benefits and consider changing the benefits to be phased in the longer a military person serves to improve retention (Hogan & Seifert, 2010).

Lundquist and Smith (2005) used the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) to examine fertility of women in the military compared with that of similar women in the civilian world. The sample included 456 active-duty enlisted women (officers are not included in the NLSY data) and 2,793 civilian women born between the years of 1957-1961. In order to isolate the effect of the variable of military service, the

two populations used propensity score matching for number of past children, race, marital status (depending on the outcome variable) with a match within +/-0.1. Matched cases were analyzed via bivariate logistic regression models for each year.

The study found that civilians were less likely to be married between the ages of 18-22 during the 1979 data year. In fact, at every stage, single women in the military were twice as likely to marry as single civilian women. By the 1983 data year, a majority of the women still serving in the military were married. The study controlled for marital status and eliminated full-time homemakers to ensure like time constraints, and at every stage military women's fertility levels were either higher or on par with those of their civilian counterparts. The researchers concluded that the military environment may foster, not hinder, family formation. They found that enlisted women married earlier than their civilian counterparts and had on par or higher fertility rates during most data years. The researchers found it to be likely that marital trends related to military benefits as supported by the finding that married mothers were more likely to stay in the service than single mothers (Lundquist & Smith, 2005).

Regardless of the job specialty, rank, or family structure, being a woman in the military has a multitude of challenges that male counterparts traditionally do not have to conquer. This population definitely deserves additional attention, but until then many of the lessons learned from research of women executives can be transferred and adapted.

Executive Women

In 2017, there were 24 (4.8 percent) Fortune 500 companies that were run by women (Catalyst, 2018). Like the 28 Air Force women general officers in this study, they were very capable women working among very capable men. Both groups had similar

stressors, but the way they were viewed by others and the methods they used to conquer the challenges were often different.

Gray and Lynch (1983) studied 232 married women physicians, lawyers and professors chosen at random from Philadelphia directories. The result of their survey showed that over 80 percent of the women stated that their husbands, colleagues and parents were supportive of their careers, yet 77 percent of them experienced strains between their family and career roles. More than half of the women who had children indicated that they were ambivalent when someone else took care of their children. When asked to rank the relative importance of each of their roles, 45 percent stated that it was impossible to rank the relative importance of these roles, and 8 percent reported that their careers definitely came first.

The authors compared the results of their study to a similar one conducted in 1970. One of the significant changes was that professional women were taking their careers far more seriously in 1983 than in 1970. Some indicators identified to support this finding centered on the numerous ways the women in the study tried to avoid limiting their professional development. For example, most of the women hired outside help to assist them with chores, or they shared equal responsibility for household tasks with family members. A number of women managed to overcame geographic limitations by either temporarily living apart from their families or commuting long distances in order to pursue careers. Fourteen percent of the women indicated they were considering not having children. These sacrifices come with a cost. Very few of the women surveyed in 1970 felt conflict between their various roles, yet almost all the women in the 1983 study reported frequent strain and conflict between home and career (Gray & Lynch, 1983).

While the ranks of women in corporate and military organizations have grown exponentially over the last two decades, these groups are still fundamentally male dominated. However, research and anecdotal evidence suggests most successful organizations will continue to develop the talents and encourage their female employees to take more responsibility and challenges. Much of the existing literature suggests that women's careers progress differently than men in large part as a result of developmental differences between men and women (O'Neil et al., 2007).

O'Neil et al. (2007) compiled a literature review on women's careers using 76 articles from 15 peer reviewed journals published between 1990 to 2006. The sampling of journals was from three main literature streams: careers, management and applied psychology. Based on this review, they identified four patterns and associated paradox based on the literature written on the state of women's careers at the dawn of the 21st century.

> **Pattern 1**: Women's careers comprise more than 'work'; they are embedded in women's larger-life contexts.
>
> **Paradox 1**: Organizational realities demand the separation of career and life.

Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) found that in comparison to men, women's career histories were relational. They noted that for the women "career decisions were normally part of a larger and intricate web of interconnected issues, people and aspects that had to come together in a delicately balanced package" (p. 111). What makes it even more challenging is the delicately balanced package changes as woman's care and life responsibilities change according to life stage concerns. However, regardless of the life stage, women were consistently concerned with succeeding in both their careers and their relationships regardless of their stage of life (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

The paradox to a woman's balanced embedded life, is that workplace still favors the traditional family model where male workers are the norm and career and life are fairly separate entities. Companies in all sectors are rallying to change their cultures and put women-friendly policies in place. However, a majority of organizations continue to be structured around the traditional 1950's family that supports the breadwinner model with men delegating family responsibilities to the spouse (O'Neil et al., 2007). This support structure is definitely still in place in the Air Force and the traditional military family is the most successful model in a highly mobile culture.

Pattern 2: Families and careers are central to women's lives.

Paradox 2: Families continue to be liabilities to women's career development.

There is a significant amount of literature on work-family conflict and work/life balance. Numerous studies have investigated the influence of family structure on career advancement and success with mixed results. However, there is strong support that indicates women personally benefit from multiple roles which in turn increases job commitment and satisfaction. However, successfully managing multiple roles is not rewarded in the workplace and continues to be a liability (Burke & Stets, 1999; Kirchmeyer, 2002). In a controversial study, Hewlett (2002) suggested that many high-achieving women have sacrificed their ability to have children in order to meet the demands required of them to advance in their careers. She proposed women are forced to choose between career and family because climbing the career ladder and silencing the biological clock were out of sync. As result, many women chose to postpone starting a family to focus on their careers. Often this delay makes conception more challenging. Younger women are more likely to still believe it is possible to have it all (Hewlett, 2002; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). However, older women have revised their images of what

"having it all" looks like and many have rebalanced their lives to focus more on family, personal interests and relationships (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005; Winsor & Ensher, 2002). A majority of the work-family conflict research is focused on the role of parenting, but childless single women experience the work/life balance struggle too. Organizations frequently count on non-parents to take on extra duties when needed. They also count on women without children being more likely to be more consumed by their work (Hamilton et al., 2006)

Regardless of all the companies that are implementing robust work-family benefits, there are still some stigmas attached to taking advantage of the time off. Women who feel they do not have direct support and encouragement from their managers minimize participation in the program in order to not be penalized (Schwartz, 1996). Since women are the majority of employees who utilize these family friendly benefits, negative fallout would more directly affect their careers as compared to men who do not utilize the benefits as frequently (O'Neil et al., 2007).

Pattern 3: Women's career paths reflect a wide range and variety of patterns.

Paradox 3: Organizations predominantly organize for and reward upwardly-mobile career paths.

The review of empirical literature revealed that the architecture of women's careers is constructed uniquely and differently from men. Women's careers are more likely to reflect a range of paths and patterns than men's careers. Huang and Sverke (2007) found those women's occupational paths were diverse, represented by patterns of upward mobility, stability and downward mobility and fluctuations. While the traditional notion of a career as a hierarchical progression up an organizational ladder is still

represented in many industries, there is also emerging evidence that suggest more snake-like or zig zag career paths.

Boundary-less and kaleidoscope careers have been proposed as the emerging career patterns of the future. Contemporary organizational career paths paradoxically remain largely defined by traditional dimensions of length of service, geographic mobility, and progression up the organizational ladder trajectory, climbing the corporate pyramid, and monetary, power and status rewards (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). This traditional hierarchy is definitely still ingrained in the United States Air Force where developmental teams still issue advice based on traditional career progression pyramids.

> **Pattern 4:** Human and social capital are critical factors for women's career development.
>
> **Paradox 4:** Women's human and social capital augmentation has not defeated the glass ceiling.

Human capital is commonly acknowledged as an important asset for career development. Education, training, developmental opportunities, job tenure, experience and mobility in work assignments each contribute to enhancing human capital. A survey of CEOs found that as a group, they believed a lack of human capital (i.e., line experience) was the primary reason why women are not advancing in organizations (Ragins et al, 1998). Unlike men, in order to be successful, it is critical that women acquire job-relevant human capital; education for increased salary level, and job experience to advance in managerial level jobs (Melamed, 1995).

Despite demonstrating significant human and social capital accumulation, paradoxically the glass ceiling continues to prevail and few women ascend to the highest rungs of the corporate hierarchy. Although women comprise 46 percent of all U.S. workers, hold 50 percent of all professional positions, graduate with 57 percent of

bachelor's degrees and 58.8 percent of all master's degrees (including 30 percent of MBAs), examination of the end of the managerial pipeline shows that very few women are actually moving up to top level management (Ragins et al., 1998). In 2006, research found that close to 50 percent of Fortune 1000 firms currently have no women at the executive level (Helfat et al., 2006). It is no wonder they leave corporate careers to consult, start their own businesses or change career fields. But it is concerning that there are the inherent biases to these departures based on the gendered language surrounding women's career choices. Notions that women are opting out or taking career off-ramps all reflect a corporate or organizational framework as the only legitimate path to success (O'Neil et al., 2007).

Running a company or holding a high-level leadership position in any organization is challenging and time consuming. Along the way, every woman is forced to develop secrets to success. Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2009) interviewed 25 women who held titles such as CEO, president, and vice president at public and private companies, government agencies, and nonprofits spanning a wide range of industries. The interviews addressed the women's career progression, challenges encountered during their careers and successful coping strategies. Their primary research question was focused on how some women managed to become executives and enjoy family with a special interest in the stance of their intimate partner, given the nontraditional nature or their relationship. The researchers found that the women designed and adapted their career and family strategies over time. They all held true to the women's values and accounted for the availability of support at home and at work. Key tactics included adapting to the partner's

lack of support, outsourcing domestic work and sequencing career and family (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

Of the 25 women interviewed, the researchers crafted seven case studies that presented a mix of life situations to demonstrate the dialog. They also summarized a list of lessons learned.

First, dual devotion to a leadership career and a family is a tough endeavor. Several women detailed challenges they encountered rising up the ladder because of long work hours, frequent travel and the emotional tug-of-war between executive and family. There were also gender related road blocks that included inhospitable workplaces and delayed promotions. On the home front, even the more supportive marriages involved compromise on topics as life changing as whose career took precedence or as simple as who handled the domestic work. Regardless of the battles, these executive women still felt fulfilled at both home and work (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

Secondly, character and your outlook on life definitely matter. It could be required because of the nature of the work or just so you can successfully navigate your career and your family needs (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

Third, it matters where you work. You need to consider the nature of the employing industry and organization and make sure it is a good fit (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

Fourth, it takes a village. All of these women were successful in part because they created complex support systems across domains of work, family, and community (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

Fifth, it matters who you marry. Choosing the right partner is critical to an ambitious women's quest for career/family balance. This was the one area where the subjects experienced a wide range of supportive stances from partners. Of note, the corresponding partner's career and background seemed to matter greatly. When husbands are supportive, their support can be both emotional (providing advice, encouragement, and emotional regulation) and instrumental (technical support and professional assistance). In some cases, men even take on stereotypically feminine behaviors like staying home with the children or relocating with the spouse (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

Many of the issues addressed in the current research on executive women and their families are directly applicable to the military woman population – balancing devotion to both career and family, marrying the right spouse, establishing a reliable support network and deciding when or if you are going to have children (Iskra, 2010). However, there are some career stressors that are decidedly different. One significant difference is there are no pay equity complaints because salary and benefits are determined by law and based on rank and the number of years in service (DFAS, 2019). Another difference is being able to ensure you get the job that best fits you and your family's needs. In the military, officers have some influence in choosing their Air Force Specialty Code or career field, but, once they enlist/take oath of office, the needs of the military come first and primarily officers are told where they will be assigned and when (Iskra, 2010). Not having considerable influence on your progression or location makes a difference when couples are considering the best options to making dual career paths work (Asch et al., 2016; Iskra, 2010).

Work/Life Conflict

There have been numerous studies conducted in the United States examining the effect of gender in the ever-changing area of work life conflict. Even though research results vary, there is some consistency that indicates many United States. women perceive greater levels of WLC than their male counterparts/spouses because women assume a disproportionate amount of the family responsibilities even in dual-career professions (Burlew & Johnson, 1992; Gill & Davidson, 2001; Madsen, 2001; Segal, 1986; Tompson & Werner, 1997). For those women who take on the challenge of working in traditionally male professions, it is even more difficult because those jobs are structured to be compatible with the traditional responsibilities of men rather than women in the family (Burlew & Johnson, 1992). Several very specific factors were identified as contributing factors to increasing WLC in women. These roles included: gender role attitudes, family climate, cooperation regarding domestic responsibilities and perceived attitudes of gender roles of people close to the individual.

McMillian et. al. (2011) completed a thorough synthesis of the WLC literature to "construct definitions and measurement tools for the work/life interface concepts: conflict, enrichment, and balance" (p.6). Key definitions and discussions regarding their work are pertinent to this literature review included in the originally sourced research. WLC is defined as "a form of interrole conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985, p. 77). The primary factors that determine the level of WFC that are experienced is often influenced by the satisfaction level of childcare arrangements, job security/insecurity, work involvement, perceived flexibility, partner's WLC and family

involvement, perceived control and goal progress (Hammer, et al. 1997; Madsen, 2001). In 2006, Greenhaus et al. expanded the definition to include conflict that occurs when one role interferes with an individual's effectiveness in the other role. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three forms of work-family conflicts: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict.

Time based is considered to be the most prevalent type of conflict (Hammer & Thompson, 2003). It occurs in one of two ways (1) the amount of time spent in one role reduces the time available for other roles and (b) preoccupation with one role impairs the ability to function in other roles regardless of physical presence. The conflict is created because the total amount of time and energy a person has available is a fixed amount and participation in multiple roles decreases the total amount of time and energy available to meet all demands (Marks, 1977).

Strained based conflict occurs when the strain (or stressors) felt in one role make it difficult to perform in other roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Strained-based conflict is based in the idea that fatigue and irritability created in one role negatively affects a person's ability to perform required activities in the other roles. Work related strain occurs with stressful events at work or job burnout that creates fatigue or depression that manifests while in the family role (Bartolome & Evans, 1980). Family based strain primarily occurs when spousal career and family expectations are not in congruence (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Behavioral-based conflict occurs when the behaviors required in one role are incompatible with the behaviors required in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

As many scholars have observed, the work-family literature is dominated by studies focusing on the conflict perspective (Barnett, 1998; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). However, much of the role and identify theory research highlights the positive nature of living in a world with multiple roles. As a result of this influence, researchers have begun focusing on studies with a more balanced approach that recognizes the positive effects of combining work and family roles (McMillan et al., 2011). The increased emphasis on positive interdependency between work life and family life is consistent with emerging trends in psychology, organizational behavior and family studies that focus on strengths rather than weaknesses (McMillan et al., 2011).

Work/life enrichment and work/life balance theories have emerged as a result of this shift. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) define work/life enrichment "as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role" (p. 73). Enrichment occurs through one of two paths: 1) the instrumental path where resource gains in one role directly increase performance in other roles or 2) the affect path where gains in one role directly increase performance in other roles due to overall improvements in the individual's positive affect (Carlson et al., 2006).

Enrichment is composed of four types of gains (Carlson et al., 2006, p. 136):

1. Developmental (acquisition of knowledge, skills, perspectives or values)
2. Affective (changes in behavior and or attitudes)
3. Capital (acquisition of assets)
4. Efficiency (development of an increased focus level)

The definition of work/life balance is far more controversial partly because everyone, including the media, has his or her own twist. Traditional efforts to define the

work/life balance concept viewed it as the absence of conflict between the work and life domains (McMillan et al., 2011).

Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2003) define work/life balance as "the extent to which individuals are equally engaged in and equally satisfied with work and family roles" (p. 513). This definition, especially for a population like the military, makes it extremely difficult to ever truly find balance. For this reason, Frone (2003) steers away from the focusing on engagement and equality, and contends "the balance occurs when there is a lack of interference between the work and family roles" (p. 145). This definition helps to move away from the "zero sum gain concept" by focusing on the idea that balance can occur without spending exactly the same amount of time in both roles.

McMillian et al. (2011) identifies two newer schools of thought. Greenhaus et. al. (2003) defines work/life balance as "the extent to which individuals are equally engaged in and equally satisfied with work and family roles" (p. 513). This definition is paired with the Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) definition of: "the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in work and family domains" (p. 458). This definition builds upon role balance theory that contends it is possible to be fully engaged in both roles without sacrificing one for the other (McMillan et al., 2011). As a result, balance becomes a continuum with imbalance (in either role) anchoring one end and balance (again in either role) anchoring the other end. Greenhaus et al. (2003) outlines three components of balance:

1. Time balance (time is divided equally between roles)
2. Involvement balance (equal psychological involvement in both roles)
3. Satisfaction balance (equal satisfaction is gained from both roles)

New to the discussion is the concept of work/life harmony. Work/life harmony is defined as "an individually pleasing, congruent arrangement of work and life roles that is interwoven into a single narrative of life" (McMillan et al., 2011).

McMillan et al. (2011) have proposed a model primarily building upon tenants from Carlson et al (2006) and Greenhaus and Beutell (1985). In their model, "harmony occurs when the resources gained through work/life enrichment (development, affect, efficiency, and capital gains) are successfully aligned with and serve to alleviate stressors (time, behavior, and strain) arising from work/life conflict" (p.15).

The purpose of their model is twofold. First it goes beyond work/life balance by integrating the concepts of work/life balance and work/life enrichment into harmony. They contend that harmony cannot exist in a vacuum because it is negatively affected by role inequities that result from work/life conflict which is defined as "a form of interrole conflict" (Frone, 2003; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Additionally, it involves negotiating shared role responsibilities which result from behavioral and process resources (development, affect, efficiency, and capital gains) (Carlson, et al., 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007).

One unique aspect about the McMillan et al. (2011) model is work/life harmony can be applied to individuals as well as organizations. By definition, an individual's overall harmony can be assessed by examining levels of experienced conflict and enrichment gains. In line with Frone (2003) and Hill et al. (2007) the concept of integrating work and life is not a zero-sum gain. As individuals increase their resources, a surplus of gains can develop which results in increasingly positive perceptions of work/life harmony and ultimately organizational performance (McMillan et al., 2011).

Regardless of which definition is used to examine the interaction between work, life, family and friends, having an acceptable distribution that aligns with individual priorities and values is important to success and happiness. Not having enough time is the most prevalent factor, but incompatible roles and stressful relationship strains are equally to blame for work/life conflict. However, the benefits of successfully managing multiple roles can provide enrichment, renewed energy and financial resources that promote confidence and physical and emotional well-being.

Military Work/Life Conflict

There were very few studies that look at work/life conflict through a military lens and even fewer that looked at it specifically for the Air Force. Sachau et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine WLC in a military law enforcement agency known as the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI). The purpose of the study was to examine the relationships among work/life balance, job satisfaction and turnover intentions in a sample of employees in the AFOSI. The researchers had the following six hypotheses:

> **H1:** We predicted both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict would be negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with turnover rates.
>
> **H2:** We predicted that work-to-family conflict would be more highly related to job satisfaction and turnover than would family-to-work conflict.
>
> **H3:** Organizational, supervisory and peer support will be negatively correlated with work-to-family and family-to-work conflict.
>
> **H4**: Organizational, supervisory and peer support will be positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively correlated with turnover intentions.
>
> **H5**: Work-to-family and family-to-work conflict will be higher for agents than staff.

> **H6:** The pattern of correlations among conflict, support and satisfaction variables will be the same for agents and staff members (Sachau et al, 2012, pp. 64-66).

A 24-item questionnaire was emailed to 2,180 personnel. The response rate was 54 percent for a population of 1,152 made up of 171 officers, 619 enlisted personnel and 362 civilians (896 males, 256 females). A principal components analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the questionnaire and produced five significant components. Multiple regression analyses were performed on each of the dependent variables (Sachau et al., 2012).

In all six cases, the hypotheses resulted as predicted. The results suggest that when the demands of the job interfere with their home lives, AFOSI personnel become less satisfied and they think about leaving OSI. Additionally, the results supported Work/life balance can reduce work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict in military law enforcement. In this study, organizational support had a stronger relationship with work-to-family conflict, satisfaction and turnover than supervisory or peer support. Finally, the researchers found that agents experienced higher levels of work conflict and lower levels of satisfaction than staff, but they also experienced less organizational support. The researchers did not address work-family conflict in regards to deployments (which in the AFOSI community can be as long as two years) in this study but recommend it as a topic in the future (Sachau et al., 2012). It costs approximately $170,000 just to train an OSI agent, so reducing turnover in this low density, high demand career field is critical (Sachau et al., 2012).

Britt and Dawson (2005) conducted a longitudinal study that examined multiple predictors of work-family conflict from four classes: workload, job attitudes, unit attributes and health variables. The purpose of the study was to identify the predictors of

WFC and examine whether ratings of leadership and unit cohesion might serve as moderators of the relation between the predictors and WFC. Four hundred and ninety-three soldiers who were in garrison (working at home station) participated in this study. The participants had an average age of 25.5 years and were 85 percent male and 15 percent female. The soldiers were a combination of ranks and came from both combat and support units stationed at bases in either Germany or Italy. The researchers used a variety of appropriate instruments to develop a survey to measure WFC, job attitudes, unit attitudes, and measures of health which they administered during two time periods. Participants were only included in the analysis if they participated in both sessions. Mean, standard deviations and Cronbach's alphas (where appropriate) were calculated for all of the predictors and various regression analyses were performed on the data.

Results of the study found that aspects of workload (work hours, hours of sleep, days training, perceived work overload) and measures of health and morale were the strongest concurrent predictors of WFC. The two job-related attributes that proved uniquely predictive of WFC were job satisfaction and job recognition. Interestingly, there were no significant differences between single soldiers and married soldiers with children in relation to these predictors. The results for horizontal cohesion suggest that tight bonds between unit members may cause them to place precedence on the work-related aspects of their life which may lead to greater WFC. The results also indicated that the relationship between many of the predictors and WFC were moderated based on the positive or negative ratings of leadership, especially officer leadership (Britt & Dawson, 2005).

Although many people would argue that every organization has unique demands and requirements that add to the stress and strain affecting work/life balance, military work/life balance has an additional demand because it is considered a greedy institution. Segal (1986) identifies a greedy institution by how different kinds of organized groups compete with each other for the limited time, energy, loyalty and commitment of individuals. Greedy institutions use non-physical mechanisms and cultivate voluntary compliance as a means of encompassing their members (Sullivan, 2014). Both the military and the family depend on the commitment of their members to survive and succeed. In most scenarios of a military family, one or both parents experience the sensation of having to split their amount of participation and loyalties between work and home which makes these two organizations in constant competition with each other and other social groups (Segal, 1986).

According to Segal (1986), the military has an unusual pattern in which it makes demands on service members and their families. Although most of the job tasks in the military can be found as a comparable position in the civilian world, the military creates a unique situation in the constellation of requirements that makes the institution especially greedy. Part of the issue is the inconsistency of the demands which varies in frequency and intensity among and within the services and over the course of a military career. If a service member stays in for more than one enlistment, his/her family can expect to experience all the specific unique demands the military has to offer. The characteristics that make this life-style so unique include, but are not limited to: risk of injury or death of the service member; geographic mobility; periodic, prolonged separation of the service member from his/her family and living and working in foreign countries. Additionally,

the family has normative pressures directly regarding their roles in the military community especially if they reside on a military installation (Segal, 1986).

What Segal (1986) views as a greedy family is much more common but varies based on the makeup of its members. Nuclear families make different demands on different members. All members are expected to be emotionally committed to the family, to display affection toward the other members, to identify with the family as a unit and to fulfill role obligations that are diffused relative to most other social groups. However, the family is not a greedy institution for all members. It is greedier for some members than others, in most cases for the woman who is expected to devote most of her time and emotional energies to the family (Segal, 1986). This is fine for the stay-at-home mom, but it creates tremendous conflict for the working Air Force mom. The greedy institution of the family is also more prevalent during certain life phases. New marriage and those with young or special needs children have a greater time and emotional commitment. And, of course, when there is only one parent, the greediness is intensified (Segal, 1986).

Although dealing with long hours, deployments and the characteristics and challenges of the greedy institutions are difficult on any military family, it can be especially difficult when the service member is a woman.

Spouse Work/Life Conflict

As women's presence in the labor force continues to increase, inevitably, so does the number of dual-career couples who must manage the challenges of work and family. The dual-career couple has been defined as "a unit where adult members of the household pursue careers (i.e., jobs that require a high degree of commitment) and at the same time maintain a family life that may include children" (Hammer et al., 1997, p. 187).

A common problem for dual career couples is finding satisfactory balance and expectation between equally valued family and professional identities. This can be especially complicated if the set of meanings a woman holds for her family identity is incongruent with her husband's expectations (Burke, 1991).

Bird and Schnurman-Crook (2005) conducted a qualitative study of 15 dual-career couples (randomly selected from a pool of 100 couples) that examined the connection between a partner's professional identity and coping behaviors implemented in response to work and family stressors. The researchers conducted open ended semi-structured interviews in the couples' homes that lasted approximately 3 hours. Each couple was interviewed separately then together as a couple.

Their analysis suggested that dual-career couples enact professional and family identities that rely on being competent and responsible in both work and family roles. Instead of finding ways to scale back to give more time to the family, the couples in this study focused on coping mechanisms that allowed them to maintain high expectations both at work and in the family (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005). Strong identification of self with both professional and family identities was prominent in both individual and couple conversations. One noted gender difference was that only the men mentioned the financial benefits of dual employment, probably because it helped provide some relief from their role of being the traditional primary breadwinner. When women spoke of career involvement, they never mentioned financial rewards (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005).

Women when discussing their professional identity talked about it being equal to their spouses and highlighted that their husbands were proud of them and the work they

did. They also carried that pride and respect to their children and felt their work provided great value in their children's eyes (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005). These statements are consistent with previous research that found having significant approval of how time is spent in the professional domain can be an important source of identity validation (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

There is extensive literature that links a variety of organizational, job, personal and family characteristics to the number of hours an employee works from a social identity perspective (Greenhaus et al., 2012). Studies show that working longer hours is consistent with a strong work identity and working fewer hours is consistent with a strong family identity. However, there is an inconsistency in sex differences in regards to the work identity/work hour relationship and, of course, sometimes individuals do not act in ways that are consistent with their identities (Greenhaus et al., 2012).

Greenhaus et al. (2012) conducted a hierarchical regression analysis that examined how 193 married college graduates and business professionals allocated work hours based on their work and family identities. The study's hypothesis focused on gender differences and the following four measures: work hours, work overload, work identity (work centrality, job level and salary) and family identity (family centrality, family satisfaction, and family time). It controlled for spouse's employment status and competitiveness of the respondent's industry. Below are the hypotheses:

> **H1:** Predicted that when work overload was low, the positive relation between work identity and work hours would be stronger for men than for women.
>
> **H2:** Predicted an interaction among family identity, workload, and sex on work hours. Specifically, it was expected that there would be no relation between family identity and work hours for men or women when work overload was high. However, when work overload was low, the negative

> relation between family identity and work hours would be stronger for women than for men (Greenhaus et al., 2012, p. 31).

The study's findings were consistent with previous research and suggested strong situational demands to work long hours which constrained individuals from acting in identity consistent ways. Basically, when work overload is high, individuals work relatively long hours regardless of the strength of either their work or family identities. However, the opposite is also true. When work overload was low, the work identity was positively related to work hours and family identity was negatively related. These findings suggest less demanding jobs provide sufficient discretion and flexibility so individuals can act in accordance with their identities. However, there are gender differences in how the strength of work and family identities affect work hour decisions. For women, three of the four family identity variables were associated with restricted work hours. Therefore, weak situational demands from a less demanding job permit women to act in ways that are consistent with their identities (Greenhaus et al., 2012).

Men construe their identities differently than women. In this study, men's work hours were generally unrelated to the demands of their job or the strength of their work and family identities. This does not necessarily indicate the amount of hours men are required to work are irrelevant to their work and family identities (Greenhaus et al., 2012). It is far more likely that men focus more on earnings, power and promotions and believe the extra hours and facetime in the workplace – even in undemanding jobs or in low level, poor paying positions –will help them advance. Similarly, the non-responsiveness of men's work hours to family related variables does not necessarily mean that their family identity is irrelevant

but rather that they may construe their family identity largely in terms of being the dominant breadwinner (Greenhaus et al., 2012).

Understanding the different meanings and priorities women place on their identities and roles was crucial to studying their journey through the labyrinth. Air Force women general officers juggle multiple, demanding roles every day. Consistent with Thoits' (1991) research, they seemed to thrive and gain endless energy from the activities associated with each identity. True work/life balance, regardless of the definition being used, is valued by most professional woman.

Most research in this area focuses on how couples share household and childcare responsibilities. Phillips and Imhoff (1997) found that the relationship between marital satisfaction and couple's perceptions of how equitably household work and parenting is divided is critical to couple's work/life balance. Involvement in work and family roles differ across dual-earner/dual-career couples and depend on the degree of traditional gender role expectations. This affects how each member of the couple responds to various work and family demands (Hammer et al., 1997). Women in dual-earner couples who performed a significant amount of the housework compared to their husbands have lower perceptions of fairness of labor allocation and higher conflict than women who equally share in the housework workload with their husbands (Hammer et al., 1997). Part of the resentment stems from the finding that based on traditional gender role expectation, women in dual-earner couples restructured their work activities around their family responsibilities more than their husbands do (Hammer et al., 1997).

In an attempt to determine what defines equitable division of household labor, researchers analyze the number of hours a wife works, the relative income of the two

spouses, the educational attainment of the partners, and the gender-related attributes and spousal support of the husband (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997). Regardless of most husbands' intentions, a number of studies still indicate that while women have taken on additional roles outside the home, their level of involvement with childcare and household responsibilities has not changed relative to their husbands'. Apparently, women are still the predominant provider of childcare, even in dual-income households (Phillips & Imhoff, 1997).

Many of these studies just focus on dual career couples, but little is known about the spousal support received by married executive women. Do women in the C-suite need more/different support than those at the lower levels and what spousal contributions do women at this level value most? To find out, Ezzedeen and Richey (2008) did a qualitative study guided by phenomenological paradigms on 20 senior and executive level women. The focus and interview discussion centered around the following questions (p. 1110-1111):

1. What are the types and categories of support provided by the husbands of executive women?
2. Which support behaviors are most and least valued, and which are considered unsupportive?

The study targeted married executive women but did include two individuals who were divorced (primarily because a lack of social support from their ex-husbands). The participants were solicited using personal and professional contacts of the researchers. Of the 20 participants six worked in private businesses, six in public companies, five in government agencies and three worked for non-profit organizations. Their average age was 49.5 years with a majority receiving yearly salaries of over $100K. The respondents averaged 12.25 years of executive experience, were married for 22.85 years and 18 of 20

had children. All put in a great deal of time and energy into their careers and averaged 49.30 hours per week at the office, 10.20 hours at home and 8.05 hours doing chores at home (Ezzedeen & Richey, 2008).

The researchers conducted 17 semi-structured 45-minute interviews by telephone and three in person. Transcripts were analyzed for six supportive behavior categories: emotional support, household help, help with family members, esteem support, career support and husbands' career and lifestyle choices. Based on the group results, the most valued behaviors (in order of importance) included: emotional support, esteem support, help with family members, career support and help with household. The least supportive behaviors in rank order were inadequate help with the household, lack of emotional support, career precedence of the husband and limited career support. This study corroborates the significance of non-work support for executive women along with the work support already addressed in research (Ezzedeen & Richey, 2008).

Splitting up the household chores and the care of children is one piece of the conflict, but, the other one is how to manage career progression and whose career takes precedence. Gordon and Whelan-Berry (2005) conducted a qualitative exploratory study involving 36 white, professional women between the ages of 35 and 50 years old who were part of dual career couples. Interviewees had been married between 5 to 20 years and all had one or more children. The study examined the contributions of the husbands of midlife women in helping them balance employment and family demands. The subjects were all women who had attained significant professional stature with husbands who were equally accomplished.

The researchers based the study on the following two questions:

1. What role has your husband played in helping you manage family and career?
2. How do you interface with your husband's career and vice versa?

The researchers used a non-random sample of Boston area professionals using a snowball technique. Each audio taped interview lasted between one and three hours. In 22 percent of the couples, the husband's career took precedence most often because he earned the larger salary and/or the woman's job was mobile. In some cases, the husband's ego needs such as providing security for his family, being the primary breadwinner or having status or power influenced the priority. In 19 percent of the couples, the wife's career took precedence for the same primary reasons of salary and mobility. In 58 percent of the couples the two careers had equal precedence but, in most cases, both parties had made sacrifices or trade-offs throughout their careers (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005).

No midlife woman did all of the family and child care herself. Most of the husbands made contributions to the family and the household activities although the amount varied from just having a small part to having the primary responsibility. In most cases these families purchased extensive child care and household services, but the responsibility for managing those activities remained. Of the women, 42 percent characterized their husband's involvement as either managing (planning and initiating) or doing (actually performing) the task. Based on the amount of effort and involvement, husbands fell into one of four categories (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005).

1. **Uninvolved husbands** (14 percent) – perceived as making very limited contribution and categorized as low in managing and doing household work and family activities.

2. **Helpmate husbands** (50 percent) – categorized as low on managing but high on doing household work and family activities. Helpmate husbands also can serve as a personal lifeline and act as a stabilizing force.

3. **Egalitarian husbands** (28 percent) – shared responsibilities for managing and doing family and household responsibilities relatively equally.

4. **Coordinator husband** (8 percent) – have the primary responsibility for managing the family and household responsibilities and rely on the wives' help in doing the related activities.

Personal, relationship and societal factors affect the way partners combine occupational and family roles (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005). The extent of the husband's contributions depended on factors such as the husband's ego, the relative salaries of the spouses, their job mobility, the flexibility of their work situations, and the early socialization of husband and wife regarding the appropriate roles for each spouse. The current study suggested that wives' perceptions of their husbands' attitudes and behaviors about employment and family are important (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005).

When wives report equal career precedence, creating truly equal careers often requires trade-offs and sacrifices from one or both partners that may be extremely difficult, often testing their commitment to their careers and sometimes their families. In most all cases, precedence is economically driven (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005).

The challenges of being in a dual career couple were numerous, but the complexity gets even greater when couples live apart. A commuting couple is "one in which both partners pursue careers while maintaining separate residences in different

geographic locations" (Bunker et al., 1992, p 399). Recent estimates showed that more than three million dual career couple were experimenting with this lifestyle and lived apart (Bergen et al., 2007). Bergen et al. (2007) conducted an interpretive study that focused on interviews through the lens of gendered role expectations using five focus groups and 50 individual interviews. They found commuter wives received messages from social network members that expressed sympathy for the poor male spouse left at home alone with no one to cook for him. The focus of the discussion was primarily on women's roles as wives and mothers that made them responsible for a large amount of unpaid labor. Researchers have articulated both the advantages and disadvantages of commuter marriage. Many have found women seem to gain more from and have more positive feelings about commuting than men because they are freed from some traditional expectations of wives, such as daily meal preparation and housework. The ability to focus on professional responsibilities rather than family responsibilities was seen as an advantage by commuting wives. At the same time these women may still perform caregiving responsibilities such as preparing meals for their families a week in advance.

So what increases work/life conflict more: Living together or living apart? An empirical study examining the quality of life of men and women in 223 dual dual-career families was done to compare measures of stress and satisfaction. The population was made up of 90 commuting families and 133 single-residence families predominately in the northeastern United States. The subjects were 99 men (38 commuters and 61 members of single-residence dual-career couples) and 124 women (52 commuters and 72 members of single-residence dual-career couples). Within the group there were 36 travelers (13 men/23 women) and 31 non-travelers (13 men/18 women). Also in this

group were 22 respondents who reported both partners travelled. The researchers had 7 total hypotheses.

> **H1:** Commuters will report more work life satisfaction than single-residence dual-career respondents.
>
> **H2:** Commuters will report less satisfaction with their partner relationships than will single-residence dual-career respondents, and less satisfaction with their own performance as a relationship partner.
>
> **H3:** Commuters will report less satisfaction with family life than will single-residence dual-career respondents.
>
> **H4**: Commuters will report more satisfaction with the time available for themselves than will single-residence dual-career respondents.
>
> **H5:** Commuters, relative to single-residence dual-career respondents, will report being less satisfied with life as a whole.
>
> **H6:** Commuters will report experiencing a more stressful lifestyle than will single-residence dual-career respondents.
>
> **H7**: Commuters will report experiencing more overload than will single-residence dual-career respondents (Bunker et al., 1992, p. 400-401).

The first four hypotheses were tied to satisfaction; H5 was tied to global life satisfaction; H6 was tied to stress and H7 was tied to overload. A 2x2 ANOVA was used to compare the quality of life variables and personal demographics (education, income, age, length of relationship, length the relationship had been dual careers, number and age of children and gender). The result found hypotheses one through five to be supported with hypotheses six through seven being unsupported. Therefore, commuters were more satisfied with their work life and with the time they had for themselves and more dissatisfied with family life, with the partner relationships, and with life as a whole. Commuters did not report experiencing a more stressful life-style than single-residence dual-career couples and felt they had a significantly less overload. Among commuters there were no significant differences between those who travel and those who primarily

stayed local. Additionally, there were no commuter role/gender interactions. The researchers concluded the commuting lifestyle has both costs and rewards for dual career couples, but that in some ways single residence dual career couples may be more stressed and dissatisfied (Bunker et al., 1992).

Research has shown military women were twice as likely to be in dual-military marriages as their male counterparts. Based on a 2006 Department of Defense report of members in the active-duty armed forces who are married, 12.7 percent were in dual-military marriages (Karney & Crown, 2007; Sloan, 2009). In the Air Force, 11.6 percent of active-duty married personnel were married to another military member whether in the Air Force or another service. Of the women that were married, 44.2 were married to other active-duty military members (IDEAS, 2018). Understandably, a dual-military career couple was often even more constrained since both professionals were obligated to a defined period of service.

Lakhani and Gade (1992) conducted an empirical study on 595 dual career Army couples using the data obtained from a U.S. Army Research Institute survey. To get a frame of reference, in the mid-1980s the U.S. Army was comprised of approximately six percent active-duty military couples. Eight percent were married officers and 12 percent were married enlisted personnel. The remaining population is either single or married to a civilian spouse. The total overall percentage of women was 11 percent and it was reported that 63 percent of married enlisted women and 68 percent of married women officers were in dual Army career marriages. The sample for this study was limited to those couples where both members were assigned and living together. It should be noted

that in 1984, 38 percent of Army dual-career couples were not approved for joint domicile and lived separately.

The researchers hypothesized that career intentions of these couples were interdependent and a function of various variables from economics, psychology and sociology (family earnings, mortgages or rent, car payments, job satisfaction, job tenure, family happiness and family size). The dependent variable was career intention of the respondent and since it was binary, a non-linear probit model was used for the analysis rather than an ordinary least squares regression to avoid biased and inconsistent estimates (Lakhani & Gade, 1992).

The researcher's hypothesis was supported and they found the most important predictor of retention intention was the perception of the spouse's career intention. This indicates the Army is likely to retain or lose both soldiers in an Army dual career marriage depending on how policies and programs effect either partner. The second most important predictor was job satisfaction which is critical in times of downsizing. If the reduction in force structure significantly increases work load on the remaining personnel, the likelihood of losing a dual career couple increases two-fold. The researchers found the third most important predictor was the larger the family the more likely the couple would remain in the Army. The fourth and fifth most significant predictors were mortgage or rent payments and military wage. Retention intention remained high as long as the military kept up with increases in housing allowances and pay increases (Lakhani & Gade, 1992).

Managing dual careers, especially in professions where mobility was minimal for one partner, could lead to some very difficult, life changing decisions. The military is a very family-oriented business that requires all members to be committed to the lifestyle.

Single Professional Work/Life Conflict

Much of the work/life conflict research centers around individuals with families. During this literature review, very little research has included the experiences of single individuals in the workplace. In 2012, Schultz et al. set out to explore work/life balance outside the conventional family and answer the question "How do young, single professionals who do not have children view work/life balance?" (p. 45). Using electronic questionnaires, the researchers recruited 183 people (72 percent female, 27 percent male and 1 percent other) through snowball sampling. Participants were predominantly white (88 percent) and ranged in age from 18-35 with a mean age of 24.4 years. The three most common careers represented were education, sales and counseling with income levels that ranged from less than $15,000 to more than $65,000 (Schultz et al., 2012).

Data was analyzed using a constructivist grounded theory approach and revealed young single professionals define work/life balance in terms of reasons for seeking it and the strategies they use to do so. Seven main themes emerged (Schultz et al., 2012, p. 46):

1. Prioritization of either work or life
2. Preference to separate work and life
3. Focus on personal physical and mental health
4. Desire for success
5. Sacrifice for success
6. Importance of engaging in life sphere guilt-free
7. Need to de-stress work effectively

Two general conclusions can be drawn from this study on how young professionals view work/life balance. First, young professionals define and understand work/life balance in terms of what they believe it should give them personally and have definite ideas on how it is accomplished. Second, based on their dialogue and rationale for how work/life balance is defined and what strategies need to be employed to successfully obtain balance, it is clear the perception among young professionals is that they must actively defend the life being overtaken by work. This perception of protection/defense suggests that some young professionals prefer less permeable borders and increased segmentation between work and life domains. The finding that young professionals may prefer a stronger border between work and life contradicted research that argued that members of Generations X and Y prefer higher levels of integration and weaker work–life borders (Schultz et al., 2012).

This literature review was comprised of a variety of areas that correlate to the lives of Air Force women general officers whether they were married with children or single. One thing that was consistent, regardless of the demographic statistics, is that multiple factors - marriage, work/life balance, role conflict and identity - play a role in the satisfaction and commitment women make to their careers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

> *Phenomenology does not just pose a problem to be solved or a question to be answered. A good phenomenological study almost always starts with wonder or passes through a phase of wonder.*
>
> - *Max van Manen (2014, p. 37)*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Air Force women general officers have experienced navigating their military careers. This study was guided by the question:

What was the lived experienced of Air Force women general officers navigating their military careers?

This chapter begins by framing the ontology and epistemology of the researcher and the guiding methodology. Next, the research process is outlined beginning with how the participants were selected, the data was collected and then analyzed. In regards to the quality of the study, sections on trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also discussed. The chapter ends with the epoche` to ensure the researcher set aside any judgments, biases, or assumptions.

Ontology and Epistemology

Theoretical perspectives or worldviews were rooted in how an individual makes meaning of the world. Ontology is the study of being focused on understanding 'what is' in relationship to reality. Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how 'we know what we know' (Cotty, 1998, p.10).

The conceptualization of this study was informed by the researcher's worldview as a social constructivist. Social constructivists believe that:

> individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8).

A constructivists worldview has a natural fit with a phenomenology. It is an appropriate philosophy for this research because meaning is constructed through the lived experience descriptions of the experiences of Air Force women general officers. This study used open ended questions so the participants could share their views.

Overview of Methodology

Phenomenological research begins with the intentional experiences of the phenomenon or problem identified, and the researcher tries to extract from it the essential features of what the individual experiences through his or her lived experiences (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology refers to the principle of intentionality as an inseparable connection to the world (van Manen, 1990). A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences and focuses on identifying what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence -- a "grasp of the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

Phenomenological data analysis steps are generally similar regardless of the methodological process (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers develop questions designed to

produce rich narrative data. Once the interviews are transcribed, the researcher goes through the data and highlights "significant statements," sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. A composite description of the essence of the experience is developed for all the individuals. The description consists of the "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it.

The value of phenomenology is that it prioritizes how the human being experiences the world (van Manen, 2014). Focusing on the lived experience was one of the primary reasons phenomenology was a logical fit for this study on the phenomenon of being an Air Force woman general officer. The goal of this study was not to determine what jobs, characteristics or skills made each of these women successful, rather to better understand their experiences as they navigated the challenges on their way to becoming an Air Force woman general officer. For many, when they were climbing the ranks, there was no one above or around them who had similar experiences to share. From the lessons learned on their journey, these women general officers will provide a roadmap for the younger generations.

Phenomenology as methodology was compatible with the researcher's personal narrative and skill sets.

> Phenomenology is primarily a philosophic method for questioning, not a method for answering or discovering or drawing determinate conclusions . . . the further we delve into the phenomenological literature, the clearer it should become that phenomenological method cannot be fitted to a rule book, an interpretive schema, a set of steps, or a systematic set of procedures (van Manen, 2014, p. 29).

Phenomenology is deeply rooted in interpretation and reflection which allows the researcher to capture the meaning and structure of the experiences to help others understand the essence of being a in the Air Force woman general officer. This was

accomplished by exploring the narratives of each of these women to understand the essence of their journey before categorizing the experiences into themes.

Generally, people tend to have much less difficulty sharing their opinions, views, and perceptions than sharing sensitive experiential accounts (van Manen, 2014). The flexibility of phenomenology allowed for the interview to be guided yet have the space to for these women to venture away from their public affairs scripts and encouraged them to talk about their real experience narratives and reflections.

Population and Sample

All 28 women who qualified for this study were sent an email invitation to participate. Emails were sent directly to each potential participant using their Air Force email address with a study information sheet included as an attachment (Appendix C). The emails briefly outlined the focus of the study, the format of the interviews and the general timeframe of the data collection period. Three general officers did not reply to the email, four declined the invitation, and ten could not participate because of scheduling conflicts. The 11 women who participated had experience that varied across multiple career fields in the Air Force from both operations and support specialties.

There is variation among the experts concerning the required sample size for a phenomenological study. Creswell (2007) suggests trustworthiness of a phenomenological study is increased if the number of participants is between five and twenty-five individuals. Seidman (2006) is reluctant to establish a set number and instead bases population size on two criteria. First, is the number of participants sufficient if it adequately reflects the range of experiences of the population. Secondly, the number can be deemed sufficient once saturation is reached and no new information is being

discovered. This study met both the Creswell (2007) and Seidman (2006) definitions based on number (11 participants), range of experiences (multiple Air Force functional specialties were represented) and data saturation was reached. Saturation was achieved when the interviews no longer provided new insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

Seidman (2006) outlines an in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing process that primarily uses open-ended questions. The goal of a researcher using a phenomenological approach to interviewing is to seek the participants' subjective descriptions of their experiences through reflective stories and explanations of life lessons. Researchers must strive to be the best possible guides to help their participants reconstruct and reflect on their daily lives and experiences. However, because it is a joint conversation, the meaning being made by the participant is, to some degree, a function of the participant's interaction with the interviewer (Seidman, 2006).

Seidman (2006) recommends a structured protocol that consists of three interviews. Interview one focuses on the life history of the participant and is designed to establish the context of the participant's experience. The second interview is designed to concentrate on the details and the context of the experience being studied. The final interview is designed to allow the participant to reflect on the meaning of the experience. However, the above structure can be altered if necessary as long as "a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect upon their experiences within the context of their lives" (Seidman, 2006, p. 21). Given the busy schedules of women generals, a modified Seidman approach was utilized and consisted of one in-

depth interview lasting between 90 and 120 minutes and covering life history, experience detail and reflection of meaning in one sitting.

"Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 92). The interviews in this study were guided by five overarching thematic questions with possible follow-up questions to help guide the discussions if needed. An interview guide was developed and informed by the theoretical framework of identity theory, role conflict theory and work/life balance.

Informed by theoretical framework of this study, an interview guide (Appendix B) was developed. Open-ended interview questions focusing on the experience of being an Air Force general officer were developed to generate narratives about the multiple roles of the participants. Questions were designed to inquire about their work/life balance and tactics used to manage competing priorities. Participants were also asked about enablers and barriers and how people and/or events shaped their journey. The final question was designed to understand why these women chose to stay in the military and accept the challenging role of being an Air Force general officer.

A pilot study was conducted with a women brigadier general the researcher worked for at the Pentagon. The lessons learned from the study helped to refine the research questions and improved the interviewing skills of the researcher.

All general officers go through a tremendous amount of public affairs training and are accustomed to answering interview questions and public discussions with the focus on the Air Force mission and vision. During the pilot study, for the first 30 minutes, the conversation was exactly what would be expected during a mentoring session with a

young officer. Most of the stories and examples were on point with the mission and vision of the Air Force at the time. Eventually, the conversation turned to more personal examples and experiences with a deeper personal meaning.

Implementing the lessons learned from the pilot study, the researcher utilized Air Force general officers' biographies (AF Bios, 2018) to prepare for each interview and increase the ability to build rapport quickly. Each participant had a current, standardized biography available as public domain on the internet that helped identify common background information and familiarized the researcher with the career path of each general before the primary interview. These biographies included colleges attended, primary career fields, in-residence professional military education opportunities, positions held, aircraft flown and number of years in the general officer ranks. Additionally, utilizing the biographies allowed for the shortened interview protocol to be focused on lived experiences rather than historical job history.

There is a balance that needs to be maintained between asking appropriate questions and actively listening to what the participant is saying, without getting so caught up in the conversation and missing the opportunity to ask a critical question (Sidman, 2006). Experience gained during the pilot study helped the researcher develop this balance and know when a follow up question needed to be injected or if it was better to just let the lived experience description continue unimpeded.

Another lesson learned during the pilot interview was transcription of recorded conversations was a difficult task that is extremely time consuming. Even with transcription software, transcribing an hour conversation was difficult and labor intensive. As a result, interviews conducted during the study were recorded using a

digital recording device that was compatible with web-based transcription services. The researcher reviewed and corrected returned transcripts before providing participants the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy.

During the data collection period, participants were stationed at various installations throughout the United States. Based on location, the researcher completed one-on-one interviews as either a face-to-face conversation or on a telephonic device with each of the participants. Both interview types created a free-flowing communication atmosphere and the data gathered was rich regardless of the method used. Of the eleven interviews, six were face-to-face and five were on a telephonic device. There did not seem to be any degradation to the conversion in regards to the communication method. Even on a phone, the generals seemed to be fully engaged in the interview. They were actively listening and reflective with each question, answering and interacting in a normal conversational manner.

Prior to the start of each interview, the participants were reminded of the description of the study as outlined in the information sheet (Appendix C). A recording device was used to capture interviews as digital audio files. Electronic audio files of each interview were downloaded to a single computer secured and only accessible by the researcher. Each audio interview file was uploaded to a secure, professional transcription website so it could be transcribed for analysis. Each study participant was sent a copy of her transcript and given two weeks to review for accuracy and help ensure trustworthiness of the data during analysis.

Additionally, the researcher reviewed the transcripts for any identifying words or phrases. Identifying passages were edited with generic phraseology or removed if the

meaning would not be significantly altered. Finalized transcripts files were labeled using a GO numbering system known only to the researcher. All related documents were filed using folders with just the generic GO# label and securely stored both in printed and electronic formats with only the researcher having access.

Data Analysis

When this study was originally designed and proposed, the intent was to use a modified van Manen as outlined by Moustakas (1994) data analysis process. However, as the study evolved, it was determined that using that particular process would be difficult because life details of the entire population of only 28 women general officers are well known throughout the Air Force. Developing individual textural and structural descriptions, while masking any identity data, would provide overly generic descriptions resulting in the essence of the experience being lost and not useful to the researcher or the reader. With that in mind, van Manen (2014) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) were utilized to guide the analysis of this study.

The primary data sources for this study were official Air Force biographies and transcribed interviews and analytical memos generated throughout the process. A multi-phase approach was used by the researcher to identify the essence of the data and any overarching themes from both an individual participant perspective and the group as a collective.

The first step involved compiling a matrix utilizing each individual Air Force biography and statements made during the interviews to build a profile of the participants in regards to their educational and professional background, family structure, and identified roles in order of precedence (which did they list first when asked). This matrix

was utilized to build the aggregate profile of the participants and integrated in analysis of several of the identified themes.

Before any in-depth analysis of the interview data began, the researcher read through the transcripts and researcher's notes from all 11 GO interviews to "get a general sense of the whole" making notes of high-level themes or ties to questions from the interview guide (Tesch, 1990, p.142). After reflecting and writing several memos, the researcher re-read the interviews focusing on each document individually making notes in the margin of possible codes (Tesch, 1990).

During the third reading of the transcripts, the researcher highlighted significant passages and cut and pasted them into an Excel spreadsheet. These passages were initially coded using the five open ended research question topics from the interview guide (identity, roles, work/life balance, family and career length decision). Quotes from transcripts were organized in a spreadsheet and tracked by category code, location and participant GO. Using the spreadsheet made it easy to sort by theme or by GO so the data could be decontextualized and recontextualized to reduce and expand the data into different organizational schemes (Tesch, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). For reference, spreadsheets were saved and printed with the significant statements coded and sorted by GO in addition to being sorted and coded by theme.

Utilizing the spreadsheets, the codes were refined to eliminate redundancy and determine themes and sub themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Initially, 45 different codes emerged. To help refine and further consolidate the data, these 45 codes were placed into a matrix with each GO listed to identify the strength of the theme among the participants and determine if there were any dissenting views. Eventually, the list of 45

codes was reduced to the eight themes and 13 sub themes. Significant passages from each GO were further refined and consolidated in separate word documents by theme and used to develop an aggregated description of each of the eight themes and sub themes. Direct quotes supporting each theme were taken from this refined collection.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) has been the historical qualitative measure to provide confidence in a study. Four criteria are used for evaluating the integrity of a study: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

To improve dependability and confirmability, a well-documented, standardized audit trail was utilized by the researcher to ensure all documentation, processes, memos and data gathered was properly handled and marked.

To increase the credibility, dependability and confirmability of this study, triangulation of multiple data sources was used to build foundational profiles of each GO utilizing data from verbatim audio transcription from interviews and official Air Force biographies. “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspective from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). Participants also were given the opportunity to review their transcripts in order to further increase credibility through member checking.

To increase the transferability of the study, thick vivid descriptions were created from the interview data to offer many perspectives about each theme and “transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200).

Finally, to improve credibility of the study the researcher participated in on-going reflective journaling and wrote the following epoche' to ensure her biases were bracketed.

Epoche`

The responsibility of the researcher is to explore the participant's experience and to bracket out biases and preconceptions using a sufficient degree of self-awareness while seeking to detect core themes from data gathered (Creswell, 2007). As part of the phenomenology method, the primary way to identify and set aside my biases was to include an epoche` to provide an account of who I am and how my interpretation of findings could be shaped by my background (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The narrative below is an open and honest self-reflection of the researcher.

As long as I can remember, I have always been fascinated by leaders. At first it was mostly great sports coaches like Bear Bryant, John Wooden and Pat Summit because those were the people my father and I would talk about while watching games on T.V. Later, as my aperture began to widen, I studied trends and enduring leadership traits found in many of our historical military leaders while I was a student at the Air Force Academy. As an MBA student at Arizona State University, my interest in leadership logically shifted to business greats such as Jack Welch, Herb Kelleher and Walt Disney. When I moved to D.C., my interest shifted again and I began to read more presidential and Supreme Court biographies.

Throughout my inquiry into of the lives of great leaders, women were always a central theme because it was through them that I thought I could learn the most. I had an incredible role model in my mother, a successful business woman who had climbed many

a rung on the corporate ladder. The lessons I learned from her were practical, survival techniques that served me well. But the biographies I studied added a theoretical dimension to the struggles women had to overcome to succeed and break the proverbial glass ceiling. The Air Force has a rich history of fascinating women general officers. Among the group were a member of the first class of women at the Air Force Academy who also became the first Air Force four-star general, a Rhodes Scholar and the leading scorer in Academy basketball history, an astronaut, the first woman to command a Unified Combatant Command and be named as one of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential people, and three who are married to fellow general officers (talk about dual career couples).

I began my journey towards this study in 2006 when I was an Air Force Reserve officer holding the rank of major in a full-time status stationed at the Pentagon. That fall I began my doctoral course work and initially gravitated toward crisis leadership. In October of 2007, I attended a three-day Air Force Women's Leadership Training Symposium. It was an incredible conference with 600 mostly female officers and enlisted troops including the highest-ranking female officer in the Air Force, Lieutenant General Terry Gabreski. It was the first time in history so many Air Force women had been in one place at the same time. Even though it was a massive room, the atmosphere was very intimate because of the common bond and an underlying energy connecting each of the sister Airmen. Speaker after speaker painted a picture for the audience of the challenges and rewards of their experiences as military women. From the conference, there were two resounding messages that kept coming back to me. The first was that there is a very young force serving today, and they need our continued leadership at home and deployed.

The second was that Air Force women do not tell their stories, and they have incredible stories to tell. I want to help tell the stories of these women so their leadership prowess can be viewed by others like that of the great coaches, military men, and public servants I studied on my journey.

Since that first conference, I have attended several other events that focused on women in the military which has been a great way to stay in touch with the current issues, see old friends and build valuable networks.

In 2007, I was promoted to lieutenant colonel which is considered to be a successful career termination rank. I believed I would make colonel (which I did in 2013), but never thought I was general officer material. While I was at the Pentagon, I had a male mentor who thought otherwise and his rankings and performance evaluations put me on the path of an HPO (High Potential Officer) and I was told to start filling squares to position myself to be a general officer. I am not married and do not have any children (I have a very low maintenance cat), so I thought why not me and began to fill the squares as instructed. For several years I was given the appropriate grooming opportunities and was succeeding when I hit a snag and was knocked off the general officer track. There are many highly qualified individuals in the Air Force so it doesn't take much for them to decide to pull you out of the potential star pool. Admittedly it was a blow to my ego and my identity took a hard hit, but like everything in life there is good that comes out of the darkness. I was still a very capable leader and was given the opportunity to command at the group level. After 29 years, I happily retired as a colonel.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with the approval of the George Washington Institutional Review Board. Any time human subjects are involved, a multitude of steps needs to be taken to minimize risks and ensure responsible research is conducted. This research adhered to the strict guidelines published by the George Washington University Office of Human Research and the Institutional Review Board. Confidentiality was the most crucial part of the data gathering and analysis process, especially considering the small population of Air Force women general officers. It was essential that the researcher protected the identity of each participant and secured any and all information collected throughout the research process. The researcher ensured confidentiality was maintained and quotes from transcripts were not identifiable by name. Participants were advised that results may be published, but no personal information will be provided in the publication, and only the researcher has access to the data. Each participant was informed that interviews would be transcribed but the researcher would ensure confidentiality of data and privacy of the participants. Confidentiality was maintained for all documents and electronic copies were physically and electronically secured and only accessible to the researcher.

In regards to presentation of data as part of the analysis and resulting conclusions, profile data and quotations were represented in aggregate form with no individual identifying data associated with all findings.

Chapter 4: Results

"I like being a woman and a leader because, there's a certain grace, I think, we bring to the equation that men just don't naturally bring. When we do and when we do it well, it is a huge contribution."

- *An Air Force Woman General Officer*

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Air Force women general officers have experienced navigating their military careers. This study was guided by the question:

What was the lived experienced of Air Force women general officers navigating their military careers?

The chapter is divided into three sections that describe the lived experiences of the participants as they juggled multiple roles during successful military careers. The chapter starts with an aggregate profile of participants based on interview data and the individual Air Force biographies of the 11 women. The profile is followed by a description of two overarching categories with their associated themes: *Being An Air Force Woman General Officer* (Theme 1. Role Navigation, Theme 2. Part of Something Bigger and Theme 3. Vocal Change Agents) and *Work/Life Harmony Secret to Success* (Theme 1. Work/Life Structure and Theme 2. Healthy Relationship Maintenance). The chapter concludes with the presentation of the essence of the phenomenon of how Air Force women general officers experience navigating their military careers.

Aggregated Profile of Participants

> Occasionally I do walk down the hallway and somebody does a double take and says, "Oh my gosh! I don't see too many female one stars in the Pentagon." For the most part, I don't pay attention to that. But then when you get confronted by somebody who wants to stop and chat with you, then I guess you're reminded that our numbers are still rather small.

Because of the unique nature and easily identifiable characteristics of each general officer in this study, an aggregate profile of the participants has been crafted. The 11 participants entered the Air Force during a 10-year span. A majority of the 11 women interviewed were U.S. Air Force Academy or Reserve Officer Training Corps graduates, and all have at least one advanced degree. All of the participants were involved in high school athletics with several continuing on as collegiate athletes.

All of the participants have been married during some point in their service, and all but one was married to a spouse who is currently or has previously served in the military. All 11 were dual career couples at some point in their career. Three of the couples have transitioned through retirement and now have a spouse/ex-spouse who is the stay-at-home lead-parent. Nine of the 11 were mothers or stepmothers. Ten of the 11 had extended family separations (this included boyfriends who eventually became husbands) due to deployments, schooling and/or geographically separated assignments ranging from one to 10 years.

All of the participants held demanding leadership positions at the squadron, group and wing command level and served on a higher headquarters staff on their journey to becoming GOs. They all took care of themselves, staying physically fit and resilient as they climbed the military ranks. They were all generally able to deal with the unconscious bias of the men they worked with, who made up the majority of those both above and below their rank as they progressed upward.

Category 1: Being An Air Force Woman General Officer

The first category, Being an Air Force Women General Officer was informed from identity theory and role conflict theory with a focus on how each general officer

identified her different roles and her place in the world and the Air Force. This category is supported by three themes. The first, Role Navigation was an apori theme that was consistent with previous research. The second two themes, Part of Something Bigger and Using Their Voice were emergent themes.

Theme 1: Role Navigation

The theme of Role Navigation is rooted in identity theory and the findings and passage illustrate the connection between self-attitudes and identities to the role relationship and role-related behavior of individuals.

There were six roles all of the participants mentioned: Airman/Air Force Officer, Commander/Leader, Mentor/Coach, Wife/Ex-Wife, Sister/Daughter, and Athlete. The order in which the roles were mentioned or the priority that was given verbally differed for each of the women with the exception of one: being an Airman/Air Force Officer. For all participants, being an Airman/Air Force Officer was mentioned either first or second when describing defining roles. Of note, all the participants spoke extensively about being a general officer, but only two participants specifically used the title of general when listing their primary roles. In terms of identity work roles, the labels used were focused more on being an officer, commander or a leader rather than being a general officer.

> I just look at myself as an officer. I guess I don't even distinguish general versus a rank. I never really think about it. I just want to earn people's respect for being me, not because of the position or because of a certain rank.

Being a woman and leader, especially in a male dominated organization, makes it difficult to blend into the crowd. All 11 participants spoke extensively about their experience as women in the Air Force, but a majority of the generals significantly

downplayed their gender, “I don't see myself as someone making a statement because I'm a female, it's just there.”

Even those women who were the first woman to do something significant in their career field (ie., be promoted to general or hold a high visibility position), minimalized their gender as part of their identity, “Yes, I am the first female general for my career field, but I don’t look at it that way. I’m a general who happens to be a female.”

The one role where gender was actually embraced and viewed in a traditional framework was the role of mother/step-mother/bonus mom. The role of mother was once thought to be incompatible with being a general officer. Several of the GOs mentioned it during their interviews. Many of the participants have heard General Pawlowski speak on her experience from when she was a young Lieutenant and General Wilma Vaught told her and several other women during a mentoring session, that they would have to make sacrifices, such as not being able to have a family, maybe not even marry, if they wanted to be successful in the Air Force (Thomas, 2007).

> I remember General Pawlowski would talk about how when she was coming up, they told her, "You cannot be a female officer and have a family." And General Pawlowski did, and she was proud of that fact, but breaking that barrier took time.

There was a perceived shift through the year groups in regards to the prevalent attitude/acceptance of General Vaught’s edict. One of the GOs identified a dividing line between her time period and the women general officers ahead of her who mostly didn’t have children.

> So that's always been sort of a dividing line, I think, between me and some of the women general officers following me, we were able to do both and have kids. I still remember reading an article about the first woman pilot making general who had children. It was newsworthy, and I was like a major.

All of the participants who were mothers/step-mothers included the role as part of their identity. However, the priority the role took in the hierarchy was much higher for those GOs with school-aged kids (mom was the first role mentioned when asked) in comparison to those whose children were grown and either in college or independent adults living outside the home.

> So, I think being a mom and a wife really comes first and then also in this case, being a commander, that comes second and sometimes even though being a wife and a mom in theory comes first, there are times where the timelines get juggled a little bit so if we have an emergency or we have a loss of life or we have a mission emergency, they know that there going to be times when mommy is going to have to go and take care of that and then come back.

All of these GO's considered having multiple roles to be a positive thing in their lives. In fact, having to find a successful work/life balance was so ingrained into their daily habit patterns that many of the coping mechanisms found in the literature were second nature to them when it came to juggling multiple roles.

> I don't believe in the whole work/life balance concept. I think you have to expect things to change daily and adjust. I definitely think having multiple roles is a positive part of my life. I love having different things going on all the time -- it keeps things interesting and I definitely don't get bored.

All of the GOs had positive attitudes about focusing only on the things they could control and embracing the controlled chaos that was inevitable in all of their lives. Each of them placed more emphasis on focusing on how they react to the chaos as leaders and provide a stabilizing presence both at home and in their units.

> I'm still all those roles. They don't go away. The balance of how much I'm putting into each role changes hour by hour. It's really, which one takes more time based on what's going on in a given situation. Then there are certain things that I have to adjust on the daily basis based on what's the crisis de jour.

Almost every participant (9 of 11) identified being cognizant of being under constant watch of other people. As Air Force Officers, especially general officers, there is a constant expectation to be a role model. All of these women were very aware of the fact, their "mics are always on, the camera is always ready and there are always people who are watching."

> As you know, as a commander, that's the mantle of command that you're wearing today and it's living in a fish bowl, it's 24/7, 365, and it's not just what you say and do, it's what you don't say and don't do. It all is kind of out there for everyone to be observing and critiquing.

Being in a fishbowl can be exhausting, but, several of these GOs found ways to be incognito. They treasured and truly valued the times they could be a normal commuter riding the bus, having conversations with people who aren't compelled to engage because you are a GO. All of these women are proud of their accomplishments and appreciated their role as an Air Force General Officer. However, there are definitely times they just want to be a normal person who isn't tied to their blackberry.

> I loved being a travelling basketball mom because I get to spend time with my kids and nobody knows about my everyday life as a general officer. I just get to be mom!

Nothing is more tied to your identity than your name. The decision to keep your last name for professional reasons is not new to the business world, however, it has a different twist in the military. An individual's military record includes an entire career of yearly performance reports with your name at the top. Every time you meet a promotion board or compete for a development opportunity such as command or in-residence schools, this entire record is reviewed. The GOs in this study took several different approaches to deciding which last name to wear on their uniform. One kept her last name to honor her father and because she strongly identified with her heritage. Another kept

her last name to help keep her professional and personal life separate. Several others did not change their last name upon marrying because they were already established professionally and their husbands did not have a preference. The most interesting discussion came about with the GOs who had divorced during their time in the service and the unconscious bias that occurs when a woman's name changes more than once.

> I mention women and changing their name because I think it introduces bias. So, I don't have my husband's name. It was an intentional strategy. After I got divorced, I changed my name back and then I never changed it again. And my husband doesn't care. Because you're allowed to have, I used to tell some women, you're allowed to have two names in your records. But if you have three names some people will be judgmental. It is not fair to women because a man can be married 20 times and never has to change his name so it is a non-issue.

For the women who had children, the decision to change their name or not after a divorce was less about the bias it would create in the military records and more about the connection to their children. In the Air Force when a family moves every couple of years, having different last names can cause stress with every different school enrollment and parent/teacher conference.

Theme 2: Part of Something Bigger

Although all of these GOs have found happiness, success and multiple ways to manage their multiple identity roles, each of them would argue being a general officer in the United States Air Force is a challenging profession to say the least.

> To say it is stressful probably isn't fair. I didn't think wing command was very stressful. I absolutely loved it, and didn't think that it was a job in any way. When you feel like your profession is your passion, it's pretty easy to get up and go to work every day. So stressful is not the right answer, but people need you all the time, so you're always on, and there's always a demand.

Being in the military has its many challenges and rewards. It is a demanding life that often eliminates your ability to make career choices based on your individual needs and desires. The mission and the needs of the Air Force usually come first and often the only vote you have is to retire or separate. All of the GOs considered getting out of the Air Force at one point or another. For some it was the desire to pursue higher education, a career change, or spend more time as a mother.

> I think when I had my first child, I thought, I was just past the 10-year point, at that point, and had I not been at the 10-year point, I think I would have gotten out. It was so hard on me. So hard to take a six-week-old baby to daycare and walk away. It killed me for months. I'm glad I didn't, but at the time I think I would have walked away. It was so hard, but since I was already halfway, I just thought I was too far gone to walk away.

For several of the GOs, at approximately the 10-year point (mid-career) they actively were pursuing outside career opportunities by completing milestones (completing master's degrees or interviewing for other government agencies) in order to meet established transition timelines. In all of the scenarios fate intervened and career opportunities were presented that put them on the path to general officer.

> I had every intention to get out as a senior captain level and go work for the State Department. I took my paperwork to MPF [Human Resources] to drop it off, but, because I was an officer, I couldn't just drop it off. I needed an appointment. The next day 9/11 happened and I got stop-lossed [approved separation rescinded]. Everything changed after that and I never looked back.

When examining why the GOs decided to stay, it was clear the events of 9/11 had a dramatic impact on all 11 of the participants lives and careers. However, for those whose decision point was distanced from that eventful day,

several cited their decision to stay occurred because a mentor helped them see the benefits or recognize their potential to do great things. For most of the GOs, the change in heart was tied to a great assignment that they didn't expect that changed their outlook or career projectory and set them on the path to being a general officer.

When asked why they continue to serve now that they are far beyond the required 20 years, they all had a sense of duty and pride, but mostly they stayed because of the Airman they love to lead. For many, the Airman are where they get their motivation and their energy to keep fighting the good fight. "I feed off the energy of my Airman. Working with great people in my Air Force family keeps me motivated!"

Theme 3: Vocal Change Agents

There have been several generations of Air Force women general officers and each generation has had a different cross to bear. The first generation had to prove women were capable of being military members. The second generation had to prove women were just as good as the guys. The third generation was just trying to fit and be accepted. Finally, this latest generation seems to be picking up traction and being able to use their voice for change.

> I have a little bit more of a platform as a general officer. But it does lead you to be aware of your voice and position. I'm the only female [High Level Command] Commander right now. I don't want to be known as the only female [High Level Command] Commander who is always bringing up women's readiness issues.

There is a balance that has to be struck between being the voice of women in the Air Force and still being the voice of all Airman in the Air Force. Obviously when you are the only women in the room (which is a frequent occurrence for these GOs) you

automatically become the voice on women's issues. However, to really get traction on change, we need for the voice on issues to also have more baritone. The more senior leaders who are conversant in women's issues, the better the odds policies and processes can be changed. One of the ways these GOs have learned to give credence to their narrative is to couch work/life balance issues and concerns as key to retention and deployability for both men and women among the Air Force.

There were several different examples of unconscious bias identified during these interviews. Most of it came from male counterparts or superiors, but in some cases it also came from military spouses. There was also a common consensus that most of the males demonstrating this bias were not doing so maliciously. However, this bias was unmistakable and, in some cases, hindered the GO's ability to lead. One of the common complaints was not being heard in a group setting.

> So, this still continues, if I'm in a group and I will say something at the beginning. Then it comes up 10 minutes later, but it's a man that says it, it's recognized and then they're like, "Oh yeah, that is a good idea." There are lots of different ways you can deal with it. You can assume the best, or you can say, "Hey, that was a good idea 10 minutes ago." Find a sarcastic way to deal with it. If you're sarcastic as a colonel, they would be 1000% fine with it, but for some reason it's just more offensive because I am now a GO. I don't get it, because it just happens.

The military is a very rank driven organization and traditionally, the highest-ranking person sits at the head of the table. In most scenarios the meeting is designed to present information to the ranking person and provide them with information to make decisions locally or present the unit's position higher up the chain. These GOs found a noticeable difference during meetings when a male was at the head of the table versus a female.

> As a Wing Commander, my first Vice, he figured it out right away, that my voice was not being heard the way the dude's voice was that I had replaced, and he would just stop a meeting and say, "Hold on a second, did you hear what she just said? Let me repeat that for you." And he did it in a way that was very positive and not condescending to me, but incredibly supportive of you gotta be shitting me. She's the Wing Commander and she just said this and it's like nobody's paying attention to her. And it worked really well. We were a really good team that way.

There were several examples of men making assumptions about what a female subordinate needed or wanted to do with her career without even including the individual in the conversation. These male supervisors meant no harm, but their lens prioritizes keeping the families together, first and foremost, and they can't believe anyone would ever willingly take assignment that would geographically separate the member from her family.

> An example of this is when people are making decisions about you when you're not in the room. Hey, we're gonna ops defer you to keep your family together because you have a one-year-old. My mentee called me and was like, "What do I do?" And I said, "Well what do you want to do?" And she said, "Well, I kind of want to go to school." So then tell your boss, "Hey, thanks for the offer to ops defer me but I want to go to school." And she shouldn't have had to have that conversation. If she had been a man, the three-star would have said, "Hey, Major so-and-so, congratulations, you got picked up for school first look, that's awesome.'

Two of the GOs had extreme scenarios when it came to whether or not they wanted to attend prestigious military education schools while pregnant. In both cases, the GOs asked for little to no special treatment to be able to attend school and still have a healthy pregnancy. In one case, the individual asked to finish school two weeks early so she could travel back to Washington D.C. She wanted to be with her husband and have her baby in D.C. rather than having it 3000 miles away and have to stay an extra six weeks before the baby could travel. The school leadership said, "No, it is in the best interest of the Air Force for you to stay here and have the baby here." The future mother

pushed back for weeks and finally found a senior master sergeant at AFPC who said, "This is stupid." And went and fought her battle and won.

In the other incidence, the individual was excited about getting a prestigious position in an elite school, but wanted to make sure the staff knew she was pregnant and would be delivering her baby during the course. However, when the school staff found she was pregnant her slot was automatically cancelled without even consulting the general officer who nominated her initially. When the general officer called to congratulate the individual, she had to tell the general the slot had been cancelled. The general was not pleased because this was a person who was being developed for bigger things. Additionally, in this individual's opinion, growing a tiny human is much easier in an academic environment than in a squadron command environment; in the individual's mind, school was actually the perfect time to have a baby. Luckily, the general immediately got on the phone and was able to get the school slot reinstated. The individual not only completed the course, but, excelled as a distinguished graduate. She stated, "There was no way I was going to show any weakness, I was really driven. I owed that to my boss who fought for me. I owed that to the next person that wanted to attend school pregnant, I really did. There was no way I was going to let anybody bring me down. No way."

> Just because we're a traditional military doesn't mean we have to approach our mission in the old traditional way. The Air Force has got to start realizing that the demographics are shifting, not just for women, but for men too . . . 90 percent of my commanders have kids in elementary school.

Not all of the participants provided examples on how they used their voice and position to fight for change. However, the examples that were provided normally benefited not just women but all Airman regardless of rank or gender.

> That's that whole lean in concept, right? How do you get to go and pay it forward to the people who look like you? How do you give them those opportunities? How do you do that? I just care to develop the team and here I am pounding the table about diversity and about all these extra people with me. It was really interesting, retired Lieutenant General [male, name withheld for confidentiality] said, "you know, it's great that you're all about diversity. It's very clear that you get it and how to do it. But they're not going to listen to you because you're not a white male, you're going to have to find your white male champion that's going to fix this for you." You know how pissed off I was by that statement?

Flexible childcare is one of the ways the Air Force could really help out the dual military family and single parent.

> When I was at Maxwell it was really difficult. I had a two-and-a-half-year-old and then I was pregnant. And the CDC has a ten-hour rule; you can't go over ten hours. And I get the ten-hour rule. Why should your children be somewhere more than ten hours during the day with somebody else? And so, I understand why they do it, but some of the rules make it a little bit difficult for the single Airman, in that case, I was married, but geographically separated. It makes it really difficult. Right, and I think that was probably one of my most stressful times. But it also gave me a real appreciation for some of our young Airmen that are single parents and trying to have a little bit of understanding.
>
> That's another example that makes me crazy." How come I had to go through one process to have live-in childcare when I was at this base, and then I go to a joint base and I have to go through a different process and fight with a different organization? And then they say, "Fine, this person can live in your house, but they can't have a car to shop at the commissary, and that they're supposed to bring one of your kids who're in elementary school." Bring a kid to escort them because your kids have ID cards. And I was like, "Why wouldn't I want the nanny to go to the grocery store while my kids are at school?"

A few of the GOs addressed the issue of women helping women in the Air Force and why there hasn't been a "good ol' girls" club that rallies around each other and helps each other succeed. Several of the GOs are trying to foster a community of ladies and encourage them to stay connected to her and with each other. Their goal is to create a community of women who are supporting and helping each other across networks.

> We compete with each other and we talked badly about each other and we don't promote each other. We tend to compete with each other. And I don't really know why . . . I've speculated it's a caveman thing because we compete for mates. I don't know. There's just some fundamental reason that we just don't mentor and take care of each other the same way that men do. And so that's always been my goal as the lone girl in many situations. When I see other talented women or I run into other women, who are peers or outrank me, I seek them out and I try to help them. I try to work with them and try to make us all successful. But I don't always see that all the time from others. And you have to foster that attitude. And I think we've got to do it as female leaders in the Air Force and in the military in general.

The challenge as a woman leader, especially in the military, is to find a balance between being the cheerleader for girl power without being accused of playing favorites among Airman. One of the GOs in this study was asked by their commander to establish a women's empowerment group to get women together to start talking to each other and try to build mentorship and working together. Later, establishing this group was used against her by a male she had fired (deservingly) who claimed she favored women as evidenced by all these women's events she was hosting. Another GO commented, “I think that the time that we have grown up, there's been a little bit of a stigma associated with can I mentor the young female officers, the young female Airmen, or am I treating people special, and will there be an IG complaint if I have lunch with the female officers. I think we've seen a lot of that come true. So, people have steered away from it."

> It's always hard to find a way as a commander, you want to be Switzerland and you want to take care of all your Airman, but at the same time, how do you still do that and at the same time, mentor Airmen who look like you -- AKA female Airmen. That’s where you have to find the balance and not go over the line and look as if you give preferential treatment.

All of these GOs were pretty humble and mostly appreciated their rank because it allowed them to be the voice for the masses and hopefully make some positive changes that would improve quality of life for everyone, not just the women.

> One of the most recent examples where I used my voice was to question the standard practice of travelling on Sunday to be at a meeting first thing on Monday morning. I asked the group, why are we doing this to ourselves? why are we doing this to our family? Give me a break. We're here for like three solid days, three and a half solid days. Travel on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Come in on Friday morning, fly home on Friday afternoon, be home for dinner. Why don't we do that? . . . . It was really affirming to hear a couple other guys agree with me.

When asked about who were the mentors and role models in their lives, most of the GOs mentioned mothers, stepmothers, and coaches. For the individuals who mentioned an Air Force mentor, it was usually a male senior officer who took an interest later in their career after they have been identified as High Potential Officer.

> When I was coming up the ranks, I didn't have anyone who looked like me with my family model to help mentor and give me tips.

When Air Force women general officers were mentioned during this discussion, they weren't described as a mentor in a traditional sense; they were described as "someone I watched" or "someone who gave me tips and suggestions." So, it isn't surprising most of these GOs were apprehensive with becoming a mentor to young women because there was no real example to follow.

> Honestly, one of my best friends is a retired master sergeant and she probably knows me better than most. And from an officer perspective, I've kind of watched General [female, name withheld for confidentiality] and I know a lot of folks compare the two of us because our styles were somewhat similar.

Many of the GOs acknowledged it took them a long time to recognize the value of sharing their story and making a connection with Airman.

> Oh gosh, I mean, who wants to hear me talk about my experiences? And it was only over the last few years that I realized that actually younger folks enjoy hearing those because they learn from them and they enjoy trying to understand how life was like for you when you were at their stage and age and experience in the Air Force. And, so, it's been kind of fun to explore that role too.

All of these GOs have evolved and are now comfortable sharing their words of wisdom and experiences with young Airman. Young female officers are very hungry for guidance and role models who currently are living the life they aspire to achieve someday. These GOs emphasized they are leaders of all Airman, not just female Airman and tailored their mentoring messages accordingly.

> Honestly, I don't differentiate, I pass the same nuggets on to everyone whether it's women or men. Now granted, a lot of women come wanting to talk to me to try to figure out how the hell I juggle all of this. But I tell them to just be yourself. You want people to respect you for you and who you are and your values. Not because of the position you're in or where you hang your hat, or what rank you are or aren't. Or whether you're civilian or active-duty or reserve, or guard. It doesn't matter. You want people to respect you for you. And I think that's probably the most important thing.

How to be a successful officer and have a family are the most popular topics these GOs are asked to address during mentoring sessions. Young women mistakenly think these women have a magic formula on when the best time to have a baby is and how to manage successful dual career marriages. These GOs have proven there is no one specific formula to success. Luckily, through the experiences of these GOs, there are several formulas to guide young women.

> I think sometimes people look at individuals who have gotten in certain positions and they see a particular pattern because the sample size is so small and they erroneously make an assumption that that's how they have to do in order to be successful. Not realizing that there were a lot of other decisions and micro decisions along the way that sort of shaped things . . . There's not like a formulaic recipe card that says, “Hey, if you do these things then you can do it all.” In fact, I usually start by telling women who come in and ask, “Man, how do you do it all?” I say I don't.

One of the key threads from the mentoring style of these GOs is making sure they are brutally honest about the sacrifices that are required to make a dual-spouse military family work. Family separation is one of the biggest topics. All of these GOs were separated from their families for a period of time. Sometimes the separations were

deliberate because they allowed for both spouses to do a job required for career progression or to keep children in school. And sometimes the separations were driven by the needs of the Air Force. For most of the GOs, the average amount of time spent apart was less than three years, but, for a third it was 6 to 10 years of making it work long distance.

> Every time I had a female officer that worked for me when they got married, I would have both of them come in and have a conversation. A lot of times I've had my husband with me and he offers great feedback from the joint spouse perspective. By having us as a couple talk to young couples, I have been very successful taking care of folks with what they really want as a couple.

These women had a healthy acceptance of juggling their multiple roles. Making trade-offs and ensuring families understand and accept their home life and work/life are completely intertwined was not an issue for the women in this study. Their only real work/life conflict was time based because there just weren't enough hours in the day to complete everything they wanted to do. The women in this study see each of their roles as being all inclusive and melded together and they need all of them to feel whole and satisfied. They mentor all Airman alike and one of the key components to all of their discussion is brutal honesty about the sacrifices that are required to make a dual-spouse military family work.

Category 2: Work/Life Harmony Secret to Success

As previously mentioned, each GO identified between 7 to 11 roles they balance on a daily basis. In all cases, the secret to their success was finding a balance through some sort of structure or specific life rules of engagement. These tactics ranged from having a structured time table throughout the day to effectively utilizing their front office staffs to ensuring each had some downtime to decompress or re-energize as needed.

The reality of work/life balance is it is not necessarily an equal balance. For these GOs, work more often than not is the role with the most time sensitive demands. It is a give and take, not as linear as many would like to believe.

> I think that balance for everybody is different and it does not mean equal. I don't think you work eight hours a day, and you have eight hours for your family, and you sleep eight hours a day. I don't think that was ever what it was intended to be. You have to find the right balance, between your work and your family, and do what works for you, and make sure that you are not wasting your time.

Theme 1: Work/Life Structure

Although the daily start time varied, all of the GOs had some sort of structure to their daily schedule that included some "me" time for alone time, exercise and much needed sleep. There were a variety of ways each started her day before she left home. Some of the GOs took the time to putter around the house and wake up, some exercised or spent time with their children, but, most of them created some sort of normal morning routine. The day begins before they get to the office and start down that to-do list knowing that 50 percent of the things on it won't get done.

> The blackberry is going on frankly 24/7. I will admit it, one of the first things I do when I get up in the morning is check the blackberry and acknowledge or respond to emails that come in before I even leave the house.

Managing their work and home schedules was a task each of these GOs prioritized. Almost all of the GOs included some period of time shortly after arriving in the office, usually an hour, to read emails and get ready for the day. This tactic allowed them to get a feel for the day before the calendar got locked in with meetings and designated administrative time. It was designed as a time to do some deep thinking, to

review what needs to be accomplished, and for at least one of the GOs, this time included a short daily prayer.

Luckily for all of these women one of the perks of being a general officer is they have staffs to help them manage intense, high tempo professional positions. Multiple GOs pointed towards the key to everything was having control of their calendar and prioritizing what gets added to their schedule. All of them managed through daily staff scheduling sessions, either in the morning or afternoon, to help set priorities and prep for the day. Sticking to a strict calendar was one of the only ways they could maintain a reasonable, work schedule and protect their evenings, weekends and vacations.

> I come in around 7:15 and when I am in the office it is full focus and full throttle. I don't take work home, there is nothing worse than the person who works all day goes home at five and then signs on to the computer late to do more work.

> Emails get away from me at times, but I guess I just prioritize, I tend to prioritize face-to-face types of things. So, I want to spend face-to-face time with the kids and I want to spend as much face-to-face time running the career field and doing the organization.

It takes some time to learn how to properly use your staff to fit your management/leadership style. Most staffs are very adaptable having been through multiple general officers of both genders, but finding the way to make it fit with your needs is key to success. A knowledgeable deputy, for example, knows the history of programs and projects in place and can sit in on meetings in the GO's place from time to time. This allows her to be away from the office when necessary without worrying about a growing workload in her absence.

> I hate inefficient meetings and luckily my staff knows that and only schedules short meetings which forces people to be prepared. I also push my staff to make sure not to schedule a meeting if the issue can be resolved

> or discussed with an email or a read ahead. Luckily, they are very protective of my time.

All of these women found ways to master being able to balance time and energy between multiple demanding roles to ensure they took care of themselves and increased their resiliency. One of the consistent threads was making sure to take some time for themselves to recharge. All of them had different definitions of what provided that resiliency in their lives, but they all had multiple ways that helped them relax and decompress. The activities ranged from working out, spending quiet time with a book, being around other people, especially the Airmen, or just being with their children. Two of the GOs put a tremendous amount of stock in just being able to laugh whether at a movie or television show or just being able to laugh at yourself when things got crazy.

> Don't be afraid to laugh! Laughter and humor are good for you. It breaks the tension, helps build cohesive teams and breaks the monotony of daily life. So, don't take yourself so seriously that you can't laugh.

The other key is knowing when you need to take a break. It can be going out for a bike ride, watching a good movie, getting a massage or having a nice glass of wine.

> Sometimes, just having 10 minutes to sit alone by yourself, your eyes close in a dark room is enough to just get you through the back half of the day. Sometimes it's a long walk listening to your music. Sometimes to rest, sometimes it's running with people, sometimes it's having some alone time.

Exercise, in some, form was a part of all 11 GO's routine. The level and amount varied from the self-proclaimed gym rat to the yogi to the one who just works out to make sure she scores an excellent on her fitness test so she doesn't have to take it more than once a year. The timing of the workouts varied from a very structured timeframe like before work in the morning or a more flexible time like taking a walk in the middle of the

day. Sometimes the socialization of these activities also can be a relaxing diversion from the daily demands.

> Some people look down on working out during the day but my response is I don't turn my brain off and lots of times if we have been struggling with a problem and I go for a run or something, I come back with a way to solve it or at least with a way forward because I had time to go work through things. Studies show exercise does help you think clearly.

Theme 2: Healthy Relationship Maintenance

Military families must be equipped to expect the unexpected, whether it is a move in the middle of a school year or an event at the office takes precedence over an event at home. Flexibility and understanding are the keys to success both for the woman general officer and her spouse and children. If there are no worries on the home front, it's far easier to focus on the demanding task at the office. Other situations put the family in the forefront of what is important. Then the demands of the office have to give. Again, it's an uneven balancing act. Everybody has a part to play to make it work.

One of the reoccurring secrets to maintaining successful relationships and increasing family resiliency was ensuring when the woman general office is at home or at events with the family she is completely present.

> If the kids have a school or athletic event, I try to be there and most importantly if an event is going on, I am actually watching and not answering emails. The last thing in the world I want to miss is a great play because I was too busy fiddling with my phone. Trust me, the emails can wait. If it's super urgent someone will call. If not, I will get to them as soon as I can. So, make sure you're actually "there" whenever you can be.

One of the other tactics many of these GOs used was including their families in Air Force sponsored or work events. This actually had a two-fold benefit. First, it made it so the GO could serve in multiple roles at once. Secondly, it sent a great message to all the Airman looking to her to set the tone about making family a priority. For these

reasons, many of the GOs specifically planned more family-friendly activities during their times as wing commanders.

A common theme from all 11 GOs was making sure to make herself and her family a priority. There will always be a time when the job will have to be front and center and often those times will be short notice and of unpredictable length, it is just the nature of the military. However, when they had the ability to take control of their priorities, they made it happen. Often it is as simple as putting something on the calendar to make a difference.

> I think first and foremost for our family the necessity that I place on being able to have breakfast in the morning with the kids and going home for dinner, communicates to them that, “Yes, I have a job and I do have a career, but they're still important.” So, one of the things that we talk about at the end of the day is, “Hey, what's your favorite part of the day?”

Understandably, most staffs are conditioned to supporting male general officers, many who have stay at home supporting spouses. Those women GOs learned to set the tone early with their staffs on what their priorities were and what were non-negotiable issues.

> One of the examples I always give is the time we moved in the middle of the school year. It is normal for you to have your change of command on one afternoon and then very next day they instantly start the indoctrination and the fire hose treatment. Well, this location was no different and they wanted to get started at 7 o' clock with a jammed packed schedule. And I'm like, "Guys, I'm not going to be in until about nine, nine thirty." And they looked at me like I had horns. And they're like, "What do you mean?" And I'm like, "Okay, hold on. So, I just PCS'd [moved] across the United States in the middle of a school year. I have a little girl in kindergarten." I've got one in fifth grade and one in seventh grade. I go, "I am going to deliver my boys to their middle school or elementary school. Make sure they know how to open their locker, make sure they know how to get to their classrooms, and their gym class and that they've got their PE clothes. And I am absolutely not putting my five-year-old little girl, on a school bus in a new state, sending her and saying good luck." I go, "I'm hand delivering her to her kindergarten teacher and making sure she's got all the right markers."

> And I go, "And when I'm done and I get them settled, I will be in and you can fire hose the hell out of me. But until then, I'm of no use to you."

There were many examples demonstrating how much the GOs value their personal time and how they protect that precious time. Blocking off time in their calendar was one of the most common, not only for special lunches or events of the children, but also to protect vacation time. They learned the value of special weekends to recharge and enjoy family time as well as longer vacations.

> There are certain things that are important in your life, put them on your calendar as soon as you possibly can to buy tickets. Because if you don't buy tickets, people can easily cancel your leave.

Keeping connected as a family is important, but it is equally important to have a strong connection and some time with just your spouse, even if it is just time to talk about what is going on with the kids. There has to be time to stay connected with the spouse to maintain a healthy relationship as a couple.

> We try and we do a lot of social events together. You can imagine as a GO how many social events I have to attend; it is a lot. So, he picks and chooses the ones that are fun to go and we spend those date nights together and we do things on weekends.

> We run together on weekends, and that's our thing. And fortunately, our eight-year-old rides a bike, so it is actually a family affair. We also try and do lunch every so often. My administrative assistant doesn't even ask, but she just blocks it off on my calendar, and sends the email to my husband. I'm like, "You found time!" It's awesome, you know? She just thinks ahead, and it's very thoughtful. So, I look forward to it.

For these women managing their own schedules is challenging, and it becomes even more complicated with a house full of active children with full schedules of their own. Military children generally are flexible, open to new things and love to travel, so they make good companions as well as contributing family members.

> It's controlled chaos, and it's the only thing my children know. It's their life and it works. Anyway, I think it's about balance, and what does balance mean to you. And I realize that my balance is not most people's balance. And I realize my kids don't go to bed before 10:00 at night because that's the only time I get to see them, and most people gasp when I tell them that my infant wouldn't go to sleep until 9:00 or 10:00 at night. How can you raise your children that way? Because that's what works for my children. That's what works for us, and I tell myself, when I am at home, it's gonna be quality time, and try not to be distracted and maybe it's only two hours a night, but it's their time. Maybe my children are a little bit brainwashed and they thought having fun as little kids was going to Target on a Saturday, and they didn't know what a movie theater was, or a zoo, but that they didn't know, so it's okay.

Military children tend to be a pretty resilient bunch, but that doesn't make the sacrifices they endure, like leaving friends behind every couple of years and having to learn a new school system, diminish mom's guilt. There were several strategies these GOs used to manage mom's work/life and provide some stability and sense of normalcy for the kids.

> I think my goal has always been that I don't want my children to suffer because I choose to do this. I want their lives to be as normal as their lives can be. So, if there's any activity they wanna do, then I'm gonna let them do it, and we're gonna figure out how to do it.

With multiple moves and lots of late nights, if the family as a whole embraces military life and buys into this adventure is bigger than themselves it helps them get through the less fun times.

> We look at it though in the way that we talk about it to our children is that we're in this as a family and so we're serving all four of us together so at any point something seems to be out of balance, then we need to talk about it as a family and make a decision as to whether or not this is something that we want to collectively continue to do. And I think because we don't get stressed about it, they don't get stressed about it. But they do think it's kind of cool.

One of the most challenging times to maintain healthy relationships is during family separations. All of these GOs experience a period of separation from their

husbands/boyfriends and families for a variety of reasons. Some of it was by choice because it would create more stability for the family, for instance during a school tour or permanent change of station in the middle of the school year. Other times there was no way around the separations such as being stationed in different locations or during deployments. Successful GOs know it takes a village and they help each other along with depending on good friends, coworkers for support. Living on base also makes it a lot easier for military families.

> Missing birthdays and holidays can't be avoided and are understandable. Just make sure you know what is truly mission-related versus a convenient excuse.

> Yeah, it is just so complicated, but I've always worked to make it work. It's interesting, I think, when people make decisions like that. And this would be the only area that I think is a little bit difficult as a female. I think they're like, "Oh, God, I can't imagine a mom wanting to leave their kids." So, it's been interesting, but every minute that I'm with them, I use it and I'm probably closer to my girls than I think a lot of people who are with their children all the time.

The use of technology and the improvements in the way to stay connected have definitely changed the game when trying to stay connected while separated. In addition to normal methodologies such as Skyping or using Facetime, some of the GOs embraced technology to do more unique things like watching games in another state or completing those "Team Mom" tasks.

> Technology is pretty wonderful because the two older boys play hockey and so they'll livestream it to us. So, I was grateful the other day. I watched them play hockey in South Dakota. My daughter plays basketball for the college that she goes to and they were live streaming the game from Minnesota. So, I felt like I could be engaged with everybody, you know, by technology.

All of the GOs had spouses with professional careers whether it was in the civilian sector, as another Air Force member or a member of another service. All but one

spent time apart as a result of professional military education, deployments, or separate assignments. The amount of time these dual career couples spent apart ranged from 1 to 10 years (this includes the period while the couple was dating prior to marriage). These couples invested resources of time and money for dual residences, full time childcare, long distance phone bills (back in the day) and airline travel to be together because they knew the short-term separations were worth a lifetime together.

> Number one, of our love for each other. We were gonna make this work, and frankly, if it had any challenge to our marriage, we would have made a decision that one or both of us would have left. But that doesn't necessarily take the stress off.

And sometimes it doesn't always work. All of the GO participants were married at some point in their career, but not all of the marriages were successful.

> It is challenging being in the military and married. I won't give you my whole drama on that. The man I was married to that I had children with, we were married for about 10 years, but you know, I would be somewhere and then he would finally get there and they would PCS [move] me. And that makes it really complicated. Marriage is already tough, but if you're never with somebody and it's even tougher. So, he retired and then asked for a divorce. I'm like, "Oh, but you're retired."

While some GOs married other members of the military, others chose civilian spouses. Each had special challenges to make the marriages work. The military spouse either competed for positions which would lead to career advancement or, in some cases, took whatever position would work in the geographic area that was less convenient. Others decided at some point who would stay in and who would get out. The military partner who left the military, then had to decide on an alternate career or if staying home and leading the family was the best alternative.

Non-military spouses had the same choices as those who left the military. Not every husband is willing to give up his dreams to follow a strong, dedicated GO as her

career advances. Somewhere along the line sacrifices must be made by one or both marriage partners. Both have to work at not resenting these sacrifices to keep the family together and to promote the other partner.

Regardless of the career status makeup of the couple, the spouses of these GOs had to adapt and make sacrifices to their careers for the greater good of the team. Fighting to be together is one piece of the puzzle, the real challenge is how to find a balance so both careers can still progress. It is especially difficult when both members are military. These GOs identified some characteristics that made it easier such as different year groups to help deconflict career milestones and reduce competition for rank within the couple. It was also beneficial if one of the member's career path allows his/her priority to be to keep the couple together. If the focus is not on the prestige of the position, rather the reward of being excited about the work, it helps ensure dual career satisfaction. Regardless of the path chosen, the bottomline for all the GOs is there was a mutual support between working professionals.

> Each spouse has got to be supportive of the other. And that's how we have always been. The conversation goes like this, "Well, what are we gonna do? I'm gonna support you on this, so why don't you go do that deployment or go for that next job, and we will make this work for us."

Managing dual military careers is difficult, but, at least both people are working for the same "company" and the career progression is similar for both people. When the spouse is a civilian, the struggle is finding a rewarding career that is also mobile with the ability to move often or spend a significant time apart. The GOs with civilian spouses all found different ways to manage dual non-military, professional careers. For some, however, it doesn't work out, and that's when the choice must be made whether to continue to slug it out or to move on to something else.

> My husband has always followed me and taken jobs that weren't always promotions, sometimes the only thing available was a lateral position. He made lots of sacrifices and it was the only way it would have worked. But, as soon as I retire, I am going to follow him anywhere he wants to go to finish out his career. I am actually looking forward to it!

Being a GO is a time consuming and challenging endeavor. For most of these women having a supportive spouse was critical to managing the role. For several of the GOs, their husbands have taken on the lead parent role either after they retired from the military or because they have the more flexible profession/job. This arrangement provides these GOs confidence there is stability and normalcy at home even when work gets unpredictable.

> My husband can take on the sports dad role, but, don't make him organize it. Don't make him send out the SignUpGenius with all the different stuff and expect him to get what you need. However, SignUpGenius comes out and I look at and I tell him, "Hey you're bringing Chick-fil-A nuggets and I put the task on the calendar. He looks at the calendar the day of, he does it. That's kind of how we operate.

As a military wing commander, which all of these GOs were at one time, there are expectations on the spouse's role and how they interact and lead the spouses' club. Each of these spouses approached it a little differently. Some take on the traditional head president of the spouse club.

> He took on the spouse role and entertaining. . . does the spouses' club. He brings a different perspective and he runs a meeting different than most of the female spouses, but over time they appreciated the different perspective. It works. He loves having all of the spouses over for a glass of wine on the back patio on a Friday night. He very much enjoys that environment.
>
> When I was a wing commander, my husband didn't want to run the spouses' club, it just wasn't his thing, but he did enjoy serving as the treasurer.

Throughout the literature there is discussion on how the home workload is divided between members of a dual career couple. Although all of the GOs had very similar

responsibilities and management techniques in their career workload, all of these GOs approached this focus area differently based on their individual family management designs. The one consistent theme was household chores are not necessarily divided by traditional gender roles.

> We team everything. We're a full team. One cooks--the other cleans, I mean there's certain house rules. We all help with laundry. He's all in with all the things that happen in the house as am I. If something needs to be done with cars or maintenance or we have to take something to somewhere and drop it off, whoever has the time makes it work.

How household chores are conquered was a key piece to the structure these GOs utilized to find work/life balance. The ability and desire to hire someone to do the most mundane chores varied during different phase of their careers. The decision point wasn't directly tied to available financial resources, rather it was more dependent on lack of available time. For example, one of the GOs hired out when she was a young major working long hour and doing her masters, but now as a GO, she and her husband just split up the floors and conquer the task together. For the most part, these GOs flexed their economic power and hired other people to do their chores even if it sometimes made them feel guilty.

> So, I don't clean my house, I have a maid. I flex my economic power and every opportunity I have to cover gaps, to buy me time back because my time is more valuable to me. I think sometimes we feel guilty when we do those things and I don't think we should. So those are the things too. I think sometimes, particularly as women, we struggle to be okay with paying for chores.

Essence of the Air Force Woman General Officers' Experiences

The women general officers participating in this study identified the following six overlapping roles that shaped their identities as part of their career journey: Airman/Air Force Officer, Commander/Leader, Mentor/Coach, Wife/Ex-Wife, Sister/Daughter, and

Athlete. Although having children and being a woman general officer was considered incompatible in the past, these women developed strategies to have both a successful career and a family and ensured their mom roles did not become an obstacle in their careers.

Although the women general officers participating in this study had similar structure to their lives, they employed a variety of different strategies to navigate the labyrinth of family and leadership life while maintaining healthy relationships, taking care of themselves and performing the mission of serving others as Air Force officers. These generals are humble yet confident and hard-charging. By the time they reach the rank of general, they have learned through years of experience and training when to push forward and when to pull back in a male-oriented military institution where they were often the only women in the room. They were self-starters who understood their power and how to use it to the advantage of the Airmen they lead. They traded the freedom to choose where they live and work for the opportunities, the training and the camaraderie of military service. For each of these women, being an American Airman was a calling to be something bigger than themselves and service a greater good.

From the first day of their careers, they filled 24/7, 365-days-a-year positions. This quickly taught them to appreciate the support of the military family and that this life is a team sport where everybody needs to play a role to make it work. They learned to juggle timelines to focus on where the need is most critical, and each day they strive to concentrate more on balance than conflict in work/life situations. They knew when to stay the course and when to delegate, both in their personal and their professional lives.

They thrived in multiple roles, yet they knew when to push themselves and how and when to back off and recharge.

Chapter 5: Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Women belong in places where decisions are being made.
- Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg (Mears, 2009)

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how Air Force women general officers have experienced navigating their military careers. This study was guided by the question:

What was the lived experienced of Air Force women general officers navigating their military careers?

The findings of this study were captured in the following two overarching categories with their associated themes: *Being An Air Force Woman General Officer* (Theme 1. Role Navigation, Theme 2. Part of Something Bigger and Theme 3. Vocal Change Agents) and *Work/Life Harmony Secret to Success* (Theme 1. Work/Life Structure and Theme 2. Healthy Relationship Maintenance). This chapter presents the discussion of the findings with associated conclusions followed by implications for research and recommendations for practice.

Discussion of the Findings and Conclusions

The essence of the phenomenon of navigating military careers as described by the Air Force women general officers (GOs) participating in this study is captured in the following six subsections.

Embracing Multiple Identities and Roles

Conclusion 1: The women in this study saw each of their roles as being interwoven with natural amounts of give and take in regards to time and energy.

The GOs participating in this study identified between 7 and 13 personal and professional roles that made up their identities. All of them placed emphasis and value on being an American Airman. For the women general officers in this study being an Airman is a delicate balance of multiple roles and identities that include: commander/leader, mentor/coach, wife/ex-wife, sister/daughter, and athlete for a total of six common roles. Being an American Airman was an honor for all of these women and viewed as an opportunity not to be taken for granted. More importantly was their role of leading Airman and providing a path for others to follow and find success while navigating their own journeys in the Air Force.

One of the most notable paths these women paved was that of being a mother. Consistent with research in the private sector by Perrone et al., (2005) the role of being a parent was highly ranked and considered one of the most rewarding roles among these women. However, most of them heard early in their careers that being a mother and a senior officer was a difficult challenge. Brigadier General Wilma Vaught, who was promoted in 1980, is famous for mentoring young women and telling them they would have to make sacrifices, such as not being able to have a family, maybe not even marry, if they wanted to be successful in the Air Force (Thomas, 2007). The women in this study were more than willing to make the sacrifices necessary to have both a successful career and a family, but they definitely made sure their "mom" roles did not get in the way or become an obstacle. In some cases that meant hiring a nanny to allow for the flexibility to navigate between roles. In other cases, it meant the trailing spouse was going to have to take on Mr. Mom duties. The shift in attitude was most pronounced by the general

officers who had kids in both the early stages of their career and then again in the late stages.

Consistent with research, the women GOs found having multiple roles to be a positive aspect of their lives because they enjoyed having different things going on all the time (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2000; Thoits, 1991). The stimulus from being given unique opportunities and having varied responsibilities created the extra energy needed for each role and ensured they "didn't get bored." Their enhanced experiences increased the likelihood of being highly engaged in all their roles both personal and professional. Additionally, the GOs in this study demonstrated positive attitudes about focusing on only the things they could control and embracing the chaos that was inevitable in all of their lives.

The women GOs in this study had a healthy acceptance of juggling multiple roles. Making trade-offs and ensuring families understand and accept their home life and work/life were completely intertwined. Their only real work/life conflict was time-based because there just weren't enough hours in the day to complete everything they wanted to do which is consistent with Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) and Hammer and Thompson (2003).

Sharing a Roadmap

Conclusion 2: The women in this study realized sharing their experiences was essential to help guide future women Air Force officers.

For the longest time, women in the military didn't tell their stories in large groups or forums because they didn't recognize the value of sharing their experiences with the younger Airman. Most of these women reported they did not have many mentors as they

climbed the ranks in the Air Force. Of those who did, they were mostly male mentors. When previous generations of women general officers were mentioned during this discussion, they weren't described as a mentor in a traditional sense; they were described as "someone I watched" or "occasionally someone who gave me tips and suggestions."

In addition to not having a role model to emulate, these GOs were consciously aware of their challenges as a woman military leader to finding a way of being the cheerleader for girl power without being accused of playing favorites among Airman. While being conscious of the perceptions, each of the women GOs in this study embraced their roles as a mentor to both women and men.

Studies show that women positively respond to having mentors and role models that are of the same gender and race (Johnson & Smith, 2016; Keller et al., 2018; Koefoed & mcGovney, 2019). A study commissioned by the Air Force examined why female officers (O-1 to O-5) decide to leave the service (Keller et al., 2018). The focus was to identify and address the barriers to female officer retention. Data was gathered from 54 focus groups conducted during 90-minute sessions. There were 295 officers ranging in rank from second lieutenant (O-1) to lieutenant colonel (O-5) who participated in the focus groups. The study found 83 percent of the focus groups specifically identified the importance of having female role models in senior leadership positions. Many of the participants had never had a female commander, especially those in male-dominated career fields. Participants noted they rarely saw female leaders who were married with children and had developed the perception that was not possible for women to both have a family and obtain senior leadership positions in the Air Force.

Consistent with the Keller et al. (2018) research, the desire for a roadmap on how to balance career and family was prevalent among young Air Force women. The list of barriers they identified as being incompatible with staying in the military and having a family included: the difficulty of frequent moves, deployments, demanding work schedules, infertility concerns and timing of pregnancies to minimize career disruption (Asch et al., 2016; DACOWITS, 2019; Keller et al., 2018). The women GOs noted similar concerns for dual-military couples and managing separation due to incompatible assignments and back-to-back deployments. However, they successfully employed a variety of strategies to support their marriages and navigate their careers so separations were shorter or less of an issue. Several of their tactics hinged on timing of the marriage and having children. Several of the GOs married other military members but later in their journey so they were already professionally established. Others married civilian or separated military who had mobile careers that were easily transferable either because there was a tie to the Air Force in a non-military capacity or a business owner with flexible management options.

One of the ways the GOs have learned to give credence to their narrative is to couch work/life balance issues and concerns as key to retention and deployability for both men and women in the Air Force. Twenty-five percent of women in the military are in dual spouse relationships with other active-duty or reserve force members (DCMC, 2018). If work/life balance is not maintained, there is a high probability both military members will decide to leave, not just the women as we have seen in the past (Asch et al., 2016; DACOWITS, 2019).

Facing Unconscious Bias

Conclusion 3: Unconscious bias was prevalent in the experiences of the women general officers navigating their career. Finding their voices to challenge unconscious bias was essential in navigating their military careers.

Throughout the journey and even as the women GOs navigated the highest ranks, there was a continued frustration of being presented as the only women in the room, but still lacking the influence to change the narrative unless there was also a male voice in support. Throughout their careers they experienced not being heard in a group setting even when they were at the head of the table as the person in charge. As wing commanders, even when they presented a very clear message or gave direction, the message was sometimes completely ignored until a male interrupted the meeting and repeated the statement. While they served as company grade and field grade officers, they developed tactics such as sarcasm to combat these biases. Despite these tactics as they advanced in their careers, these women continually faced unconscious bias which in some cases hindered their ability to lead.

The women GOs shared incidents about when they were part of elite warfighting units where they were counselled differently than their male counterparts. Specifically, they were told to smile more or change the way they communicate even though they had similar roles and rank as their male squadron mates.

There were some extreme scenarios of bias presented in this study, but none were as misguided as those surrounding attendance of prestigious military education schools while pregnant. In both cases, the GOs asked for little to no special treatment to be able to attend school and still have a healthy pregnancy. In the first incidence, the individual

was flat out denied her opportunity to attend a prestigious position in an elite school because she was pregnant. It took four-star level involvement to get the school slot reinstated. The individual not only completed the course, but excelled as a distinguished graduate. Her efforts and ultimate success eventually influenced change and paved the way for those that followed. Recently, the policy changed and women cannot be involuntarily banned from attending professional military education while pregnant or during postpartum (Losey, 2020).

The decision to keep your last name for professional reasons is not new to the business world, however, it has a different twist in the military that provides a challenge due to unconscious bias (Johnson & Smith, 2016). An individual's military record includes an entire career of yearly performance reports with your name at the top. Every time you meet a promotion board or compete for a development opportunity such as command or in-residence schools, this entire record is reviewed. A male officer can get married and divorced multiple times but it will not be identified in his records because his last name doesn't change on his performance reports. However, a woman who chooses to take her spouse's last name when she marries will have performance reports with different last names. Current military society attaches a negative stigma to divorce, so having multiple last names could flag a person.

The days of needing a white male champion to push diversity issues is slowly fading. Progress has been made in righting some of the policies wrongs that primarily effected women and blocked them from opportunities. There are official channels such as the newly established Air Force Women's Initiative Team and even more unofficial channels on social media where women can find support, ask those sensitive questions

and get a wide range of opinions from all ranks. The women in this study have made sure their voices are being heard and continue to fight the unconscious bias and microaggressions daily with hope they will be able to educate those men and women who mean no harm but do so just because the lens they are seeing the world through has too many good ol' boys and not enough good ol' girls to tell the other side of the story.

Starting in the 1970s, there have been several generations of Air Force women general officers and each generation has had a different cross to bear. The first generation had to prove women were capable of being military members. The second generation had to prove women were just as good as the guys. The third generation was just trying to fit in and be accepted. Finally, this latest generation seems to be picking up traction and being able to use their voice for change that may finally eliminate some of the barriers women face during their careers. Unlike the early generations of GOs who were primarily focused on proving women can do any job they are given, the women in this study are more likely to advocate for piddle packs, flight suits and body armor designed for women rather than just making the versions designed specifically for men work. However, there are still times when there are no women in the room to lend their voice to the issue at hand and problems will continued to be solved from the male perspective only unless the Air Force can increase the number of women general officers. The Air Force has made significant progress in eliminating these barriers, but there still is a lot of work to be done.

Recognizing the Need for Self-Care

Conclusion 4: Investing the time in mental and physical health was a priority in navigating the women general officers' military careers.

There is no lack of practical evidence maintaining health and wellness, especially when you are in a demanding professional position, is key to being able to operate at max capacity. Only recently, does the leadership literature address the need for self-care and increased mindfulness through practices such as yoga, meditation, relaxing walks and quiet time (Tsao & Laszlo, 2019). The study emphasized there should be no associated guilt regardless of when, where and how decompression tactics are implemented. Everyone understands their individual needs and should build a program and engage in activities of self-care in the best way possible

All the women GOs in this study realized the need for self-care and used multiple ways to helped them relax and decompress. The activities ranged from everything from working out, spending quiet time with a book, watching TV, being around other people especially the Airmen, or just being with their children. There was even the recommendation to engage in laughter even if you are just laughing at yourself to help remain humble. All of the women GOs also valued opportunities to travel with their family and/or capitalize on much needed time-off in order to recharge.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) identified three forms of work/life conflicts: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. The primary type of conflict the women GOs in this study had to overcome was time-based conflict which occurs when the time required by one role interferes with participation in another. All of the women in this study found ways to master being able to balance time and energy between multiple demanding roles. To help maximize quality family time so critical to the mental health and work/life harmony of the women in this study, many of these

women invested in extensive child care and household services to reduce time and energy constraints.

The tactic of using financial resources to solve time-constraint problems is consistent with research on executive women completed by Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2009). Their study found that the women designed and adapted their career and family strategies over time. The executives all held true to the women's values and accounted for the availability of support at home and at work. Key tactics included adapting to the partner's lack of support, outsourcing domestic work and sequencing career and family.

Relying on Love and Support of Family and Friends

Conclusion 5: Support of family and friends was critical for the women general officers' navigation of their careers.

Among this group it was widely recognized that an Airman's family has to come first. If there are no worries on the homefront, then it is far easier to focus on the tasks at work. Foremost in the women GOs' minds was securing reliable childcare. This philosophy was consistent with role balance theory that contends the accomplishment of role-related expectations can be negotiated with a shared understanding between an individual and his or her role-related partners in work and family domains and that it is possible to be fully engaged in both roles without sacrificing one for the other (Grzywacz & Carlson 2007; McMillan et al., 2011).

All of the GOs in this study made a concerted effort to take the opportunity to really be present when they were with their family so they could enjoy family meals and activities. Technology can hinder these efforts if not managed properly with a disciplined

approach to only letting the most critical of communication disrupt the family time (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

One of the opportunities the women GOs embraced was being able to present their military service as a family affair. Military kids are pretty resilient and independent (Clever & Segal, 2013). Treating them as if they are part of the team also serving the nation helps provide purpose and makes it easier for them to feel as if they have a voice if at some point things get out of balance. It is important to talk about it as a family and make a decision as to whether or not this is something that they want to collectively continue to do.

One of the most challenging times to maintain healthy relationships was during family separations. All of the GOs experienced a period of separation from their husbands/boyfriends and families for a variety of reasons. Some of it was by choice because it would create more stability for the family, for instance during a school tour or permanent change of station in the middle of the school year. Other times there was no way around the separations such as being stationed in different locations or during deployments. Especially during deployments, the use of technology enhanced this group of women's ability to stay connected. In addition to normal communication tools such as Skyping or using Facetime, some of the GOs embraced technology to do more unique things like watching sporting events and other activities in another state or country.

Another challenge that was identified and remedied by all of the women GOs in this study were the barriers military life induces on finding dual career balance. Being able to manage dual professional careers for the couples in this study was less of an issue than was suggested in the literature (Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005; Lakhani & Gade,

1992). A majority of the couples were dual military at some point in their marriage which may be why there was a more defined understanding of the sacrifices required. The late nights and long separations were an accepted part of being in a military relationship. Many of the couples had been married for a long time and had settled into their respective roles so any traditional issues that may have occurred during the early years of the relationship had been resolved. Additionally, many of the couples married after a couple of assignments so they were established and a little more mature when they merged lives. Finally, in many of these couples the spouse was towards the end of his military career nearing retirement or in some cases already retired and so the transition to lead parent was a more natural fit having already had a fulfilling career.

Throughout the study, the women GOs mentioned how critical the support of their families was to being able to navigate and succeed in such a demanding career. Research has shown that although the intense demands of managing multiple roles may increase strain, strong support from family and colleagues can mitigate the negative effects. Both received and perceived support (the extent to which support is seen as being available) are important in addition to affective support (listening, encouragement), informational support, and all other tangible types of support (Perrone et al., 2005). The women in this study valued their friends and family and found strategies to maintained strong relationships in order to mitigate the negative effects of juggling multiple demanding roles while navigating their military careers.

Achieving Work/Life Harmony

Conclusion 6: Work/life harmony was an essential element in navigating their careers.

This study began firmly planted in the work/life balance camp where it is assumed there is ever present conflict between the roles and trade-offs in time and priority in how individuals managed. However, after completing the interviews and analyzing the data and reflecting on the overall attitude of the women in this study, work/life balance more neatly fits into the definition and theoretical stance of work/life harmony. Work/life harmony is defined as "an individually pleasing, congruent arrangement of work and life roles that is interwoven into a single narrative of life" (McMillan et al., 2011, p.15). With this definition, "balance" can still be obtained as long as an individual's roles are integrated in a manner that is in line with the individual's values and a fit for the family regardless of the amount of time allocated to each. It is also a more encompassing construct that can be inclusive of those individuals without traditional family demands, yet who have other entities that create a similar pull and drain on their time.

Work/life harmony is a better theoretical construct fit than work/life balance for women who are in high efficacy occupations where the job is considered a "calling" or "serving as part of something bigger than yourself."

> Harmony allows for the individual to intentionally create a synchronized and complementary arrangement of roles, relationships, resources and responsibilities . . . that contribute to an integrated narrative of work/life that is productive, satisfying and fulfilling. Individuals can choose to sacrifice time, engagement or satisfaction in any role at any time to fulfill the needs of another role, and still maintain their overall feeling of "harmony" (Morris & McMillan, 2014).

The Air Force women general officers who participated in this study when describing how they integrate and manage the roles that make up their identity more closely aligned with work/life harmony. Where most people see conflict, the women in this study saw their normal, intricately linked identities which needed to be managed as a

whole instead of as individual roles that are rank ordered and given resources based on priority.

Recommendations for Research

The findings of this study have indicated there are valuable lessons to be learned from the way Air Force women general officers navigate their careers and what coping strategies and mental attitudes they employ to be successful. Although many of the experiences are universal, replicating this study with women general officers from other services could expand the findings of this study.

The generational progression of how women are becoming more assertive in using their voices and pushing for policy and equipment change has made a difference in recent years. However, many of the recommended changes do not gain traction unless male GOs are recognizing the needs of women and championing their causes. Conducting a study to understand how male GOs navigate their careers and how they perceive women GOs could provide insight into this type of relationship and uncover any unconscious bias.

Given the unconscious bias experienced by the participants in this study, research should be conducted to investigate the culture of the Air Force that allows for this unconscious bias.

Considering the nature of the lived experiences of these Air Force women general officers, a study should be considered that examines how women lead differently than their male counterparts.

A majority of the general officers interviewed plainly stated they would not be successful without the support of their spouses. Many of the spouses' careers were a

secondary priority compared to their wives' career progression. Finding the balance between dual professional careers, especially when it is a dual military situation, is a phenomenon of its own. A study on how trailing spouses of Air Force Woman Senior Leaders perceive the career navigation as part of a military family should be considered.

As the findings of this study show, children played an important role in supporting the careers of their mothers. Future studies should investigate the experiences of the children of Air Force woman senior leaders and the impact of those experiences on their career path.

Recommendations for Practice

> *Diversity is part of the fabric of our Air Force. It is part of the fabric of who we are.*
>
> - *Air Force Chief of Staff General David Goldfein (Tirpak, 2018)*

The Air Force has made a large effort to change policies to improve diversity among the ranks. It is widely recognized there are dividends for lower ranking personnel to see people who look like them being given unique opportunities and more importantly serving in senior leadership positions. The Air Force is pursuing different avenues to meet this goal to increase diversity through education, recruitment and retention.

The Air Force needs to embrace the concept that work/life balance policies benefit all Airman, not just those with children in traditional families. It is well documented that retention policies need to be focused on more than the individual in the service. Retention decisions start in the home and are directly correlated to how a member's service effects their family. The Air Force should consider increasing child development center hours, extending paternal leave policies and enforcing vacation leave to be taken not only to relieve the stress on working mothers, but also on dual

professional couples who equally share the childcare responsibilities. When developing these policies, the focus needs to include options and benefits for non-traditional family models that may include single parents, same sex parents and required generational care. Finding a fair balance between the mission requirements and time to decompress whether it is alone or with family members benefits all Air Force members in the long run.

Air Force Personnel Leadership should develop robust mentoring programs for all levels of supervision. The program should be structured using guest speakers, small group workshops and book reviews that focus on philosophies and tactical tips to mentor all different ranks, job specialties and genders. Additionally, reoccurring mentorship forums, communities of practice on social media and women's readiness issue panels should be organized to increase discussion and brainstorming avenues. The program should focus on developing leaders who are skilled at leading fellow Airman who are diverse. One module of study could center on how male officers, especially those at the senior levels, can lead/mentor women. Growing up in a male dominated career field where white men are the predominant voice provides them little exposure to competing views. Unless male officers have daughters or wives who are pursuing professional careers, many of them do not know how to tailor their mentoring and leadership styles for women.

In the same spirit of learning how to lead different diverse groups, training for all Air Force members on how to identify individual and group unconscious bias should be instituted. Specific attention should be given to unconscious bias and/or mansplaining that occurs when communicating in mixed crowds. Educating others on the different lens minorities view life through could improve relationships and positively influence how

men react to working for women and how they mentor women. Additionally, the Air Force needs to increase opportunities for women to learn how to mentor other women.

Air Force Personnel Leadership should implement training for women on how to combat and overcome the bias and ensure their voices are heard. There should be policies and protections in place to encourage this behavior until it becomes the norm. Additionally, HAF/A1 needs to find a way to mask the multiple name changes and take the divorced identifier out of the promotion record. In addition, a full policy and process review should be completed to identify any other programs with rules that hinder/deny women developmental opportunities or support work/life balance for women.

HAF/A1 and local wing commanders should establish formal male spouse support groups and host discussion panels to get the perspective of a growing population of dependents. Additionally, when designing future retention and recruitment policies and programs, consideration should be given to non-work factors that focus on retention of family as a whole (e.g., child care, youth programs, spouse clubs) including senior/elder care which can affect all members single and married.

Today the Air Force women general officers embrace their far-reaching influence and rather than championing just women, this group fights for the universal change which benefits all Airman. Taking that oath of office and slipping into the uniform they wear on the job every day confers respect from those they command along with the right and the privilege to shape individuals who can influence the communities where they serve as well as communities across the globe.

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Appendix A: Data for Women in the Military Work Force

Total Population	Total Population	Not Married	Married	Married Mil to Mil	Married to AD AF	Married to ARC	Married to Civilian	With Children	Without Children	Married with Kids	Not Married with Kids
Total Officer Core	62258	19600	42658	352	5137	1329	35840	29339	32919	28603	736
Women	13246	5631	7615	238	2688	390	4299	4300	8946	3895	405
Men	49012	13969	35043	114	2449	939	31541	25039	23973	24708	331
Total Capts	20829	7099	13730	146	2269	401	10914	8725	12104	8525	200
Female Capt	4989	2084	2905	100	1199	130	1476	1408	3581	1287	121
Male Capt	15840	5015	10825	46	1070	271	9438	7317	8523	7238	79
Total Cols	3239	238	3001	7	92	81	2821	2216	1023	2178	38
Female Cols	458	104	354	6	33	17	298	255	203	239	16
Male Cols	2781	134	2647	1	59	64	2523	1961	820	1939	22

* Table is derived from Air Force Personnel Center IDEAs Reports reports from September 2018 (Military Couples by Rank and Gender; Children in Household by Marital Status, Rank and Gender and Gender, Grade, Marital Status and Spouse Status).

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Opening Statement: Thank you for participating in this study. The results of the interview may help researchers and Air Force Personnel better understand how Air Force women general officers have navigated the military system and other aspects of their lives during their careers. The interview will be recorded using a digital recording device that is compatible with off-the-shelf transcription software. As the researcher, I will ensure confidentiality is maintained. Aggregate results will be published, but no personal information will be provided in the publication, and only the researcher will have access to the full transcripts. Researcher will proceed with the below open-ended questions as needed.

Theme from Lit Review	Resulting Question
Identity Theory	1. Describe your life as a female Air Force General Officer
Stryker, 1968; Thoits, 1991; Sachau et al., 2012; Pawelczyk, 2014	a. How do your friends and family feel about you being a general?
	b. How much is being a general officer part of your identity?
Role Theory	2. What roles currently define your life?
Tompson & Werner, 1997; Thoits, 1991	a. Has being a woman general officer made a difference in how you see and/or fulfill these roles?
Gill & Davidson, 2001; Tompson & Werner, 1997	b. Do you think having multiple roles is a positive or negative part of your life?
Work/ Life Balance	3. How do you define work/life balance in your life?
Thoits, 1991; Greenhause et al. , 1985	a. How do you prioritize you time?
Britt & Dawson, 2005; Vinokur, Pierce & Buck, 1999	b. What do you do to recharge?
Dual Career/Spouse Support	4. What role has your spouse played in helping you manage family and career?
Phillips & Imhoff, 1997; Gordon & Whelan-Berry, 2005; Ezzedeen & Richey, 2008	a. Does your spouse help with the housework and child or elder care?
Greenhause et al., 1985; Hammer, et al., 1997; Gray & Lynch, 1983	b. Has your spouse's career ever been given less priority than yours in either the long term or short term? Have there been any negative consequences to this priority? What about unexpected positive outcomes?
Bunker, Zubek, Vanderslice & Rice (1992); Bergen, Kirby & McBride (2007); Lakhani & Gade, 1992	c. Have you ever had to live in separate locations because of career commitments?
Retention	5. Why did you decided to stay at the 10-year point and past 20 years?
Heilman, Bell& McDonald, 2009; Baldwin, 2007	a. Is there anything you would do differently?

Appendix C: Information Sheet

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

Information Sheet for Air Force Women General Officers

This is a phenomenological study that will examine the lived experience of Air Force women general officers. As you know, the Air Force has the ability to grow its own general officers through rewarding jobs and a variety of leadership development programs. The problem is not developing qualified women candidates; it is retaining a diversified force at the senior ranks that can add their voices to long-term strategic discussions that improve quality of life and mission accomplishment. The results of this study have the potential to help Air Force Secretary James' meet her diversity goals and provide useful insight into the reasons why the current core of women general officers chose to remain in the service. However, the primary reason for this study is to gather data to research for a doctoral dissertation.

You have been invited to part in a research study because you are one of the few military women who meet the criteria of having obtained the military grade of O-7 or above (general) in the United States Air Force.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand how Air Force women general officers have navigated the demands of the military institution and other aspects of their lives during their careers. This study will be guided by the question: How do women live and experience life as Air Force general officers.

How long will I be in the study?

This study requires your participation for a 90 minute interview and possibly 10 to 15 minutes of follow up questions. Your participation is voluntary. You will be able to opt out of the research at any time just by communicating your withdrawal with myself or my dissertation chair.

What happens if I agree to be in this research?

I will conduct a one-time 90 minute interview (preferably in person although skype is an acceptable alternative). Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. The interviews will have some guided questions that will be used to generate conversation; however, there is no set protocol on what questions have to be answered – we will just go where the conversation takes us. All interviews will be audio taped with your oral consent at the start of the interview and any follow up information will be obtained via telephone, email or skype. Recordings will be transcribed shortly after completion of each interview and will be available for your review if desired. The recordings will be kept secure and will be destroyed after the data analysis and completion of the study.

APPROVED
The George Washington University
Institutional Review Board
IRBAN00005945

Information Sheet for Air Force Women General Officers

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

The risks and discomforts associated with participation in this study are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Potential risks are mild emotional discomfort and loss of confidentiality. Additionally, your employment status will not be affected in any way by your decision to participate or not participate in this research.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research. However, the themes identified could be used to help Air Force Leadership and policy makers better understand the journey of the female general and hopefully influence policy changes to help all women and families in the Air Force.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Information collected will be used to complete the dissertation requirement for my doctoral studies. Privacy and confidentiality will be a top priority. All documents and recordings will be stored in a locked file box. No names or identifying descriptions will be used for tracking or filing purposes. All text will be written in a generic enough manner that no identifying statements can be tied to any one participant. The final defended dissertation will be submitted to Proquest and will be publically available. Additionally, I would be happy to send you a copy directly if you are interested.

Why the interest in this issue?

I am a doctoral candidate at The George Washington University pursuing a degree in Human and Organizational Learning and a colonel serving as the IMA to the Commander of the 76th Aircraft Maintenance Group at Tinker. I started this journey almost a decade ago as a major at the Pentagon. During this time, the Armed Forces have undergone many firsts and changes to the opportunities available to women. Programs and policies have been implemented to help families balance and manage the demands of a military career. However, most of the current focus in the A1 community is on retaining the sharp captain thinking about getting out at the 10 year point. My end goal is to help improve the retention of HPO majors and lieutenant colonels who are choosing to retire as colonels instead of shoot for the stars.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, please contact me at capttigger@aol.com or sherry.teague@us.af.mil or via phone: 850-803-3831 or my dissertation chair, Dr. Maria Cseh at cseh@gwu.edu or via phone: 202-994-8649.

This research is being overseen by the Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). You may contact the IRB at 202-994-2715 or via email at ohrirb@gwu.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Appendix D: Category and Theme Codes

Below are the codes produced from the Air Force women general officer narratives organized into categories, themes and sub themes.

Codes (39)+A1:D40+A1:D40	Sub Themes (13)	Themes (5)	Categories (2)
Identity Roles	Identified Roles	Role Navigation	Being an Air Force Women General Officer
Dominant Role			
Role Salience			
Life in a fishbowl	Identity Optics		
What's in a Name			
Piece of the Puzzle	The Greater Good	Part of Something Bigger	
Leadership Humility			
Decision to Stay	Career Retention		
9/11 Influence			
Military Family Legacy			
Contemporary Gender Bias	Unconscious Bias	Vocal Change Agents	
Military Community Bias			
Battle For Change (women)	Fight for Change		
Battle For Change (All Airman)			
Mentoring Obligations	Mentoring		
Personal Mentors			
Calendar Review/Management	Schedule Management	Work/Life Structure	Work/Life Harmony Secret to Success
Staff Structure			
Home Structure			
Aide Utilization			
Resiliency/Recharging	Self Care/Resiliency		
Exercise			
Alone Time			
Sleep			
Family Time			
Value of Travel			
Relationships	Family Resiliency	Healthy Relationship Maintenance	
Parents/Siblings			
Parent/Child			
Spouse			
Staying Connected			
Family Separation Decisions	Family Separation		
Military Forced Time Apart			
Career/Family Coordination			
Spouse Employment	Dual Career Balance		
Spouse Sacrifices			
Career Synchronization			
Military Spouse Role	Supportive Spouse		
Domestic Chore Distribution			