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I JUST WANT TO DO MY JOB: THE EXPERIENCE OF FEMALE FIGHTER PILOTS IN THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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Abstract

Chairperson: Kirsten W. Murray, Ph.D.

      Little is known about the female fighter pilot experience. As the Department of Defense recognizes the increased warfighting capability of a diverse force, it is important to understand the unique experiences of this rare group. This study uses a qualitative Phenomenology to investigate and describe the experiences of female fighter pilots in the United States Air Force. Several important findings emerged from the study including: the impact of the population's minority status on their experience; the pervasiveness and impact of systemic sexism, institutional betrayal, sexual assault, ambivalent sexism, and pregnancy discrimination; details of utilized resiliency skills; the prevalence of burnout; descriptions of moral injury; and the impact of family on career progression and decision-making. The current study concluded that the previously mentioned findings were the most challenging aspects of the female fighter pilot experience, and that the easiest aspects of their experience was the safe and effective performance of the mission and their job. Recommendations include the achievement of critical mass through continued diversity efforts; resolution of sexism at the systemic level including altering the engineering standards of future fighter aircraft to accommodate the anthropometric specifications of the general recruitment population instead of the current military pilot population, the engineering and purchase of safe and effective flight and combat gear to fit all members of the recruitment population, and the implementation of policies that limit the inevitable career consequences of pregnancy.

Acknowledgments

No journey is traveled alone, and I'd like to thank several impactful people. First, I'd like to acknowledge the support of my Chairperson, Dr. Kirsten Murray, whom I'm convinced is the greatest Chair of all time. I am incredibly thankful for her insight, qualitative research expertise, support, and encouragement. Chairing a dissertation is a considerable time commitment, and it requires selfless dedication to student growth and achievement. The giving of time, knowledge, and self is substantial, and I appreciate every ounce of effort Dr. Murray put into my project. It was a long, winding, bumpy, and rewarding road that I can't imagine sharing with anyone else. I also thank her family for their willingness to share precious family time as she worked through more than a few nights and weekends.

I am grateful for the members of my committee: Dr. Veronica Johnson, whose stellar reputation preceded her hiring at the University of Montana, and she's fully lived up to it! Your professionalism and diligence are increasingly rare. Dr. Sara Polanchek, who's hilarious, humble, and authentic words always serve to calm and validate those around her. You paved the road and managed to make it a little less bumpy for those coming after you. Hillary Wandler, who joined from the Law School and the Veteran's Law Clinic, graciously dedicated her time, and willingly shared her unique expertise. The entire team thoroughly valued your presence and contributions. And Dr. John Sommers-Flanagan who always found the time to show-up despite a multitude of on-going projects.

I'd also like to thank my study participants who gave hours of their time in hopes of improving the experiences of future female fighter pilots. After every interview, I sat back in my chair and reflected on the humbling, insightful, and inspiring experiences I'd just heard. The responsibility to accurately describe your historic experiences, give context to your hard-earned

wisdom, and document your noteworthy courage drove me to keep going when I wanted to quit. I am forever changed by your stories and grateful for your contributions.

Next, I'd like to acknowledge my husband, Brian, who's been a steady presence in my life for 22 years. You are always there to support, listen, and provide a comforting silent hug. I'm sure there are times when you think my latest and greatest idea is crazy, but you graciously give me the space to follow my dreams. The support you provided through flight training, my Ph.D., and daily life are incredibly admirable and I am forever in your debt. Thank you for doing every single dish, caring for the fur-children, keeping some semblance of food in the fridge, and generally holding down the fort while I focus on my work. I love you.

And to my friends and family: Carrie Lee, thank you for housing me while I commuted back-and-forth from Great Falls to Missoula. Your friendship makes my life better, and I am forever grateful for that long walk to the brewery in 2007. Thank you to my family who supports me despite not always understanding. Mom and dad, you are the hardest working individuals that I know. Thanks for teaching me how to work hard and persevere. Grandma Joanie Bug, thank you for encouraging my passion for education and for being a life-long teacher. To my nieces Kenzie and Myla; you are both such wonderful young ladies, and I am excited to see what your future holds. It meant the world to have you, your parents, Aunt Lynn, Uncle Jay, Uncle Jeff, Deb, and Jim in attendance at my graduation. Our family may be a little nutty, but you are always there, reliable, and trustworthy.

Finally, I want to thank the Montana Air National Guard. The Air Force parented me, encouraged me, opened my mind to possibilities, and never failed to provide new challenges. Many of my most inspiring, difficult, frustrating, scary, funny, and rewarding experiences

occurred while in military service. My life would not be as rich without the experiences of the last twenty years.

There's been many influential people in my military career, but several stand-out and interestingly, their lessons are applicable to the present study: Command Chief (Ret.) Timothy Huffman, who's intolerance of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and bias in the workplace was unwavering. His principled leadership created an environment where I could just do my job, and at 18-years-old, my expectations of a professional work environment were formed. I was lucky to join a shop full of Loaders that treated me with respect, fairness, and kindness, and our lifelong friendships are a testament to the power of effective leadership. Lt Col (Ret.) John Jensen, who walked with me through one of my defining life hurdles. I frequently reflect on your selfless leadership style and dedication to doing things the right way regardless of the consequences and potential for ensuing unpopularity. You demonstrated what it looks like to, truly, invest in the well-being of your troops. Chief (Ret.) Robert Dobis, who gave me confidence when I was "the only" and encouraged me to push for more. Chief Dobis and Lt Col Jensen's wives, Lydia and Mary, who provided female friendship when the loneliness set-in. Chief (Ret.) Ronny Grina, who was the first female in my direct chain-of-command and provided years of mentorship, consultation, and friendship. You are a voice of reason, one of my loudest cheerleaders, and one of the rare leaders who values others' successes as much as your own. I learned and grew so much under your guidance and will be forever grateful for your continued friendship. Colonel Jason Green, who graciously allowed me the time to finish my research and supported me as I struggled to identify and follow my life purpose. And finally, to all the past and present members of the Montana Air National Guard, my fondest memories will always be of the camaraderie and friendship developed through decades of hard work and hard play.

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my Grandfather, Lincoln Thomas Power Engel. He enlisted in the Marine Corps at 17-years-old on 17 January 1944 in Butte, Montana. He served 23 months as Military Police in the Pacific theater of World War II. At 18 years-old, he was sent to Nagasaki weeks after the nuclear bombing. Because he enlisted while still a minor, two years after he returned from WWII, he registered for the draft and was called up again to serve as Infantry in the Korean War. He saw things that many can't even imagine, "I have been bombed, strafed, shot at with rifles and machine guns, mortared, booby trapped, shelled by artillery, and I avoided a kamikaze plane by just one ship. Besides that, I have been forced to live in some very uncomfortable places at one time or the other. But really, the most unpleasant thing would have to be, trying to help a wounded Marine, especially when I knew he was going to die."

As a result of his experiences, he lived with severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for the remainder of his life, a diagnosis that was poorly understood. He wrote, "In WWI, it was called Shell Shock. In WWII, it was called Combat Fatigue. In Vietnam, it was called Post-Traumatic Syndrome Disease. Well, whatever you call it, it is a fact of life. It will never, entirely, go away and a sight, a sound, a smell, a happening; each can bring back the most terrible memories of the things which happened." His story is one of dedication, service, and incredible strength.

While I was in Air Force Basic Training, he sent me the photo below in one of his weekly letters. This drawing visually represents the way he lived his life. I've leaned on his memory, his lessons, and this simple drawing countless times over the course of my life and military career.

Don't **EVER** give up!
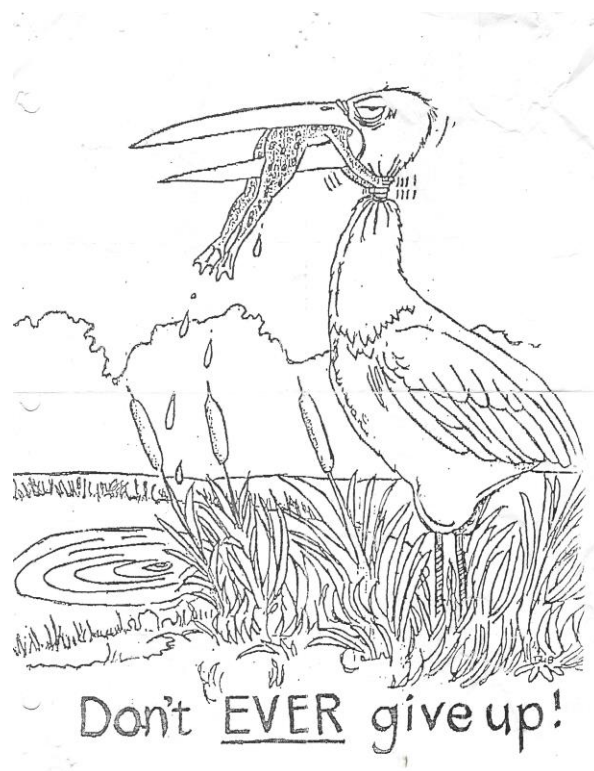
It is almost impossible to describe the experiences of many military service men and women. Grandpa Linc wrote, "I don't think that you can ever make anyone who was not there realize what you would like him or her to realize, because it must be something like having a baby. I can know, I can empathize, and I can even see, but I will never know what it is like to have a baby and 'they' can never know what combat is like." I hope my attempt at describing the experiences of female fighter pilots is as accurate as it can be, does justice to the incredible participant experiences, and assists others in gaining some additional empathy and understanding.

Semper Fidelis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

More women now participate in the labor force than women who don't; more women attend college than men; women obtain about half of the advanced degrees in law, business, and other high-status professions (England, 2006; Valian, 1999; Rudman & Phelan, 2010). Yet, women remain underrepresented in the highest echelons of power, continue to be underpaid for their equal efforts, and are responsible for the majority of domestic labor (England, 2006; Ridgeway, 2006; Valian, 1999; Rudman & Phelan, 2010). In military culture, the position of "Fighter Pilot" is a position of status and power, and also a position where women remain grossly underrepresented and understudied. As of 2021, the Air Force reported that only 3.1% of fighter pilots, O-6 and below, are women. The Marines report that females account for less than 1 percent of their fixed-wing pilots, and 4 percent of the Navy's F-18 Hornet and radar-jamming jet pilots (Scarborough, 2013).

This study of female fighter pilots is an effort to understand and gain insight for implications of support and increased equanimity for this underrepresented group. Especially as women transition into a military environment that only recently officially allowed women access to any military position. Recent emphasis has been placed on the importance of diversity among the ranks in an effort to improve innovation, agility, and ultimately the mission. The Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. David L. Goldfein stated, "Recruiting and retaining diverse Airmen cultivates innovation. Like different aircraft and missions make up one Air Tasking Order, different people make the best teams when integrated purposefully together" (U.S. Air Force, undated; Matthews, 2018). Ethical counseling also encourages counselors to understand and advocate for diverse and underserved populations. The 2014 American Counseling Association

Code of Ethics preamble lists several core professional values relative to this study. The first is to honor diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts. The second is the promotion of social justice. These professional values provide a conceptual basis for the ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and fidelity (American Counseling Association, 2014). Social justice encourages human development and the empowerment of individuals and groups (Crethar & Ratts, 2008). Female fighter pilots are a relatively new, underrepresented, and under-researched population whose understanding is essential for diversity, advocacy, and social justice in the contexts of counseling and beyond.

Historical Context for Female Fighter Pilots.

Women comprise 16.68% of active duty enlisted and officer service members (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2018). In the United States, 5.39% of all pilots holding an "other than student" license are female (Goyer, 2010). Between 1960 and 1980, the number of women holding a for-hire pilot certificate rose from 763 to 4,473, resulting in 5.15% of the pilots holding for-hire certificates, and since then, growth has stagnated around 6% (Goyer, 2010). Female pilots are a rare group in a challenging, high-risk, and male-dominated profession (Chappelle, Novy, Sowin, & Thompson, 2010).

The Women's Armed Services Integration Act governed women's military service since 1948; restricting them from serving aboard Navy ships other than hospitals and transports and from aircraft that could have a combat mission (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). Until 1974, when the Navy awarded six female pilots their wings, women were not allowed to fly for the military. The Army quickly followed, and began training female helicopter pilots the same year. The Air Force admitted women to their flight training programs in 1976, and admitted women to

Navigator training in 1977. Despite the introduction of women into military aviation, women were not officially allowed to fly combat missions; a policy formalized in a 1994 policy letter (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). Female pilots were officially allowed to fly tanker aircraft, transport aircraft, and fighter training aircraft. When they flew fighter training aircraft, they were serving as instructor pilots at aviation training bases, and teaching men to fly fighter aircraft (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). Despite the official policy, women flew combat aircraft in combat missions during Panama, Grenada, and Desert Storm; yet the exact nature of their contributions are excluded from or minimized in official combat records due to the combat exclusion laws (American Civil Liberties Union, 2013; Baron & Wise, 2006). Dessert Storm and Dessert Shield saw 33,000 women deployed, two captured as prisoners of war, and 13 killed (Baron & Wise, 2006).   Major Marie Rossi, was the first female pilot to serve in combat as an aviation unit commander, the first female pilot to fly combat missions, and the first female pilot killed in combat when her CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed during a 1991 Desert Storm combat mission. She was honored with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery and awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, and Air Medal posthumously; she was the only female casualty to be honored in this manner (Baron & Wise, 2006).

In 1993, the U.S. Defense Secretary, Les Aspin, ordered the chiefs of the military to disband the prohibition of women flying in combat (Baron & Wise, 2006). At that time, Jeannie Leavitt was training to be a T-38 instructor pilot, and once finished, she immediately started training in the F-15E Strike Eagle, becoming the nation's first female fighter pilot (Martin, 2013). Kara Hultgreen became the nation's first carrier-based fighter pilot (F-14 Tomcat) in 1994. In 1995, now Congresswoman Martha McSally, became the first female fighter pilot to officially fly a combat mission in her A-10 Warthog (Dimacio, 2015). In 1999, the first African

American female fighter pilot, Shawna Kimbrell, received her wings (Rojek, 2012). In 2006, the Thunderbirds accepted Major Nicole Malachowski as the first female demonstration pilot (http://nicolemalachowski.com, undated). Despite apparent progress, female fighter pilots remain a minority, and no research exists documenting the unique experiences of these women.

History illustrates a multitude of creative ways used to dodge official guidance and engage women on the frontlines of combat. One recent example is the Army's Cultural Support Teams (CSTs) and the Marine's Female Engagement Teams (FETs). Women on CSTs and FETs were "attached" instead of "assigned" to Special Operations teams such as the Green Berets, Army Rangers, and Navy SEALs. This important administrative distinction allowed the military to use groups of women in noncombat billets and attach them to units whose role was direct combat (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). CSTs were conceptualized in 2010 and implemented in 2011, two years before the combat exclusion policy was dissolved and five years before the first two females officially attended Army Ranger school.

Women's contributions have become increasingly useful to the United States Military as conflicts with Islamic cultures have increased. Traditional Islamic culture considers it inappropriate for men to intermingle with women, and as a result, portions of compounds were not being cleared, the female members of populations were not being searched or interviewed, and critical pieces of intelligence were left undiscovered (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). Members of CSTs served as enablers supporting special operations combat forces in and around secured objective areas. They played a critical role in the campaign to "win hearts and minds," gaining the trust of the female Afghanistan population, gathering important information that was previously unknown, and contributing to force protection. The first CST member to die in combat was First Lieutenant Ashley White, who along with two male Rangers, died in October

2011 from an Improvised Explosive Device (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). Retired General Peter Chiarelli who served as the 32nd Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 2008 to 2012 stated,

> There are so many women out there who put themselves in harm's way throughout the 13 years of this conflict. The CST's performed "magnificently" and made a huge impact, showing some of the previous barriers in front of female soldiers have been "totally artificial" (Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015, p.15).

The United States military's combat exclusion policy continued to officially ban women from serving in small ground combat units until 2013 (ACLU, 2013). Women served in multiple combat roles such as: intelligence analysts, combat pilots, Delta Force members, and convoy members; and they also earned prestigious medals such as Purple Hearts and Bronze Stars for at least 10 years before the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff unanimously agreed to end the ban on women serving in ground combat units in January 2013 (ACLU, 2013; Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). The end of the combat exclusion policy was spurred by an ACLU lawsuit, Hegar, et al. v. Panetta, filed on behalf of four servicewomen and the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN). The plaintiffs all served in combat and/or led female troops on missions with male combat infantrymen in Iraq or Afghanistan. Two were awarded Purple Hearts after being wounded in combat, and one earned a Distinguished Flying Cross with a Valor Device after being wounded when her helicopter was shot down over Afghanistan. Despite their apparent ability and bravery, all reported that their careers were limited by a policy that does not grant them the same recognition for their service, and negatively affects their ability to do their job (ACLU, 2013; Tzemach-Lemmon, 2015). After Secretary, Leon Panetta, announced that the ban would be lifted; the Obama administration set a three-year deadline for all service branches to either fully integrate women into combat jobs

or request an exemption. The Marine Corp was the only service branch that requested an exemption for infantry and armor positions, which was denied by Secretary Carter (ACLU, 2013).

In the summer of 2015, the first two female soldiers, First Lieutenant Shaye Havre and Captain Kristen Griest, attended the elite Army Ranger school (Rosenberg & Philipps, 2015). The decision to send women to Ranger school before the 2016 inclusion deadline was made, in part, to inform the Army's decision to apply for a later exemption. Both earned their Ranger tab, and are currently serving as infantry commanders in the Army (Modern War Institute, 2018). The Army did not request an exemption, and in December 2015, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced to the nation that all combat positions are open to women (Rosenberg & Philipps, 2015). Since 2016, women have been allowed to serve in all combat positions, and little research exists about the results of these changes. The impact, if any, on military culture and readiness as well as the experiences of women in combat is largely unknown.

Despite progress toward the integration of all genders into all military positions, an irony continues to confront excluded parties who attempt to enter any previously banned area: the exclusionary feature that was a disadvantage may also be cited as providing an unfair advantage by critics (Sadler, 2003). Women entering male dominated career fields, such as military aviation, encounter this irony. Women aim to be recognized for their aviation skill, and as a result, attempt to neutralize their gender (Kennedy, 2018; Martin, 2013). At the same time, they are acutely aware of occupying female minority status, will never be a full member of the "boys club," and consequently, hold attention because of their sex and gender (Sadler, 2003). The constant pressure to either neutralize or embrace gender, depending on the situation and audience requires constant editing, placing additional stress on female fighter pilots (Kennedy, 2018).

Little research exists about the experiences of female military members in the most masculine military positions; especially that of fighter pilot. The small collection of data, mostly collected at pilot medical screening facilities, suggests that female and male pilots are more similar to each other than they are to nonpilots of the same gender (Chappelle, Novy, Sowin, & Thompson, 2010). On the contrary, differences of experience are likely, given the social locations of being a gender minority within the masculine military fighter pilot culture; the unique challenges of being married or partnered (often to another military member) as a woman; and the complicated nature of motherhood and military service.

Personality. Aircrew are considered to have psychological attributes (i.e., cognitive abilities, personality traits, and motivation for flying) that are different than their peers in the general population (Picano, Williams, & Rolland, 2006). In addition to ability and motivation, personality characteristics are considered important to one's success as a military pilot (Paullin, Katz, Bruskiewicz, Houston, & Damos, 2006). Paullin et al. (2006) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of the past 20 years of literature regarding military pilot selection and found several personality traits relevant to pilot performance including conscientiousness, integrity, achievement orientation, emotional stability, openness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and risk tolerance. These traits have been identified among Air Force (Boyd, Patterson, & Thompson, 2005), Army (Grice & Katz, 2007), and Navy (Helton & Street, 1993) personnel, as well as National Aeronautics Space Association (NASA) astronauts (Fitzgibbons, Davis, & Schutte, 2004). Another meta-analysis of personality data from assessment and selection programs of high-risk and high-operational military professions including United States Air Force (USAF) pilots found that initiative, motivation, drive, self-discipline, dependability, and cooperation were also relevant to performance (Picano, Williams, & Roland, 2006). Further, there are also

personality traits accepted as being incompatible for military flying including being highly anxious, hostile, depressed, isolative, and impulsive (Air Force Instruction 48-123, 2009).

The use of military aviator personality characteristics is descriptive and not causal in nature. The validity of how well particular personality traits influence job performance is somewhat dependent on the type of aircraft flown (fighter/bomber vs. tanker/transport). For example, the positive traits more often associated with crew resource management (CRM), a term describing the way the crew interacts and works together, might be more important for success in a crew aircraft (tanker/transport) versus a single-seat fighter aircraft with less demand for interpersonal skill (Chappelle, Novy, Sowin, &Thompson, 2010). Each airframe in the military inventory has a specific mission and requires a specific skill-set, and it may be more accurate to match desired personality characteristics for each airframe/mission than for all pilots across all airframes. Despite the controversial nature of such implications, personality traits are considered to play a key role in the success of USAF pilots (Anesgart & Callister, 2001; Hunter & Burke, 1994), and all branches of the military send pilot candidates through a rigorous medical screening process that includes personality testing.

Currently, interpretation of personality testing by psychologists is limited because normative data is based upon females in the general population or male USAF pilots (Chappelle et al., 2010). The few peer reviewed publications that provide normative psychological test data on USAF pilots are limited due to: out-dated material, small sample sizes, samples restricted to tanker/transport airframes, or samples that failed to control for student pilots who were eliminated or disqualified from training. Despite limitations, the studies above suggest that female USAF pilots are generally calm, emotionally resilient, extroverted, outgoing, active, high-spirited, open to new experiences, competitive, tough-minded, dependable, and moderately well-

organized. As a result of current research limitations, we know little about the personality characteristics of female fighter pilots and how these characteristics influence her experience.

Chappelle et al., (2010) examined the current inventory of USAF female (n = 512) and male (n = 9630) pilots' baseline psychological test scores on the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R). The study hoped to provide normative data on the personality traits of current USAF female pilots; identify differences in the personality characteristics of male pilots, female pilots, and non-pilot females in the civilian population; and identify personality differences within female pilots across different airframes (fighter/bomber, reconnaissance/surveillance, tanker/transport, and helicopter). The study found that USAF female pilots are more extroverted; interpersonally gregarious; assertive; outgoing; excitement-seeking; expressive of positive emotions; open to new experiences, inner feelings, and emotions; tough-minded; straightforward; proud; competitive; achievement oriented; self-confident, capable of handling stress and remaining composed in difficult and highly challenging situations; and willing to consider new and unconventional ideas than females in the general population. When compared with male USAF pilots, female USAF pilots tend to be more expressive of positive emotions; have a greater appreciation for art and beauty (e.g., poetry, music, art); are more open to re-examining their social, political, and religious values; and tend to have broader interests. They also tend to be more open and receptive to inner emotional experiences, and report being less vulnerable to emotional difficulties. The study also revealed that, overall, personality test scores for female USAF pilots are more similar to male USAF pilots than they are to non-pilot females in the civilian sample. Male pilots seem to be a better comparison group than non-pilot civilian females in the normative sample when using the NEO PI-R. Also, no significant differences were identified between female pilots in different airframes

(fighter/bomber, tanker/transport, reconnaissance/surveillance, and helicopter) on any of the personality variables measured with the NEO PI-R, which suggests that female USAF pilot group is homogenous. Although Chapelle's findings support considering female pilots across airframes as a homogenous group, considering female and male pilots to be more similar than different when compared to each other, and female pilots to be more similar to male pilots than they are to non-pilot females in the civilian population, little is known about how these personality traits may play out differently in military environments for women than men. An exploratory study of the female fighter pilot experience is necessary to begin examining potential differences.

Critical Mass. Critical mass, a concept originating in nuclear physics, refers to a quantity required to start a chain reaction. Critical mass as related to gender dynamics began with a 1977 sociological study claiming that gender proportions impact gender interactions (Kanter, 1977). Kanter (1977) asserted that women belonging to *skewed* group types, which are groups having a "large preponderance of one type over another", and are subject to "the dynamics of tokenism." It is largely accepted among the discipline, that tokenism contributes to a variety of issues including: sexual harassment, performance pressures, role entrapment, and self-distortion; resulting in competitive disadvantage, decreased performance, and the assertion of dominant-group solidarity. Kanter's study concluded that "Women (or members of any other underrepresented group) need to be added to total group or organization membership in sufficient proportion to counteract the effects of tokenism" (p.988). Kanter identified 15-35 percent of the total group population as the point when the *skewed* group transitioned to a *tilted* group, but acknowledged the need for further research to quantify the exact number at which a minority member moves from "token" into a full group member (Schaefer et al., 2015).

A second notable study by Drude Dahlerup (1988) investigated the idea of critical mass as it applied to women in politics. The study examined changes in the impact of female politicians of five Scandinavian counties as their minority status grew in proportion. The study concluded that there was insufficient evidence to support reaching a fixed or specific percentage to produce change. Instead, Dahlerup suggests that factors other than specific percentages, such as generational change in attitudes toward women in public roles, have more effect on *skewed* group dynamics. She encouraged the search for "*critical acts, not for a critical mass.*" A 1990 Women's Research and Education Institute report generally agreed more with Kanter's original work and asserted that obstacles will remain as long as women remain in small numbers while in nontraditional employment contexts. The presence of underlying stereotypes and the additional pressure placed on a few token women will continue to make successful performance less likely (Rix, 1990).

Research investigating the effects of being the only woman in a traditionally male group is plentiful and generally indicates that these women draw more attention from the rest of the group; a phenomenon associated with decreased performance (Lord & Saenz, 1985; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2003; Schaefer et al., 2015). A 2008 study by Konrad et al. supported these findings, and noted that "lone women" report a reduced capacity to contribute due to feeling invisible or overly visible, having to play catch-up, having to break stereotypes, and difficulties in having their voices heard. More recently, some critical mass scholars are rejecting Kanter's critical mass theory that numbers are the primary cause of gender discrimination in the workplace. Although, they acknowledge that minority women experience discrimination in the male dominated workplace including the pressure to work harder, automatic visibility, and heightened scrutiny; they reject the idea that *skewed* and *solo* status

negatively affects female performance. Instead, they point to civilian literature addressing the

"pathbreaker" status, a concept describing a feeling of pride in response to the notion that they

are highly qualified corporate directors, accustomed to their "outsider" status, and need no

additional reassurance or support from other members of their minority group (Broome, et al.,

2011).

Females in underrepresented career fields, such as fighter aviation, report increased

feelings of isolation due to a lack of female peers and mentors in their direct chain-of-command

(Keller et al., 2018). In fact, military personnel statistics across branches have consistently

illustrated a pattern in which few female officers attain the highest ranks. For example, in the

Air Force, female officers make-up 21.1 percent of officers in pay grades O-1 through O-5, but

only 13.9 percent at the pay grade of O-6 and 7.5 percent at O-7 or higher (Keller et al., 2018).

Fifty six percent of focus groups in the Keller et al. (2018) study identified the importance of

mentorship to career success and reported a desire to receive mentorship from successful

females. Research from the civilian sector shows that individuals receiving formal or informal

mentoring are likely to earn more and attain positions of power sooner than those who do not

receive mentoring support (Fagenson, 1988, 1989; Dreher & Ash, 1990; James, 2000). The lack

of female peers, role models, or mentors in their workplace environment or chain-of-command

creates an inherent barrier to upward mobility for female fighter pilots (Keller et al., 2018).

Research on "solos" in the civilian population suggests that the presence of other women within

the group reduces negative effects, provides social support, and contributes to increased

performance and resilience (Konrad et al., 2008). Currently, military regulations and policy

provides little guidance or consideration in regard to critical mass when determining

assignments. Shaefer et al. (2015) examined 14 Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy

regulations to find only one mention of minimum numbers in regard to assignments. The sole

mention in a 2011 Navy regulation requires a minimum of one female officer and one female

chief petty officer to be assigned to all gender-integrated ships and squadrons. Although the

critical mass concept is not employed by the United States military, it is used by foreign

militaries. Countries such as Canada, Norway, Sweden, and Australia all use the critical mass

concepts when assigning women to *skewed* units (Schaefer et al., 2015). Several studies

conducted on foreign militaries suggest that women having solo status results in negative effects

such as: experiencing lower job satisfaction, increased feelings of isolation, leaving the unit

prematurely (within a year), and lower performance ratings (Schaefer et al., 2015; Pazy & Oron,

2001). Although foreign militaries found that assigning women in groups of a "sufficient size"

increases satisfaction and success, they do not recommend a specific number or percentage for

what constitutes a critical mass (Schaefer et al., 2015).

Currently, there is a plethora of academic research examining critical mass in civilian

workplaces, but only a few focused on military workplaces and none focused on female fighter

pilots in the workplace. Anecdotal evidence indicates that female fighter pilots in skewed work

environments experience the void in female leadership and peers as detrimental. Early research

on critical mass in the military examined Army work groups and found that groups with a higher

percentage of women were less cohesive than the groups with fewer women, although, this study

utilized data collected in 1988 (Rosen et al., 1996). Later research found the opposite; that a

higher proportion of women in Army work groups was associated with higher levels of perceived

acceptance by those women (Rosen & Martin, 1998). Data for the latter study was collected

after Dessert Storm; where the lines between combat and noncombat positions were blurred

creating a theater where men and women were unofficially integrated due to the nature of the

conflict (Baron & Wise, 2006). Rosen and Martin (1998) suggest that the differences in results "could be an indication of progress in the integration of women into Army units" (p. 239). Further research in this area impacts the experience of being a female fighter pilot and the very current issue of integration of women into all combat fields, which in turn, affects military retention levels. Little is known about the effect of critical mass in the United States military, and how solo status or being in a *skewed* environment affects female fighter pilots or women in general, as they are officially integrated into all combat positions.

Cohesion. In general, military culture requires a high sense of comradery, teamwork, and trust to be successful. The nature of many military missions demand that military personnel have each other's back, take care of each other, and trust each other. It makes sense. Often military personnel travel to foreign countries, many of which are dangerous; share intimately small living spaces for long periods of time; and engage in life-threatening duties with their "coworkers". This level of closeness is a necessity of literal and figurative survival. Fighter pilot culture is the culmination of this phenomenon. A typical flight profile for a routine Basic Fighter Maneuver (BFM) sortie dictates speeds between 300-450 knots at close interval. This level of daily risk requires an immense level of trust in your wingmen. Yet, female fighter pilots describe feeling added pressure as a result of not having the same level of cohesion, inclusion, and support that men have with each other as a result of typically being the only female in their unit, training program, or chain-of-command (Siekert, (2019).

Research on group cohesion finds that the level of cohesion directly affects important outcomes such as group performance and job satisfaction. Behavioral researchers agree that cohesion is a valid group process, but methods of defining and measuring cohesion is controversial (Schaefer et al., 2015). One of the most accepted views of cohesion differentiates

between Task Cohesion and Social Cohesion (Schaefer et al., 2015; National Defense Research Institute, 2010; Mullen & Copper, 1994; Zaccaro & Lowe, 1988). Task cohesion is defined as the "shared commitment among members to achieving a goal that requires the collective efforts of the group," and contributes to the achievement of group-based tasks (National Defense Research Institute, 2010). There is a positive relationship between task cohesion and group performance (Beal et al., 2003). Social cohesion is defined as the "nature and quality of the emotional bonds of friendship, liking, caring, and closeness among group members," and it places emphasis on interpersonal liking and social activities (National Defense Research Institute, 2010). The distinction between task and social cohesion is not black-and-white though. Some qualities predicting liking can also be related to task cohesion such as; trust, effective communication, and openness to opposing ideas. Conversely, other aspects of social cohesion have little or no impact on task cohesion such as; shared activities and preferences, common ideologies, and similar demographic backgrounds (race, age, gender, socioeconomic status) (Schaefer et al., 2015).

Research shows that more cohesive groups perform better than less cohesive groups (Schaefer et al., 2015). Several analyses of previous studies found significant relationships between cohesion and several aspects of individual and group performance. While there is some evidence that task cohesion better predicts group performance than does social cohesion (Schaefer et al., 2015), research results depend heavily on how cohesion is defined and measured. For example, one analysis of studies of military units that did not distinguish between studies of task cohesion and studies of other types of cohesion, found unit cohesion to be positively associated with unit performance across studies (Oliver, Harman, Hoover, Hayes, & Pandhi, 1999). Another analysis of civilian and military literature examining the relationship

between individual cohesion and performance found that task cohesion but not social cohesion was associated with increased performance (Mullen & Cooper, 1994). Finally, an analysis of 64 publications investigating unit-level cohesion and performance showed that both task and social cohesion were related to increased performance. This study further delineated between the process (e.g., group communication, coordination of actions) and the outcome (e.g., accomplishing a task, performance time); insinuating that the link between social cohesion and performance may result more from interpersonal communication and less from liking (Schaefer, 2015).

Also of importance, is evidence that the link between cohesion and performance flows both ways. One study found that unit cohesion increases performance, but that increased performance also increases unit cohesion. This study produced evidence that the effect of performance on cohesion is greater than the effect of cohesion on performance (Mullen and Cooper, 1994). Group culture plays a part in the increase or decrease of personal performance, cohesion, and therefore group performance. The presence of gender stereotypes in an environment negatively affects performance. Research conducted on female Marines found that they are susceptible to gender stereotypes such as being perceived as having less ability than male Marines. The same study found that females who experienced stereotyping performed worse at marksmanship when compared to female Marines who had not experienced stereotyping (Archer, 2013). Rosen, Knudson, and Fancher (2003) found that, after gender integration, groups more hostile to women and displaying a higher degree of hypermasculine culture experience lower levels of cohesion than groups that are less hostile and hypermasculine.

Finally, increased levels of sexual harassment in a group negatively affect culture, cohesion, and therefore, personal performance. Rosen and Martin (1998) studied mixed-gender

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Army units and found that the units with more sexual harassment were less cohesive, less accepting of women, and less ready for combat than units with less sexual harassment. This study also discovered that levels of cohesion decrease for both men and women in units displaying higher levels of hypermasculinity and sexual harassment. The majority of research also indicates that increased harassment in the workplace results in negative performance outcomes (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2005) such as increased absenteeism, tardiness, making excuses to get out of work, lowered productivity, and neglecting tasks (Magley et al., 1999; Stockdale, 1998; Glomb et al., 1999; Schneider et al., 1997). Schneider, Tomaka, and Palacios (2001) looked at the impact of sexual harassment on physiological, affective, and cognitive reactions. They found that, after exposure to misogynistic comments, women displayed greater cardiovascular reactivity in the moment and perceived an upcoming task as more demanding than women not exposed to harassment. A 2005 study conducted by Woodzicka and LaFrance examined the immediate impact of subtle sexual harassment, presented in the form of sexualized questions, on women's' job interview performance. The study found that the subtle harassment significantly impacted job interview performance. Thus, we can conclude that the presence of gender stereotypes and a hypermasculine culture negatively affects performance, and decreased performance negatively affects group cohesion.

Work-Life Demands. Research shows that mothers in western societies struggle with work-life balance due to societal pressures and expectations (Baker, 2010; Crittendon, 2001; Probert, 2005; Smithson & Stokoe, 2005; Swanberg, 2004; Taber, 2013). The Rand Corporation conducted a study of the barriers to female Air Force officer retention in 2018. The qualitative study conducted 54 focus groups with 295 female Air Force Officers across 12 Air Force installations. The study found that many participant comments related to difficulties managing a

desired work-life balance due to the nature of an Air Force career. In general, research finds that men experience a similar conflict, but that it is greater for women (Coser, 1974; Segal, 1986; Bourg & Segal, 1999; Hosek et al., 2001; Hochschild, 2003). Moekler and van der Kloet (2003) contend that there is an inherent conflict between a military career and the family due to the level of devotion each expects. Female Air Force Officers report that they feel the need to choose between their families and their Air Force careers, and a belief that having both is not maintainable or realistic in the long-term (Keller et al., 2018). Work-life balance and problems meeting family commitments are cited as top influencers for leaving or intending to leave the Air Force for women (Keller et al., 2018; Taber, 2013).

In some ways, the military work environment offers less personal control than in the civilian sector. Frequent deployments and moves, shift work, and long hours; can result in additional demands on service members' time (Hopkins-Chadwick & Ryan-Wenger, 2009). Studies suggest that military stress is similar to other high-stress occupations, with high levels of burnout that may spill over into other areas of life if levels of functioning are diminished (Vinokur, Pierce, Lewandowski-Romps, Hobfall & Galea, 2011). The most common reported stressors for military personnel are being away from family, deployment, an increase in work load, conflicts between military and family responsibilities, and experiencing a permanent change of station (PCS) (Bray et al., 2010).

Deployments tend to have a disruptive effect on relationships due to the lack of communication, resulting financial concerns, disruptions in the family routine, and the pervasive worry and anxiety about loved ones in combat (Karney & Crown 2007). Further, the DoD reported that military personnel who have deployed in the last 3 years showed an increase in work and family stress when compared to non-deployed personnel (Bray et al., 2006). Exposure

to war-related violence and threat may compound the influence of job stressors, financial stressors, and work-family conflict (Hobfoll, Vinokur, Pierce, & Lewandowski-Romps, 2012) for some individuals. Currently, there is no research focused on the effect of deployments on female fighter pilots.

Being a fighter pilot is a demanding and time-consuming role, and many officers and aviators report working much more than the standard 40-hour work week. The maximum duty day for a military aviator is 16 hours, and exhausting the maximum duty day is not unusual. Predictions state that women will make further inroads into high-status masculine domains, which often comes with more demanding schedules including longer work hours. On the contrary, men are more likely to resist traditionally held, lower-status, feminine work roles (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). This research suggests that women with high-status professional positions carry a heavier burden as a result of the disproportionate distribution of labor they face at home. Hochschild (2003) found that the disparity in the division of household labor is even greater for low income couples. Women of the future are projected to be both high-earning working women and primary caregivers, whereas men's roles and stereotypes are not expected to change (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; Diekman et al., 2004).

Kimmel (1993) suggested that, in general, men do not perceive "competent homemaking as a badge of masculinity" and they may view making a larger contribution to the home, as women contribute more to the workforce, as an indication of their failure in the traditional provider role. Predictors of men's involvement in household labor include the employment status of wives, the wage gap between spouses, the gender ideology of the husband, the husband's employment status, and the presence of children in the family (Hochschild, 2003). Arrighi and Maume (2000) found that men's contributions to household labor are also influenced

by their workplace status, and they suggest that the employment outlook of military spouses is seriously compromised due to frequent moves. Men who are subordinated in the workplace or because they are under or unemployed are more likely to resist housework (Arrighi & Maume, 2000). In general, the more dependent husbands are on their wives for financial support, the less housework they do, particularly in lower income households (Brines, 1994). Hochschild (2003) also addressed this phenomenon and referred to it as the principal of "balancing". She asserts that wives are "'making up' for doing 'too well' at work by doing more at home" (p. 292).

Women in the civilian sector and women in the military report increased stress and increased difficulty managing both the increased expectations at work and at home. Hochschild's (2003) work found that the majority of men do not share the housework, and that women carry more of the responsibility for organizing and delegating when men do share hours of work. Women also do the majority of the daily jobs; such as cooking, cleaning, and child care while men perform jobs that are completed less frequently; such as appliance maintenance, vehicle maintenance, and lawn care. Finally, she found a significant "leisure gap" between husbands and wives as a result of the "second shift" women work at home after working their paid job. This leisure gap exists regardless of the number of hours women work at a paid position. Currently, there is no research on the division of household labor within households of female fighter pilots or the potential impact on their life and career. The aforementioned research suggests that they are at a disadvantage at work due to higher demands at home. Building an understanding of the female fighter pilot experience will shed light on how the division of household labor affects their work-life balance, career, personal life, and retention decisions.

Coupled and Partnered Service Women. Approximately half (48.8 %) of all Americans over the age of 15 are married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Approximately 1.5

million men and women are active duty service members in today's military (Lacks, Lamson, Lewis, White, Russoniello, 2015), and approximately half (53.5 %) of these individuals are married (Military One Source, 2016). Over the last 40 years, dual earners in the American workforce has become the norm (Haddock, Zimmerman, Ziemba, & Current, 2007) as more women pursue a career outside the home. For example, in 2009, 59 percent of women were working outside the home, which is up from 43 percent four decades ago (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). These changes also affected military members, and in 2012, both partners were active duty (dual military) in 11.6% of military marriages (DoD, 2012). Of married service members, women are more likely to be in a dual military marriage. Despite the increase in women choosing a military career, the majority of military families consist of a male service member and a female spouse. As a result, there has been very little research on structural changes within military families, male military spouses, same-sex relationships, or dual military marriages. The majority of military sponsored family programs, spousal support programs, and services cater to the traditional family structure. Thirty seven percent of focus groups listed military spouse concerns as a factor affecting retention decisions (Keller, 2018). Adding information about the experiences of female fighter pilots and their spouses will help educate and guide commanders as they update policy and programming to better fit the modern military family and increase retention.

Members in dual military marriages are demographically different and appear to have unique work and family experiences such as "role-overload" (Janofsky, 1989) and an increased juggling of home responsibilities (Lewis & Cooper, 1987) compared to individuals in single-earner military marriages (Schumm et al., 1996). Although military personnel receive benefits such as low-cost health care and a housing stipend, they also experience many hardships due to

the demands of being in the armed forces (Laser & Stephens, 2011). In general, military families have less control over some areas of their lives such as, where they live, when they move, and whether they live near extended family members (Hooper, Moore, & Smith, 2012). Geographic mobility, periodic separations, and long unpredictable duty hours (Burrell et al. 2006) are just a few of the elements that may negatively influence a military marriage. The demands of military life can alter the positive bonding, including closeness and intimacy, needed for a healthy marriage (Markman et al., 2010).

Schumm et al. (1998) found that wives in dual military marriages reported lower marital satisfaction than dual military husbands. Contrary to expectations, multiple studies found that the number of deployments is unrelated to marital health (Lacks et. al., 2015; Anderson et al., 2011). Conversely, multiple focus groups conducted with Female Air Force Officers, identified separations from civilian spouses for deployments as a stressor sometimes leading to divorce (Keller et.al., 2018). Wives' rank was significantly related to her reports of marital adjustment and quality. More specifically, as wives' rank increased, the less adjusted she felt in her marriage and the more she was able to identify negative qualities in her husband. Often, as rank increases, so does career responsibility making it more difficult to meet the demands of family and career aspirations. Also, husbands' marital satisfaction decreased as wives' rank increased (Lacks et al., 2015), which further suggests that balancing career and family becomes more difficult with rank for military women. Currently, we do not know how military demands and marital satisfaction affect female fighter pilots, but the 2018 RAND study suggests that spousal concerns could be influential.

Lengthy and frequent separations, or fears of such separations, are a reality in dual military marriages. Sometimes assignments are considered collocated from an administrative

perspective, but are several hours apart by car (Keller et al., 2018). It was noted that joint-spouse assignment concerns affect women more than men, because more women are in joint-spouse partnerships in higher numbers than men. The Air Force Personnel Center (2016) reported that 37 percent of married female Air Force officers are joint-spouse while only 7 percent of married male Air Force officers are joint-spouse. It is quite possible that in order for a dual military couple to stay together, one spouse would give up a career-broadening position or cross-train to a new careerfield to maintain the relationship (Military One Source, 2013; 2019). Typically, one spouse's military career must take the lead and one must take the back seat. Participants in focus groups felt that it is often the female officer's career that suffered more than the male officer's career (Keller et al., 2018). Some career fields, such as pilots, pose greater problems for joint-spouse military members. Dual military pilots find that it is especially difficult to be assigned to the same duty station multiple times. It's rare that a duty station can accommodate two pilots of differing rank and who fly different airframes, which means that it's common to be stationed in differing locations. Some dual military pilots report spending less than half of their career stationed at the same location as their spouse. In dual military couples of different ranks, the junior spouse often has more flexibility in his or her career resulting in the couple putting the senior spouse's career first (Smith, 2010). In addition to physical separations and negative career impacts, there are increased expenses related to maintaining separate households, and increased need to use leave time, an increased demand for childcare, and increased travel expenses. Although, separated families receive a small monthly family separation allowance, the added expenses outweigh this allotment (Keller et al., 2018).

In general, husbands have a significant influence on their wives' commitment to the labor force (Chuang & Lee, 2000). Jebo (2005) found that military husbands were less supportive of

their wives' retention in the U.S. Military than military wives were of their husbands' retention. The difference was small, and statistically significant. Participants in 54% of focus groups identified their spouse or partner as the factor having the most influence on their decision to remain in the military (Keller et al., 2018). Utilizing data from the 1995 Survey of Army Families, Marshall-Mies (2001) found some notable differences after analyzing male and female Army spouses. First, male spouses were more likely to live in a different geographic location than their active duty spouse. Also, they were more likely to live off the base, were less satisfied with their housing situation, and were less likely to have made a permanent change of station (PCS) move with their female spouse. Finally, male spouses were less likely to have experienced an extended military absence, and were less prepared to deal with such an absence (Marshall-Mies, 2001). These differences paint a picture of male spouses and partners being less influenced, less invested, and less supportive of their wife's military career. The willingness of male spouses to accept the unique demands of the military lifestyle and to support their wives' military careers is likely to significantly impact the ability of women in the military to balance their careers with family demands (Jebo, 2005). Given the demanding position of fighter pilot, spousal support appears critical for a fighter pilot to have a successful career. We currently know very little about how spousal support impacts female fighter pilots' careers, choice to have a family, and retention.

While nearly all couples experience turbulent moments in their relationship, military couples encounter unique difficulties (Griffin & Morgan, 1988). Almost every focus group in the 2018 RAND study discussed issues related to the effect of frequent moves on civilian spouses' careers. Civilian spouses often struggle to transfer jobs, find new employment, and solve state licensing issues each time they move. Some women reported living separately from civilian

spouses so the spouse can maintain a career. A substantial amount of research has been devoted to the effect of multiple relocations on female spouse employment options, and understanding of the effects on male spouse employment is less understood. The 2011-2012 Air Force surveys indicated that among married and single females who intended to separate from the military, compatibility with a spouse's career/job was the top influencer for leaving the Air Force (Air Force Personnel Center, 2013). Male military spouses are more likely to describe themselves as unemployed when not in the labor market, while female military spouses are more likely to view themselves as having chosen to remain out of the workforce, which appears to indicate a greater connection to the labor force for male spouses than female spouses (Jebi, 2005).

In addition to employment problems, civilian spouses and partners often experience feelings of alienation. Male civilian spouses identify multiple struggles such as a difficulty "following" their spouse's career, stigma associated with the "so-called emasculating roles" of male spouse or stay-at-home-dad, and a lack of support (Keller et al., 2018). Segal and Segal (2003) found that civilian husbands, particularly those with no previous military experience, "are likely to experience social and interpersonal difficulties resulting from their treatment by other members of the military community" (Segal & Segal, 2003, p.227). The prevalent stereotype that military spouses are female continues to be salient in the United States military and society as a whole. As a result, military family policies and support services "tend to be oriented toward traditional gender roles and traditional family structures" (Segal & Segal, 2003, p.227). Spousal support groups in all branches of the military are notorious for the support they provide, yet many are not inclusive of male spouses. Some groups explicitly state that they are for female membership only, but there's rarely a large enough civilian male spouse population to start a separate group (Keller et al., 2018). The isolating nature of being a male spouse is exaggerated

for the spouses of a female fighter pilot, and it appears as if they struggle to navigate gender role

expectations and their status as "the only" alongside their female partners.

Also important, but neglected in the literature, are: single women, dating women, and the

lesbian; gay; bisexual; transgender (LGBT) communities. Single or dating female military

officers are often overlooked in the literature and by support organizations. This group describes

several struggles related to their status. Overall, societal norms make it less likely and acceptable

for men to follow a woman in her career. As a result, some female Air Force officers report that

each PCS brings a dating relationship to a point where they feel pressured to marry (often

prematurely) or end the relationship. So, like married and partnered women, they also report

feeling pressured to choose between career and family (Keller et al., 2018).

For 17 years, the military operated under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy.

Since 1993, when the policy was enacted, public opinion of the LGBT community has improved.

In 2010, polls showed that nearly 90 percent of Americans agree that members of the LGBT

population should have equal rights in job opportunities (RAND, 2010). The 2015 Department

of Defense Health Related Behaviors Survey (HRBS) found that 7.0 percent of military women

identified as lesbian and 9.1 percent identified as bisexual. The same survey found that 1.9

percent of military men identified as gay and 2.0 percent identified as bisexual. Finally, 0.6

percent of military service members described themselves as transgender. On December 15,

2010, DADT was repealed and on September 20, 2011 the appeal of the policy went into effect,

allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual members to openly serve in the U.S. military. Until that

point, they were required to keep their sexuality and familial status private for risk of being

discharged (RAND, 2018; Cole, 2017). Although the repeal of DADT afforded same sex

partnerships access to some benefits, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) continued to

restrict full access to the benefits available to heterosexual military members. In 2013, United

States v. Windsor (2013) lead to the repeal of DOMA. As a result, same sex couples were able

to legally marry within federal institutions including the military, which finally allowed for the

full receipt of benefits (18 U. S. C. §115; Cole, 2017).

Overall, military women face unique challenges as they manage their career and their

family life. Whether they are single; dual military; or partnered to a civilian, officer and enlisted

women across all branches report several barriers such as spousal career difficulty, spousal

alienation and lack of support, frequent relocations and separations, and negative career impacts.

Currently, we do not know how these considerations impact female fighter pilots. As the

Department of defense remedies the current pilot shortage while also striving to improve

diversity and retention rates, the information gleaned from the current study is important in

determining how to better understand and serve a growing population of female fighter pilots and

modern families.

Motherhood. Women in the U.S. Military are less likely to be married and have children

than military men, 44 % compared to 56 % (Military One Source, 2016). Single parents, female

service members, and dual-career families are found in a higher percentage of military families

than ever before (Hooper, Moore, & Smith, 2014). The increase of women in the military, and

especially in combat-related positions, has resulted in more attention being given to the unique

challenges faced by military women (Drummet et al., 2003).

In organizations where women work in non-traditional roles, such as the military, the

difficulty of combining motherhood with paid work can not only be exacerbated, but also viewed

as an unacceptable interference with the military's core mission of national defense (Taber,

2011). Some women report feeling as if they needed to "prove" their dedication to the unit and

mission, by refraining from starting a family, whereas men did not get the same pressure (Taber, 2013). Others report feeling like "they are being punished for having a baby" while in the military (Taber, 2013). Conversely, some women cite wanting to be "a good role model, a strong woman, someone who can be an equal partner, and someone who can go out into the world and make a difference" for their children as one of their motivations for remaining in the military post motherhood (Taber, 2013). Frequently, the goals and accomplishments of the military mission take precedence over all else (Hooper, Moore, & Smith, 2014); forcing service members to set strict boundaries around family and schooling when giving them a higher priority than the military mission. When negotiating these priorities, women become especially mindful of the career consequences motherhood brings in an often-unforgiving system.

Within the patriarchal structure of the military, career fields such as general aviation and fighter aviation, adopt rules and roles that cause particular tension between motherhood and career demands (Taber, 2013). Within some career fields, it's an unwritten rule that women should not get pregnant, because their (mostly male) coworkers would have to fill-in, cover for them, and "pick up the slack" (Taber, 2013; Keller et al., 2018). Female fighter pilots report feeling as if they are informally prohibited from having a family while assigned to a combat squadron, as pregnancy is considered a "disqualifying medical condition," and they are unable to fly while pregnant (Keller et al., 2018). Additional research reported a perception that leadership and peers believe that female officers get pregnant to avoid deployment, and aren't "pulling their weight" while on maternity leave. Receptivity to motherhood and family varies by career field and that some workplace cultures are receptive and encouraging of women having babies, although it's also acknowledged that becoming pregnant still negatively impacts promotion,

career progression, the ability to attend in-residence Professional Military Education (PME), and the ability to gain important flying time (Keller et al., 2018).

The "timing of pregnancies" is often a concern among female Air Force Officers and aviators. The success of a military career and a member's promotability rely heavily on meeting strict time lines and formal evaluations of performance. The promotion requirements for military aviators are even more stringent in that they have flying hour "gates" they must meet to receive flight pay, on-time promotion, and to be considered for career-broadening opportunities. Twenty-eight percent of females participating in the RAND focus groups listed pregnancy discrimination as a concern. They cited examples such as being limited to correspondence PME courses, which are viewed more negatively than attending in-residence PME by promotion boards. Any military career requires careful long-term planning to ensure success, but female Air Force officers report not feeling comfortable mentioning potential pregnancies as part of career planning discussions with leadership. Timing of pregnancies is usually centered around meeting rigid career time lines in an effort to minimize negative career effects (Keller et al., 2018). Kelley et al., (2001) found that timing childbearing in relation to military service was a top reason provided by Air Force and Navy women for leaving the military. Some view "family" and career progression as a dichotomy; you can have one or the other, but not both (Taber, 2013).

Also surfacing in the RAND study were concerns over pregnancy medical care such as, inappropriate responses to miscarriage, inadequate access to infertility treatments, a lack of schedule flexibility to attend medical appointments, insufficient treatment of postpartum depression, and inadequate time and space to accommodate breastfeeding (2018). Pilots experience further complications that can negatively affect their career. For example, pilots

cannot be on flight status if they are taking certain fertility medications, resulting in a greater loss of flight hours, increased scrutiny, and their medical situation becoming public knowledge. Focus group participants also discussed a lack of facilities for breastfeeding, and reported using bathrooms and closets for pumping. Many also reported complications on temporary duty assignment (TDY) after maternity leave, and the need to ship breast milk home. Some female officers reported the need to stop breastfeeding their child due to a lack of support to continue while TDY (Keller et al., 2018).

The military lifestyle creates additional stress and instability as a result of frequent moves and deployments, and the instability can result in additional barriers when children are involved. In 2003, the Senate Armed Service Committee failed to approve a bill that would have prohibited dual military couples with children to deploy to combat zones at the same time (Library of Congress, 2003). Current regulations and policies make it possible for both parents to deploy simultaneously; potentially leaving children without a primary caregiver. Avoiding this, often means back-to-back deployments where spouses are apart for long periods of time (Keller et al., 2018). PCSs can result in children being separated from one parent if a joint military couple is not collocated, a civilian spouse stays behind to continue current employment, or a child stays behind with one parent to complete high school or a similar milestone. Female officers also indicated difficulty associated with leaving children for deployments. Concerns such as missing milestones in their children's lives, feelings of guilt, and the fear of young children not remembering them when they return were voiced in the RAND study focus groups. Separation concerns were cited as reason to delay the decision to have children for some women, and as a reason to leave the military altogether for other women (Keller et al., 2018). Air Force women who gave birth during the two years following Dessert Storm, were twice as likely to leave the

military (Pierce, 1998). On the contrary, some Navy mothers reported that deploying may reduce any cognitive dissonance or conflicting feelings about career commitment, and stated that a deployment was their motivation for remaining in the military (Kelley et al., 2001).

Childcare was also a frequently mentioned obstacle. In fact, anxiety was higher in women with children, and many expressed concerns for childcare while deployed (Wynd & Dziedzicki, 1992; Kelley et al., 2001). Female Air Force officers in the Rand focus groups stated that rigid work schedules, long work hours, and the prevalence of shift work affect their ability to find adequate childcare for and spend time with their children. Child Development Centers (CDCs) located on most active duty military installations, often have hours that are limited and inconsistent with expected work hours. The struggle to find consistent and quality childcare is amplified for certain career fields. Pilots, for example, are regularly required to fly at night, can legally work a 16-hour day, and are frequently TDY; making it difficult to work around the normal CDC hours, school pick-up times, or the hours of any traditional childcare option (Keller et al., 2018).

The Air Force recently implemented several programs aimed at reducing the reported conflict between career advancement and motherhood. The first policy change involved an update to the maternity leave policy. The policy update extended maternity leave from 6 to 12 paid weeks and deferred fitness tests and deployments for one year after the birth of a child (Keller et al., 2018). The second policy implemented was the Career Intermission Program (CIP), which allows for inactivation and transfer to the Ready Reserve with partial pay for up to three years (Keller et al., 2018). A military career presents unique challenges such as increased travel, frequent moves, long unconventional work hours, and unforgiving guidelines for career progression. The increased demands often result in the timing of pregnancies or feeling that they

are unable to become pregnant without negatively impacting their careers. Previous research identifies barriers in the areas of pregnancy discrimination, the requirement to plan pregnancies, pregnancy medical care, breast feeding, and childcare for female Officers and enlisted personnel. Currently, the limited research in this area does not examine how these barriers affect female fighter pilots and their decision to become a mother, or how they manage deployments, TDY's, PCSs, and nontraditional work hours after choosing motherhood. It is important to understand how these additional stressors and barriers to family planning affect female fighter pilots personally and within their career, so we can increase wellness, retention, and equality among an expanding subset of the military population.

Retirement and Retention. Women leave the military prematurely more often than men, and for different reasons (Keller et al., 2018). Personnel statistics consistently demonstrate a pattern in which female officers across services are generally less likely to progress through career milestones at the same rate as male officers. One of the most significant policy gaps to date is in identifying potential changes to personnel policy that may influence more female officers to remain in service through the senior leader marks. Overall, continuation rates are greater for men than women across enlisted/officer and rated/nonrated ranks. The majority of male nonrated officers (55%) are retained through ten years while only 37 percent of female officers are retained at the same point. This difference becomes more pronounced when looking at rated officers. At the 13-year point, when initial service commitments expire, male rated officers are retained at a rate of 63 percent compared to 39 percent of female rated officers (Asch, 2012). Currently, there are no statistics specifically tracking male and female fighter pilots. Gaining a better understanding of the reasons female officers, and especially rated female

officers leave the military is important for diversity and ensuring equal opportunity for promotion and retention among military women.

Women and mothers have resigned from western militaries for multiple reasons including harassment, others' questioning of their military dedication, barriers to equality, deployments, separation from family, work/family conflict, dissatisfaction with the military, and a higher commitment to motherhood (Kelley et al., 2001). Factors such as younger age, fewer children, negative views of the military, financial strain, and beliefs that civilian work conditions were better predicted a higher likelihood of leaving the military (Kelly et al., 2001). Despite the presence of research examining why women leave the military, there is no research examining how frequently and why female fighter pilots leave the military. The cost to train a fifth generation military fighter pilot hovers around 11 million dollars a year according to Lt. General Gina Grosso (McCullough, 2017). This equates to a major fiscal concern when only 39 percent of rated female officers remain in the military after their initial service commitment. Increasing understanding of why female fighter pilots decide to stay or leave the military will better inform leaders and commanders as they strive to increase retention rates among all pilots.

Female soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are exposed to stressors in the military that affect them differently than males (Norwood & Ursano, 1997). Deployments and TDYs can be sources of stress that are experienced differently by male and female service members. They are sometimes cited as reasons to leave the military, and also sometimes cited as reasons for remaining in the military. Goodwin (1996) found that deployments increased integration into the Navy for the majority of the women who experienced deployment. It is often assumed that deployment is a negative experience for service members, but some women service members actually chose military occupations that are more likely to deploy, and cite deployments as an

incentive to remain in the military (Kelley et al., 2001). Aircrew are also frequently required to attend formal trainings and TDYs. The emotional strain of separation can weigh heavily on military parents who are frequently required to be away from their children (Goodwin, 1996; Kelley, Herzog-Simmer, & Harris, 1994). Kelley et al., 2001 found that approximately one fourth to one third of women service members report that the difficulty of balancing a Navy career with family responsibilities as a reason they plan to leave the service. Satisfaction with the ability to balance family life with a career in the Navy was the second most important predictor of retention behavior among Navy personnel (Szoc, 1984). For Navy women approaching a sea rotation, the anticipation of being separated from their family and the uncertainty of how family members would fare increasingly became a concern as the deployment approached (Kelley et al., 2001).

Permanent change of station (PCS) moves are also a source of stress for military members, and the frequency may be a factor in the decision to stay or leave the service. The shorter the average time between moves, the more the military member's spouse was in favor of separating from the military altogether (General Accounting Office, 2001). This could be because frequent relocation makes it difficult for individuals to keep a healthy social life and support systems or attain educational and career goals (Makin-Byrd et al., 2011).

Smith (2010) reported that dual military couples may choose to leave the military if their family and military work demands conflict. For example, if both partners are in the military and want to begin having children, one partner may consider leaving the military in order to provide stability for their children and to avoid both partners being deployed at the same time. Given that the family responsibilities have traditionally been more demanding for women than men, the conflict experienced while attempting to balance work and family is likely to be more significant

for women in the military (Segal, 1986). This increased conflict may impact the retention of women and their ability to combine a military career with family life. Kelley et al., (2001) found that Navy mothers whose self-concept largely stemmed from their maternal role were more likely to find the demands of a military career incompatible, and were more likely to separate from the military. On the contrary, mothers who perceived that daily separation from their family had positive benefit s for their children were more likely to reenlist. Military personnel are influenced by their family's satisfaction with the military lifestyle, and dissatisfaction may lead them to pursue employment in the civilian labor market (Segal & Segal, 2003). Despite clear evidence illustrating the challenges of balancing a military career with motherhood, the presence of a child or children in the family was found to have a significant positive influence on spouse support for retention (Jebo, 2005).

Sexism, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault. Thirty-one percent of female service members report feeling stressed simply due to being women in a predominately male military (Hopkins-Chadwick & Wenger, 2009). Despite woman in the military holding a non-traditional work role, military women continue to be overrepresented in traditionally female career fields (Feinman, 2000). At the same time, women are underrepresented in the military overall when compared with men. Keller, et al., (2018) found that 37 percent of focus groups mentioned concerns about sexual harassment and assault without being asked. Participants shared stories of sexual harassment, mostly in male-dominated units and career fields, and many noted that their concerns were heightened when deployed. Participants also reported facing sexism and the existence of an "old boy's network," and some participants associated male-dominated career fields with experiences of sexual harassment and assault. Female service members who experience sexual harassment are more likely than others to leave the military (Sims, Dragsow,

& Fitzgerald, 2005). Swim (2001) found that women in the civilian sector experienced sexist events more often than men, and at a rate of once or twice per week. Women experienced more everyday prejudice and interpersonal discrimination than men. They also experienced significantly more incidents of sexual objectification; a category that men rarely experienced at all. Research conducted in civilian organizations also found that higher levels of sexual harassment are associated with more task and team conflict and lower organizational commitment by women (O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, and Lean, 2009; Raver & Gelfand, 2005).

Taber (2013) identified several prevalent themes when interviewing women in the military. The first is a sense that they need to put forth more effort and appear stronger to be considered the same as a male. Carli (1999, p. 94) stated, "Women are actually held to a higher standard of performance. In effect, women must be better than men to be considered equally competent." Tumey, Bishop, Karp, Niemczyk, Sitler, and Green's (2002) research supported Carli's (1999) work, and found that women agreed more than men that "Women who go into aviation have to be psychologically stronger than men" (p.5). Additionally, when women make mistakes, the mistakes may be attributed to their gender whereas men's mistakes are rarely attributed to the fact that they are male. Secondly, they reported having to defend their capabilities, demonstrate their commitment, and develop an ability to "adapt" to harassment in ways men did not. A portion of this "adapting" is found in the commonly expressed desire to not "stand out" as different or female (Sadler, 2003). An example of this phenomenon is the story of Lt. Kara Hultgreen, one of the first two female naval carrier-based fighter pilot. She died in 1994 when she crashed her F-14 Tomcat into the ocean while attempting to make a carrier-based landing on the USS Abraham Lincoln. The backlash was immediate; with the media,

conservative political groups, and Hultgreen's own leadership and shipmates attributing her accident to her gender. They used the accident to further their agenda and justify beliefs that women are incapable of flying a combat aircraft. As of 1997, 144 of the 632 Tomcats built had crashed, and 143 of those crashes involved men. The Abraham Lincoln had five female pilots out of 117 total. The scandal quickly engulfed the second female F-14 pilot, Lt. Carey Lohrenz, who was ostracized, harassed, denied opportunity, denied training, and left to "sink-or-swim" without support or mentorship (Thomas, 1997). Adding to the harassment, a doctored version of her training records was released, and stories of her incompetence were printed in the Washington Times and San Diego Union-Tribune. It was a matter of time before her treatment began to take a toll on her flying, which resulted in her being grounded despite there being 12 male pilots with lower flying scores. She would never fly a fighter aircraft again. Within months, two of the three remaining female pilots were also grounded, and the third requested a transfer (Thomas, 1997).

Cultured beliefs about gender afford men a higher status in society than women and often result in gender differentiated performance and ability. Such differences bias the assessments men and women make of their own competence for career-relevant tasks. Widely accepted beliefs about gender include the ideas that men are more capable and competent at most things, and are generally better at mechanical tasks, while women are better at nurturing tasks (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Correll, 2004; Fiske et al., 2002; Williams & Best, 1990). Eagly and Karau (2002) stated, "In general, prejudice toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles" (p.3). Even the most junior fighter pilot occupies a leadership role in a flying squadron. Despite the lack of research specific to female fighter pilots, previous

research suggests that women may immediately be perceived as less and have to work harder to prove their competence due to biased belief systems.

When in operational roles, military women are often marginalized as tokens (Enloe, 2000), and are continually expected to "perpetuate a respectable brand of femininity" (Enloe, 2000, p.263). As Herbert (1998) stated in her study of how women adapt to the military, "When women seek to enter male domains, they are often confronted by social expectations concerning what constitutes a 'real woman.' Surely a 'real woman' doesn't want to carry a weapon, sleep in a foxhole, or go for weeks without a shower. A 'real woman' doesn't want to do 'men things'." Ironically, penalizing women in the military for acting masculine points out the fallacy of the "natural attitude" and the concept of a "real woman" because it shows that gender isn't "natural;" instead, it is a role in which we perform according to social expectations" (Herbert, 1998, p.2).

Military organizations tend to value hegemonic masculinities that promote conformity to a male norm (Duncanson, 2009; Kronsell, 2005). Researchers at the US Air Force Academy found female cadets who were ". . .invested in the attempt to become 'cadet' and reject the label 'female'" (Bertini & Weir, 1997, p.106; Sadler, 2003). Neutralizing gender in an attempt to fit the male norm means that "the 'gender neutral' cadet is defined as the cadet who is 'not female'" (Bertini & Weir, 1997, p.109; Sadler, 2003). This results in the conclusion that gender neutral indicates non-females or males; in other words, what is neutralized is femininity, and the accepted way of being is male. According to Gray (2003), a female soldier's persona is masculine in dress and posture, and feminine in status.

Phillips's (2006) research examined the systematic discrimination of female fighter pilots in the New York National Guard. Jackie Parker, an accomplished pilot known for being the youngest person to graduate from The University of Central Florida at 17; NASA's youngest

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fully-trained mission controller at 18; the first female to graduate from the USAF's Test Pilot Training; and the first female to fly a fighter aircraft for the Air National Guard, experienced sexual harassment so severe, that it resulted in a hostile work environment and a diminished sense of safety. Her appointment to the Air National Guard was heavily publicized, and it drew even more attention when she resigned stating that she was not "accorded a fair opportunity to become fully qualified in the F16C." The resulting report painted a hopeless picture of an accomplished female fighter pilot attempting to assimilate into a squadron who referred to themselves as "The Boys from Syracuse." Parker stated,

> In my past 15 years, I've always found it easier and I'm most
> accepted quickly if I can kid around a little, a few dirty jokes…it's my way of
> putting them at ease and that it's also part of my being somewhat of a
> combatsman. I'm a fighter pilot. If they are going to say something vulgar to me, I
> will say something vulgar back. (p.14).

The only other female fighter pilot in the unit, Captain Sue Hart-Lilly also described her survival method of limiting her visibility, "I tend to pretty much stay out of the limelight as much as possible. I found, over the years, that causes you as little problems as possible" (p.157). Both women tried and failed to find the right dose of masculinity, brashness, sexuality, and confidence that would result in acceptance within the squadron, but instead were criticized and mocked as being "unprofessional" and "lacking in military bearing". Multiple statements from other people in the squadron validated that they didn't fit in to the "boys club" despite trying multiple strategies to do so (Phillips, 2006). The report leaves the reader with a clear understanding that, although the doors to being a military fighter pilot might have been officially open in 1993; unofficially, those doors remained closed.

Davey and Davidson's (2000) study of female pilots in commercial aviation also confirmed the existence of sexism. They found that blatant forms of sexism experienced early in commercial aviation had declined, yet female pilots continue to report sexist jokes, derogatory comments about women, and on occasions, aggressive/sexist behavior from male colleagues and passengers. Captain Dr. Sharon Jones, Southwest Airlines, stated,

> I became a regional airline pilot at the age of 23, my greatest need was acceptance, which
> I found I could obtain by de-emphasizing my femininity. By being even more brash than
> most of my male colleagues, I had hoped to convince them that I was more similar to
> them than to their wives, mothers, daughters. This technique, though not optimal, proved
> somewhat adaptive. It also produced consequences that I neither intended nor relished
> (p.45).

The mainstream media has highlighted several high-profile cases of sexual harassment, sexism, and the sexual assault of female fighter pilots in the military. Despite anecdotal evidence and a few notorious stories, the experiences of female fighter pilots remain unresearched. Results from research conducted in the commercial aviation industry and in the civilian marketplace is comprehensive and overwhelming in its description of how harmful sexual harassment, sexism, and sexual assault are for the individual, the organization, and overall productivity. Despite years of research, sexual harassment, sexism, and sexual assault are pervasive in military culture. It is important to gain a more comprehensive picture of how sexual harassment, sexism, and sexual assault affect the experiences of female fighter pilots.

According to the Department of Defense (DoD) Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (2018), between FY12 and FY17, sexual assault reporting increased by 88 percent, while prevalence decreased by 44 percent. The DoD offers sexual assault victims two reporting

options; Restricted and Unrestricted. A Restricted Report allows the victim to store rape kit

evidence, remain anonymous, and receive full access to services and resources; but does not

allow for prosecution of the perpetrator. An Unrestricted Report allows the victim to press

charges against the perpetrator, but the victim's anonymity is lost. A victim can begin with a

Restricted Report and move to an Unrestricted Report at a later date, but is unable to move to a

Restricted Report from an Unrestricted Report. In FY17, 2,196 Restricted Reports were made,

and 537 (24 percent) later converted to an Unrestricted Report, which was a three percent

increase in conversions over the previous year (DoD, 2018). In FY17, sufficient evidence to take

disciplinary action was present in 62 percent of cases, and 38 percent of cases saw no

disciplinary action due to evidentiary issues, the victim declining to participate, or other reasons

(DoD, 2018). Seventy-three percent of respondents in the 2016 Military Investigation and

Justice Experience Survey recommended that other service members report their sexual assault,

while 40 percent reported experiencing retaliation after reporting a sexual assault.

Recently, Senator Martha McSally, the first woman in the Air Force to fly in combat and

the first woman to command a fighter squadron, disclosed to a hushed Senate hearing room that

she was raped by a superior officer while serving in the Air Force (Cochrane & Steinhauer,

2019). Her disclosure came amid the current debate over how to adjudicate claims of sexual

assault in the military. Senator McSally stated that she did not immediately report her assault,

because she "did not trust the system at the time" (Cochrane & Steinhauer, 2019). When she

finally tried disclosing her sexual assault, the responses she received from military officials "felt

like the system was raping me all over again" (Long, 2019).

Multiple changes affecting how sexual assault cases are handled within the military legal

system have been made in recent years. Lawmakers ended the statute of limitations on assault

and rape cases, made it a crime to retaliate against victims who report sexual assault, and made it

mandatory to issue a dishonorable discharge or the dismissal of anyone convicted of sexual

assault or rape. Despite progress, the military struggles to curb the prevalence of sexual assault,

while encouraging victims to come forward. Senator McSally's disclosure sent shock waves

through military and lawmaker communities; drawing attention to the magnitude of the problem

when someone of her status, strength, and notable accomplishment doesn't feel safe to report.

Although, Senator McSally's case is only one, there is no existing research about the prevalence

of sexual assault and rape among female fighter pilots.

Systematic Barriers. The equal participation of women in the fighter pilot realm is even

further hindered by the actual aircraft design. Fighter cockpit height requirements physically

limit the participation of women in fighter aviation. For example, the cockpits of fighters were

designed to fit the average male, which automatically disqualifies more females than males based

on height and weight. The average height of females in the United States is five foot four inches

and the average height of males in the United States is five foot nine inches. The minimum

height required to fly an ejection seat aircraft is five foot four inches. So, the average female

would barely meet the minimum height requirement for ejection seat aircraft, but a grossly below

average male would still meet the minimum height requirements. Most fighter aircraft were

designed prior to the combat exclusion laws being lifted. But the two newest fighter aircraft, the

F-22 and the F-35, were designed after women were officially allowed to fly in combat, yet the

cockpit height requirements remain the same. Currently, there is no research about how many

females are excluded from fighter pilot training due to the cockpit and ejection seats of fighter

aircraft being designed for men.

Social Embeddedness of the Author

Phenomenology relies on the researcher as an instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). As a result, it is important to examine how my own experiences impact my interactions with participants and the data. My primary influence in choosing my dissertation topic was my experience as a military member. I joined the Montana Air National Guard after graduating High School, and have been a member for 18 years. I began my career as an enlisted F-16 Aircraft Armament Specialist, and was one of three females in my shop of 60 personnel. After nine years, I moved to a career field where my immediate supervisor was female. This was the first time I had a female in my immediate chain-of-command.

Throughout my enlisted career, I maintained a strong desire to become a pilot. I spent several years going through the rigorous interview process, and observing the experience of the lone female F-16C pilot in our unit. After several interview attempts, and our unit converting from fighter aircraft (F-16C) to cargo aircraft (C-130H), I was hired as a pilot. I went to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to complete my Flying Class I physical, and was disqualified due to my height and arm reach. However, I was medically qualified to become a C-130 Navigator.

After 15 years as an enlisted military member, I attended Officer Training School, Survival Evasion and Escape (SERE) school, Combat Systems Officer school, and C-130 follow-on course. The two and a half years of Navigator training was the most difficult challenge of my life, and the experience magnified my existing curiosity about the women who achieve and perform at the pinnacle of military aviation; fighter pilots.

As I moved from the position of applicant and student into the position of a rated officer, I've also had the honor of mentoring pilot and navigator applicants on their journey, and serving as a selecting official on a hiring board. The knowledge I've gained as I complete my doctoral program and this study has increased my awareness around the societal, institutional, and

systemic barriers that females face as they attempt to be accepted into a traditionally male career field. As a result, it is critical to maintain awareness around how my experiences motivate and inform me as I complete this study.

Summary

Senior leaders across the U.S. Department of Defense recognize the importance of demographic diversity. Currently, personnel data statistics highlight a decline in representation of female and minority officers at the highest levels (Asch, Miller, & Malchiodi, 2012). A study by Lim et al. (2014), identified one reason for this pattern as the fact that rated positions with the highest promotion rates (e.g., pilot and navigator) are less likely to be held by female and minority officers from the outset. Additionally, women leave the Active Duty Air Force at higher rates than men; further reducing their representation across all ranks, but especially at the highest levels (Keller et al., 2018). Although recent efforts to understand female and minority representation and retention among officers have produced some research, there is even less research on female pilots, and no research on female fighter pilots. When current cost estimates to train a single fifth generation fighter pilot hover around 11 million dollars, retention of this underrepresented group becomes a serious fiscal concern (McCullough, 2017).

 It is important to fill the research gap in regard to female fighter pilots, because ethical counseling encourages counselors to understand, advocate for, and promote social justice within diverse and underserved populations. Female fighter pilots are a relatively new, underrepresented, and under-researched population whose understanding is essential for diversity, advocacy, and social justice. Advocacy requires an understanding of the unique experiences of the underserved population, and there is currently no research in this area.

This study explored the unique lived experiences of female fighter pilots through qualitative phenomenology. In keeping with Moustakas' (1994) writings on phenomenological research, I posed the following research question: What is the experience of female fighter pilots in the United States military? Phenomenology is the study of lived or existential meanings derived from first-person reports of life experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative phenomenological research was appropriate for this study, as minimal research exploring the experiences of female fighter pilots from the participants' perspective existed. I began by conducting two semi-structured interviews with each of the six participants, and continued interviews until saturation was reached. I identified themes, built a mental model, and ultimately developed a textural narrative of the phenomenon. Finally, after fully synthesizing the data, I relayed the essence of the female fighter pilot experience to the audience.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Until 1974, when the Navy awarded six female pilots their wings, women were not allowed to fly for the military. The Army began training female helicopter pilots the same year, and the Air Force admitted women to their flight training programs in 1976 and navigator training in 1977. Despite the introduction of women into military aviation, women were not officially allowed to fly combat missions until 1993, when the U.S. Defense Secretary, Les Aspin, ordered the chiefs of the military to disband the prohibition of women flying in combat (Baron & Wise, 2006). Despite earning the official right to fly in combat, more women participating in the labor force than not, a higher number of women than men attending college, and women earning half of advanced professional degrees (England, 2006; Valian, 1999; Rudman & Phelan, 2010); very few women currently serve as military fighter pilots (Scarborough, 2013). The importance of diversity among the military ranks has recently been emphasized at the highest levels in an effort to improve innovation, agility, and ultimately the mission (U.S. Air Force, undated; Matthews, 2018). Yet, there is little understanding of the reasons, rationale, and barriers which explain why the number of female fighter pilots remain small.

The small body of existing research on female fighter pilots, comes from personality testing at pilot medical screening facilities. The results reveal that female and male pilots are more similar to each other than they are to nonpilots of the same gender (Chapelle et al., 2010). Despite reported personality similarities, research on similar civilian and military populations

suggest that women have unique experiences in the areas of work-life balance, the establishment and maintenance of intimate relationships, motherhood, and workplace sexism than men (Keller et al., 2018). This study of female fighter pilots in the U.S. military is an effort to understand, provide layered support, and increase equanimity to an underrepresented group as they transition into a military environment that, as of recently, officially allows women to hold any military position. An increased understanding will allow the Department of Defense, and helping professionals to better address the unique needs, barriers, and concerns of female fighter pilots. Further, knowing little about these women's experiences leaves mental health practitioners ill prepared to join, conceptualize, and advocate for their needs.

Research Question

Phenomenological research requires that a researcher identify an interest in a selected human experience. Then, the researcher questions what the something is "really" like, and asks the question, "what is the nature of this lived experience?" (Van Manans, 1990, p. 42). In this phenomenological qualitative study, I explored the lived experiences of female fighter pilots in the U.S. military. In keeping with Moustakas' (1994) writings on phenomenological research, I posed the following research question:

What is the experience of female fighter pilots in the United States military?

For the purposes of this research study, "military" is a collective term referring to anyone who served or is serving in the following branches of the armed forces: Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, the National Guard, or their respective Reserve components. Fighter pilot is defined as anyone who flies an aircraft primarily designated for air-to-air combat or an attack aircraft primarily designated for ground attack, but with a secondary capability of air-to-air

combat. Participants in this study will be trained to fly fighter aircraft that include: A-10, F-16, F-15, F-15E, F-18, F-22, and F-35.

Phenomenology & Rationale

Phenomenology is the study of lived or existential meanings derived from first-person reports of lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research attempts to describe and interpret the common meaning found in the lived experience of a phenomenon across several individuals with depth and richness (van Manen, 1990; Creswell, 2013). A phenomenon is described as an "object of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177), and consists of a single concept or idea. "Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research," and meaning is gathered by giving lived experiences memory (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). "Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). The result is a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of participants' everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenological researchers understand that collecting only observable data is not an adequate method to understand intimate human experiences captured and consolidated in the mind (Wertz, 2005). Phenomenology examines a combination of individual realities and experiences. Such lived experiences are also "conscious" and directed toward an *object* (Creswell, 2013). Stewart and Mickunas (1974) write that "consciousness" is an activity rather than a thing, and therefore must be directed toward an *object* of consciousness such as: a physical object, theory, emotion, value, moods, future possibilities, etc. Participants' lived experiences, and what they come to know about them, is based on their individual internal characteristics and experiences, which becomes more complicated than simply collecting

objective facts. The researcher has a responsibility to understand participant reality by conducting extended participant interviews (Creswell, 2007). The researcher has a responsibility to make a "commitment to copresence" with the participant by conducting the interview in a manner that allows researcher and participant to co-create a shared understanding of the participant's lived experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57).

Next, the researcher finds the commonality between multiple participants experiencing a single phenomenon, and reduces those individual experiences into the phenomenon's universal "essence." This "essence" becomes the detailed description of a phenomenon. The researcher has a goal of accurately describing the "essence" of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (1990) defines essence as a "grasp of the very nature of the thing" (p. 177). A universal or essence is understood through studying the specifics of the lived experience. The resulting description of the essence of the phenomenon consists of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it (Mousakas, 1994) so as to better understand what the particular experience was like for the subjects. "Phenomenology is not concerned primarily with the nomological or factual aspects of some state of affairs; rather, it always asks, what is the nature of the phenomenon as meaningfully experienced?" (van Manen, 1990). When the universal essence of an experience has been sufficiently described; the description rekindles the significance of the lived experience in a fuller or deeper manner (van Manen, 1990.)

Phenomenology is *systematic* in that it uses practiced modes of questioning, reflecting, focusing, and intuiting. It is *explicit* in that it works to articulate the universal meaning embedded in lived experience as opposed to leaving the meanings implicit. It is *self-critical* in the sense that it continually examines its own goals and methods in an attempt to identify the strengths and weaknesses of its methodology. It is *intersubjective* in that the researcher needs the

other (for example, the reader or the participant) to develop a relationship with the phenomenon, and to validate the essence of the phenomenon. The researcher remains true to the *object*, or "that towards which the consciousness is directed," by describing and interpreting it while remaining faithful to it. Finally, because the meaning of the lived experience is the subject of the research, phenomenology is a *human science* (van Manen, 1990; Stewart & Mickunas, 1974).

Phenomenology is selected as the appropriate methodology for this research study to understand the shared experiences of the phenomenon of being a female fighter pilot in the United States military. Currently, there is minimal research exploring the experiences of female fighter pilots from the participants' perspective, and there is no standardized or operationalized quality or experience of female fighter pilots to investigate using quantitative methods. A phenomenological qualitative study finds meaning in understanding not only the physical events and behaviors, but also how participants make sense of the phenomenon and how their understanding affects their behavior (Maxwell, 1996). Finding shared experiences through a phenomenological research method provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of female fighter pilots, and establishes themes for further investigation in future quantitative studies or exposes specific points of exploration for future qualitative studies. The research design also allows great depth of details to be held in consideration for the development of practices and policies in support of this small, important, group of military personnel (Creswell, 2013).

A phenomenological study also seeks to understand the context of participants' experiences, and how the contextual factors influence their behavior. Historical and social contexts are especially important in this research study given the recent removal of the combat exclusion policy, allowing female military members access to all military positions. This change

to an antiquated and poorly adhered to policy resulted in significant changes for the dominate

masculine military culture, American society, and the opportunities available to women. A

phenomenological research design will allow the researcher to examine the ways in which the

unique circumstances of the current climate, culture, and political environment impact the

events, actions, and meanings for the participants (Maxwell, 1996).

Instead of identifying themes expected to be found in the research in advance,

phenomenology urges the researcher to remain naïve and present as they engage in continued

open-ended exploration of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 1996). The methodology allows for a

complete picture of the experiences of participants to be co-constructed, while emphasizing what

happens in the particular situations and social locations of female fighter pilots. Attending to a

phenomenon at these levels allows the resulting narrative to improve existing policies and

practices rather than simply assessing the value of the current policy (Maxwell, 1996). To best

capture variations in the experience of female fighter pilots, multiple identities and their

intersections were considered when selecting participants for this study. These efforts aimed to

capture as broad a view as possible when considering the multiple contextual factors that may

influence participant experience.

Transcendental phenomenology. Multiple types of phenomenology exist. This study

focused on transcendental or psychological phenomenology. The term transcendental means "in

which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (Mousakas, 1994, p. 34).

Mousakas also writes that this is rarely fully achieved, but through the use of bracketing, the

researcher sets aside their own experiences as much as possible to create the space to focus on

the experiences of the participants. Transcendental phenomenology is a four-step process

including epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of

meanings and essences. The following sections will explain the four-step process in greater detail.

Epoche. Phenomenology is a philosophy without presuppositions (Husserl, 1970). Epoche is a Greek term meaning to stay away from or abstain (Moustakas, 1994), and the term used to describe phenomenology's suspension of all judgements about what is real until they are based on the shared experience of multiple individuals (Creswell, 2013). In epoche, the researcher strives to set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the topic being explored (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological epoche does not deny and doubt the reality of everything; it only denies and doubts the biases of everyday knowledge and facts claimed to be known in advance. Instead, phenomenological epoche seeks knowledge through the research process and through internal reflection and meaning finding (Moustakas, 1994).

Epoche is a method of preparation in expectation of gaining new knowledge. It is a process in which the researcher enters into a different consciousness by setting aside predilections, prejudices, and predispositions. As a result, the researcher sees things, events and persons in a fresh light, as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche allows a phenomenon to be viewed without "voices of the past that tell us how things are or voices of the present that direct our thinking" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). In epoche, the researcher approaches the phenomenon with an openness and a willingness to allow it to be what it is. Phenomenology allows the researcher to view the phenomenon from a new vantage point free from our previous experiences and information provided by science, society, government, authority figures, friends, enemies, etc. (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche challenges the phenomenological researcher to adopt a new awareness and understanding allowing the participant and phenomenon to just be as it is.

Moustakas (1994) states, "The challenge of epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner" (p. 86). Moustakas (1994) encourages the researcher to approach the phenomenon by looking, noticing, and becoming aware without applying our judgement, biases, and previous experiences to what we see, hear, and feel during the research process. In epoche, the researcher takes no position, has no agenda, and views all information as having equal value. The "pure state of being" required by epoche requires a level of intensity, presence, and aloneness that is not easily or perfectly achieved (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87).

Epoche was achieved in this research project through the use of reflective journaling, personal counseling, consistent consultation, and a routine mindfulness practice. Moustakas (1994) describes finding a quiet place to examine and reflect upon biases, prejudgments, thoughts, and feelings related to the person, situation, or issue in question. In this process, biases are brought into consciousness and set-aside in an effort to view the topic with openness, newness, curiosity, and a fresh pair of eyes. I engaged the epoche process with reflective journaling about my lived experiences in the military and as a military aviator, while also documenting my biases and emotional responses to the phenomenon and the participants' lived experiences. I also attended personal counseling and regular consultation where these topics were explored and feedback from my counselor and dissertation chair was solicited and received.

An additional aspect of achieving epoche is the establishment of a reflective-meditation practice where preconceptions, prejudgments, and biases enter the consciousness and are allowed to leave freely. The researcher allows such thoughts, becomes aware of them, and sets them aside as they continue to strive for a state of unbiased looking and seeing. The researcher then returns to their reflective writing to record the prejudgments and biases. The process can be

repeated until a fresh perspective and ability to view the person, situation, or issue as-is and without judgement is achieved. In this project, I engaged in a regular mindfulness practice, which allowed me to examine my emotional responses in a nonjudgmental manner and with radical acceptance in an effort to remain receptive and open to the phenomenon and lived experiences of the research participants. My practice assisted me in remaining fully present during interviews, and to "listen and hear whatever is being presented, without coloring the other's communication with my own habits of thinking, feeling, and seeing, removing the regular ways of labeling or judging, or comparing" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89).

Moustakas (1994) writes that Epoche is rarely perfectly achieved. Despite its aspirational nature, the effort involved in reflection, self-dialogue, being intentional, and remaining open significantly increases the researcher's ability to receive whatever appears and reduces the influence of presupposition on the research. He goes on to state that some lived experiences are so "severe, intense, and telling" that they cannot be fully bracketed, but with intense effort, presuppositions that contribute to false realities and truth can be bracketed allowing the essence of the phenomenon to be realized.

Phenomenological reduction. The second stage of Moustakas's four stage process is phenomenological reduction, and occurs during both the interview and coding phases. During this step in the research process, the researcher is in a present state while interacting with the participants. This includes bracketing, or setting aside previous knowledge, expectations, and distractions during the interview process, allowing the researcher to be fully present. Remaining in the present moment allows the researcher to absorb the full description of the phenomenon and focus on the participant's lived experiences.

The phenomenological reduction process consists of the researcher helping participants describe, in textural language, what is seen. This "seeing" is applied to the consciousness, the experience, and the relationship between the phenomenon and self in addition to the external *object*. Phenomenological reduction is a way of seeing, and also a way of listening "with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 92). The goal is to describe the nature and meaning of the experience using detailed textural qualities. (Moustakas, 1994).

In phenomenological reduction, the researcher repeatedly looks at, then describes what they see. The phenomenon is examined multiple times from multiple angles while the researcher maintains focus on the phenomenon exactly as it appears. Each new look adds to the acquisition of a deeper understanding, awareness, and sense of knowing of a piece of the overall lived experience. The researcher documents their prereflective description of the phenomenon, reflects on that description, then reduces the description to what is horizontal and thematic. This approach to understanding one's own knowledge is called Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction. Schmitt (1968) adds:

> The world is examined in relation to myself when I try to distinguish those aspects of experience which are genuinely evident from those which I merely assume or supposed to be the case. The subject is examined in relation to the world when I inquire into the beliefs, feelings, and desires which shape the experience (p. 67).

The researcher continues this process of looking and reflecting until reoccurring themes of evidence are identified, the evidence is exhausted, and themes become repetitive. It is at this point that we have adequate evidence to confirm the phenomena's existence.

Through continued purposeful attention and comprehension, the examined lived experience is reduced to what is texturally meaningful and essential to understanding each component of the phenomenon. Aspects of the phenomenon become clearer as they are examined again and again. As the components are understood and themes develop, the essential nature of the phenomenon forms, and the separate parts become unified as a whole (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994). As new and differing information is recognized, the researcher must make corrections to previously held beliefs and perceptions, and check these corrections by looking again at the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Making corrections to previously held beliefs moves the researcher toward the realization of "more accurate and more complete layers of meaning" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95).

Another aspect of Phenomenological Reduction is the process of horizonalization. Horizonalization asserts that we are never able to completely exhaust our experience regardless of the number of times we reconsider or view them (Moustakas, 1994). Horizonalizing initially treats every statement as having equal value. After the process of reexamination, irrelevant, repetitive, and overlapping statements are deleted; leaving only the horizons. Each horizon is a condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character and textural qualities, which enable us to understand the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The final aspect of phenomenological reduction includes horizonalizing, which is the process of discarding irrelevant or repetitive statements, leaving only the unchanging portions of the phenomenon, referred to as *horizons* (Moustakas, 1994). The *horizons* are then clustered into themes, and together, the *horizons* and themes create a coherent textural description of the phenomenon. The creation of the textural description encourages the researcher to look again and again at the phenomenon, which facilitates the development of deeper layers of meaning.

The process of phenomenological reduction results in the experiencing person gaining a self-knowledge and a knowledge of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

       Imaginative variation. Imaginative variation is the third stage in Moustakas's process, and occurs during the analysis phase. The goal of imaginative variation is to describe the essential structures of the phenomenon. The researcher examines multiple and conflicting perspectives, seeks additional meanings, and examines all possibilities (Moustakas, 1994). The imaginative variation process includes a phase where multiple possibilities are examined and expounded on. This is done by "utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The goal of imaginative variation is to develop a description of the experience that includes the underlying and precipitating factors and themes of the experience using imagination and intuition. It examines the "how" and "what" of the experience, and investigates how the phenomenon came to be what it is (Moustakas, 1994).

       In this phase of the research project, the conditions that must exist for something to be, are uncovered. The researcher moves away from the measurable facts and toward the discovery of meanings and essences. The use of intuition in this phase is imaginative in nature and assists in the search for essences and the development of mental models of meaning. The textural description of a phenomenon is used to describe the context or setting that influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Imaginative Variation allows the researcher to develop structural themes based on the textural descriptions developed in the phenomenological reduction phase (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher imagines the possibility of multiple universal structures such as: time, space, materiality, causality, and the relationship to

self and others. These structures are used to imagine multiple possibilities that connect to the essences and experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the researcher vividly illustrates the structural themes and a structural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Synthesis. The final step in the phenomenological research process is the synthesis of meanings and essences, which requires the integration of the textural and structural descriptions to create a composite description of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon. The essence in a phenomenological study is the description of the common experiences of the participants, and it focuses on the common underlying structure of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Husserl (1931) describes essence as the overarching condition or quality which makes an experience what it is.

The essence of an experience is never completely exhausted, because the phenomenological researcher is viewing the experience at a specific point in time, place, and from a particular vantage point. After conducting an exhaustive process of imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon, the researcher settles on the essence of the experience at that point in time and from their perspective (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher provides a thorough narrative packed with thick-rich description, which allows the reader to come away from the phenomenological study stating, "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Using a detailed narrative, I showed the reader what it is to be a female fighter pilot.

Participant Selection Process

Sampling. This research study utilized purposeful sampling, whereby specific settings, persons, or events are intentionally selected to gain information that cannot be obtained from other sources (Maxwell, 1996). Potential participants will be identified through military aviation networking channels. I have previous friendships with two female fighter pilots who recommended other female fighter pilots, unknown to me, that may be willing to participate in the study. These friends connected me to potential participants through their Facebook "friends" lists. In addition, I connected with female fighter pilots who regularly participate in closed Facebook groups for female Air Force pilots and officers, many of which are fighter pilots. Initial contact with all participants was made through Facebook Messenger and text.

Maxwell (1996) discusses four possible goals of purposeful sampling, and this study utilized two goals. The first goal is achieving representativeness. Representativeness is the purposeful choosing of cases, individuals, or activities that are typical or homogeneous. The participants in this study were active duty and retired female fighter pilots. The second goal of this purposeful sampling is the opposite of the first in that it is also important to accurately represent the heterogeneity, or variation, within the population. The purpose of seeking heterogeneity is to ensure that the research study's conclusions accurately capture a range of experiences within the participant population. I attempted to recruit participants from all branches of the military in an attempt to represent the unique lived experience of each branch (Sadler, 2003; Phillips, 2006). As a member of the Air Force and Air National Guard, I had more connections and access to Air Force participants than participants from other branches of service. I attempted to recruit participants from as many branches as possible, but only the Air Force was represented due to the very small population of female fighter pilots in general. I achieved variation in rank, although research shows a sharp decline in the number of women in

the highest ranks (Keller et al., 2018), also making it more difficult to find higher ranking

participants. Research demonstrates that rank affects career progression in multiple ways such as

mentorship availability, work-life balance, and dual-military concerns (Keller et al., 2018; Lacks

et al., 2015; Smith, 2010). In addition, participants represented both active duty and retired

personnel, because continuation rates are greater for male officers than female officers, and this

disparity grows when examining rated officers (Asch, 2012). Research also indicates that female

officers leave the military for different reasons than male officers (Keller et al., 2018). Finally,

varied familial statuses were represented, as women report an inherent conflict between family

and an Air Force career resulting in the belief that having both is not realistic long-term (Moekler

& van der Kloet, 2003; Keller et al., 2018). Due to the study's small and homogenous

population, variation in race and sexual orientation was not achieved. Women of color are

grossly underrepresented fighter pilot military careers, and sexual orientation is often a hidden or

nondisclosed identity status. This study included six participants who each participated in two

interviews and member check procedures until saturation was reached. The number of

participants was small so their experiences could be explored in-depth and an adequate level of

understanding gained (Carpenter, 1999). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that data

saturation is typically reached after twelve interviews. Six participants also aligns with

Creswell's (2007) recommendation for 5-25 participants to reach data saturation in a

phenomenological study.

Branch of Service	Duty Status	Family Status
Participants represented one military branch	Participants represented three different duty statuses (active duty, reserve, and retired)	Participants represented two coupled and family configurations (partnered with and without children)

Research relationship. Maxwell (1996) discusses the process of creating a research relationship that allows for the ethical gathering of information in an effort to validly answer your research question. It is a continual negotiation and renegotiation based on the rapport built between the interviewer and the participant. In qualitative studies, "the researcher is the instrument of the research, and the research relationship is the means by which the research gets done" (Maxwell, 1996, p. 66). The recognition that the researcher becomes a part of the phenomena studied is referred to as reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). The reflexive relationship built between researcher and participant can hinder or help multiple aspects of the research design. My status as a fellow female military aviator granted me greater access to potential participants. In some aspects, my status assisted in building rapport due to the inevitable shared experience of being a female, being in the military, having gone through flight training myself, and being a member of a flying squadron. On the other hand, my status may have hindered some aspects of my ability to build a trusting relationship with participants. Concerns of confidentiality, reputation, and impression management may have surfaced due to the fact that the military flying community is small and close-knit. It would not be out of the question for researcher and participants to encounter each other again in an operational environment. Either way, bracketing was especially important to avoid the risk of overlaying my shared experience on top of, or persuading, research participants. These concerns and considerations were addressed in both written and verbal informed consent.

In general, pilots, and especially fighter pilots, have strong, A-type, intellectual, and rational personalities. Fighter pilots go through years of demanding, strenuous, and challenging training where self-confidence, strength, and self-sufficiency are emphasized and valued. As a result, building a trusting relationship where fighter pilots, who have spent the majority of their

life fighting off perceived "weakness," feel comfortable sharing their feelings, struggles, inner thoughts, and personal experiences proved challenging. In such instances, I depended on the basics of being a helping professional including; validation, empathy, unconditional positive regard, and respect to build a deep rapport within the relationship. Maxwell (1996) addresses the risk of developing the type of rapport where the participant is very involved, intellectually, in the interview, but not revealing anything deeply personal. He also states that this type of rapport might work well for some studies, but for the sake of this study, it was imperative that participants be willing to engage in critical reflection, be vulnerable, and openly engage about personal matters. Participants were vulnerable, honest, and actively engaged during all stages of the interview process.

Data Collection and Analysis

   Interviews. I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of the six participants. I met with each of the six participants twice via Skype for the first interview and via Doxy.Me for the second interview and member-checks. Participants committed to meeting in a solitary area for the interviews where their statements remained confidential and where they were not interrupted during the interview. They were informed that the interviews would last approximately one hour but would continue as long as needed to gain a detailed and rich description of their experience.

   The following four questions guided the first interview:

1. Tell me about your experiences being a female fighter pilot.

   a. Do any stories come to mind that really capture pieces of your experience?

2. How do you think being a woman has made your experience different, if at all?

    a. Has your identity as a woman in this role resulted in any specific challenges?

    b. What, if anything, has been a resource/source of strength/support during your career?

3. What is it like navigating military culture, and more specifically military combat culture, as a woman?

4. What do you hope people come to know and understand about the female fighter pilot experience?

At the initial meeting, I thoroughly covered the informed consent and allowed as much time as necessary for the participants to voice questions and concerns about the interview process. While covering the informed consent, I emphasized the limits of confidentiality, the possible risks associated with participation, the requirements of participation, and the right to cease participation in the study at any point. Several possible risks were discussed at the initial interview. The first was the risk of a breech in confidentiality. The second was the possibility of an unanticipated emotional response or stress as a result of discussing unpleasant, stressful, or traumatic events. Participants willingly shared difficult and personal stories during their interviews, and resourcing was addressed in those situations. A final email will be sent to participants with the finished study attached. Additional resources and competent referrals will also be included in this final contact.

The terms of confidentiality, as outlined by The University of Montana's Institutional Review Board, were followed. Specifically, I conducted interviews in a confidential area, recorded all interviews on two separate devices, and uploaded the interviews to an online, encrypted storage site. After saving these interviews, they were deleted from the devices. Each interview was transcribed within one week by a HIPAA compliant transcription service.

Subsequent interviews followed the same process. No identifying information was used during the encryption process and pseudonyms were given in the final narrative. Once the informed consent was covered verbally and clearly understood, written consent was obtained from each participant. During the interview, I used my written interview questions as a guide, and followed the flow of the participant's experiences, exploring for more depth and description when necessary. The interview process required that I ask follow-up, probing, and clarifying questions in response to participant statements. In addition, I summarized client statements to verify that I accurately heard the participant, and I skipped questions that had already been addressed in the flow of the interview.

I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the interviews as soon after the encounter as possible. Once I received the transcriptions, I devoted my entire attention to submerging myself in the data. I identified themes, built a mental model, and ultimately developed a textural narrative of the phenomenon. Next, I requested feedback from participants during the member checking process; checking for completion and accuracy of the conclusions in regard to the themed analysis. I further reduced the identified themes based on their review. I engaged in imaginative variation; looked for multiple and conflicting perspectives, examined additional meanings, and examined all possibilities. Each subsequent interview provided an opportunity to gather more information, expand or more clearly define the themes and horizonalization process, looking again and again at the experience. The themes were further reduced during each set of interviews and horizonalization was achieved. Finally, I constructed a textural narrative describing the essence of the experience of being a female fighter pilot.

Data analysis. Qualitative data analysis clearly distinguishes itself from quantitative data analysis. The researcher first considers the complete interview transcript, and reduces the

information to significant statements, sentences, or quotes (Maxwell, 1996). All expressions relevant to the experience are listed. Moustakas (1994) refers to this process as horizonalization. Each expression is tested for two requirements: first, it must contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it. Secondly, it must be possible to abstract or label the expression. If so, it is a horizon of the experience.

Next, the significant statements are combined into larger themes that form clusters of meaning that are grounded in the data (Moustakas, 1994; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The clustered and labeled groups become the core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Then, the researcher checks the established themes against the complete transcript of the participant asking three questions: First, are the themes expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? Second, if not explicitly expressed, are the themes compatible with the experience of the complete transcript? Third, if they are not explicitly expressed or compatible, they are not relevant to the participant's experience and should be deleted (Moustakas, 1996).

The researcher then uses the validated themes to develop a textural description, which describes "what" the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it. This textural description should contain verbatim examples from the transcribed interview. It is also in this step where the researcher employs imaginative variation to assess the data and create a structural description for each participant. Finally, the textural and structural themes are combined to derive the overall meaning and essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013, Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness and Transferability

Due to my personal experiences as a female in the military and aviation community, it is important to use a methodology that provides clear guidance of how to bracket previous

knowledge and experience in a way that allows the researcher to view the phenomenon naively and from a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). To fully understand and describe the experience of participants, researchers must bracket out, as much as possible, their own experiences and rely on various efforts to establish trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). Trustworthiness assists in determining the worth of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Maxwell (1996) calls it the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account. Several methods were used to establish trustworthiness and transferability in this research project.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation require efforts to create an open and trusting relationship with participants during the interview process. Also, as an 18-year member of the military and 3-year member of the military aviation community, I have been immersed in a military culture as have my participants. Being a member of a similar culture affords me a sense of authenticity and legitimacy that assists in building the trust required for honest disclosure. On the other hand, my experience in the culture dictates that I make a purposeful effort before, during, and after interviews to bracket my own experiences, assumptions, and biases and fully focus on the participants and their unique lived experiences.

My ability to bracket my personal experiences is connected to my epoche processes of daily journal reflections, individual counseling, mindfulness practices, and frequent consultation. My daily writings provided a space to process my reactions toward participants, military culture, and information learned. My mindfulness practice teaches and challenges me to further develop the skills of nonjudgment, open-mindedness, acceptance, and a present focus that allows me to

accept participants where and as they are. Mindfulness also supports me as I set my own experiences and cultural emersion aside.

Finally, weekly meetings with my therapist and weekly consultations with my dissertation chair provided me with educated and experienced sounding boards. They guided me through the process and held me accountable to the participants, the research process, and my commitment to produce an accurate description of the essence of the phenomenon. My therapist helped me process my reactions to the research and provided feedback if she believed my personal experiences and biases were overlaying or persuading the research participants. My dissertation chair examined both my process and product for accuracy and held me accountable to the participant voices. She evaluated my findings, interpretations, and conclusions; ensuring that we agreed on the meaning within the research.

Member checking. During each participant's second interview, I used completed mental models and recalled information to check-in with them regarding the information collected during their initial interview. This informal member check allowed me to expand and clarify based on round one interviews. I invited members to correct, clarify, and redirect me if they felt the collected information was inaccurate, incomplete, or misunderstood. This process also assisted in rapport-building between the researcher and the participant, which further increased participant honesty and openness during subsequent interviews. A formal member check was conducted after the second interview, where my final results were presented to the participants. The member checking process allowed me to validate, corroborate, and clarify the information that I found important. Finally, the process of member-checking increased the accuracy of the information collected, and further validated the information presented in the results section.

Rich, thick description. My narrative report used rich, thick description with direct quotes from participants, which created a detailed description based in the experiences of my participants. I used abundant and interconnected details from participant interviews to create a holistic picture of the experience of female fighter pilots (Stake, 2010). A detailed synthesis of multiple participant interviews created a vivid picture of the essence of the lived experience of being a female fighter pilot, and allowed the reader to determine whether the reported data was transferable.

Bracketing and clarifying researcher bias. In Phenomenological research it is important the researcher perform bracketing by acknowledging and setting aside bias, so the researcher can be completely open to receive the participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. Or, more accurately, the problem is that our "common sense" pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question (van Manen, 1990, p. 46).

This research project employed bracketing as a way to acknowledge and set-aside the researcher's personal experiences with the phenomenon being studied. Bracketing does not take researcher bias completely out of the study, but it assisted in identifying personal experiences with the phenomenon, so the researcher can set them aside to better focus on the meaning produced by the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). In an effort to successfully bracket my bias, I engaged in reflective writings throughout the research process. I made special note of

my personal experiences as a military aviator, my emotional responses, my expectations, and my personal feelings toward the military and the value of equal opportunities for women.

Secondly, I maintained weekly meetings with a therapist, Dr. Christine King, who spent time in an equally male-dominated field as a police officer, and who specializes in working with military veterans. She served as my inquiry auditor (Lincoln & Guba, 1982) and assisted me in identifying and processing biases that surface over the course of my project. We set aside a portion of most sessions to discuss my responses to existing research, relevant current issues, and my responses to participant interviews.

Finally, as a part of the research process, I met weekly with my dissertation chair, who served as another inquiry auditor. In-part, we discussed my worries, concerns, triggers, and existing biases. The openness of this relationship allowed for constant consultation and "checking" of my biases. The experience of my committee chair in the area of qualitative research acted as a final filter and ensured that I remained open to the participants' lived experience without letting bias from my personal experience taint the collected information. Together, we reviewed my meaning making processes of the data, ensuring the results were a reflection of the data itself.

Feedback. Maxwell (1996) states that soliciting feedback from others is an extremely useful strategy for identifying validity threats, your own biases and assumptions, and flaws in logic. In this study, I solicited feedback from two nonparticipant female pilots whom I had previous relationships with. Both agreed to review the research project and provided valuable insight and feedback to assist in checking my biases, logic, and assumptions.

Summary

Despite the flight and ground combat exclusion policies being lifted in 1993 and 2013 respectively, female fighter pilots remain a minority in the U.S. military. In an era where diversity is valued for multiple reasons, it is important to understand the experiences of female fighter pilots in an effort to provide layered support and increase equanimity to an underrepresented group as they transition into a military environment that, as of recently, officially allows women to hold any military position. Current literature suggests that women in the military and civilian aviation communities have different experiences than men, but currently, there is no research specifically examining the female fighter pilot experience. In an effort to add to the current literature on the female fighter pilot experience, I conducted a phenomenological study around the central research question: What are the experiences of female fighter pilots in the United States military? I conducted two semi-structured interviews with six participants who were referred to me through personal relationships with female fighter pilot nonparticipants and closed Facebook groups for female Air Force Officers and female aviators. I then analyzed and coded the data resulting in the synthesis of the phenomenon's universal "essence," or the detailed description on the phenomenon (Mousakas, 1994). The resulting description of the essence of the phenomenon consisted of "what" the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it (Mousakas, 1994).

Chapter III: First Round Analysis

In this chapter, participants are introduced, and first-round data is analyzed. The following four categories emerged from the first interviews: The Mission, Family, Culture, and the Internal Experience. The theme of Being the Only was present within all four categories, and all participants reported experiences unique to being the only or one of very few females within the fighter community. Participants also reported that leadership quality and exposure to other female fighter pilots positively impacted their experiences.

Description of Participants

I conducted six initial interviews after receiving approval from the University of Montana Institutional Review Board. The six participants in this study were current or former female fighter pilots in the United States Air Force or the Air Force Reserves and will be referred to by pseudonym. Navy and Marine pilot participant recruitment was unsuccessful. Going forward, the six participants are referred to as: Beryl, Jackie, Marina, Eileen, Bessie, and Amelia. Beryl is in her 30s and identifies as White. She received her commission from the Air Force Academy and was active duty Air Force before transitioning to a part-time position with the Air Force Reserves. She flew a fighter/attack aircraft before transitioning to an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) airframe. She has multiple children and is in a heterosexual marriage with a civilian. Jackie is in her 40s and identifies as White. She received her commission from the Air Force Academy and served 20 years as an active duty Air Force fighter pilot. She currently works as an airline pilot. She has multiple children, and is in a heterosexual marriage with a retired fighter pilot. Marina is in her 40s and identifies as White. She received her commission from the Air Force Academy and served as an active duty Air Force fighter pilot before transitioning to the Air Force Reserves. She currently works full-time as a fighter pilot and is in a senior leadership position. She has multiple children and is in a heterosexual marriage

with a retired fighter pilot. Eileen is in her 30s and identifies as White. She received her

commission from the Air Force Academy before serving as an active duty Air Force fighter pilot.

She transitioned to the Air Force Reserves where she currently serves as a fighter pilot and is in a

leadership position. She has multiple children and is in a heterosexual marriage with a retired

fighter pilot. Bessie is in her 30's and identifies as White. She received her commission from

the Reserve Officers Training Course (ROTC) and served as an active duty Air Force fighter

pilot before transitioning to a second fighter airframe. She is currently active-duty Air Force, has

no children, and is in a heterosexual marriage with a civilian. Amelia is in her 50s and identifies

as White. She received her commission from the Reserve Officers Training Course (ROTC).

She served 20 years of active duty in several career fields including that of a fighter pilot. She is

retired from the Air Force and the Airlines. She has a child and is in a heterosexual marriage

with a civilian.

Review of Procedures

Purposeful sampling was used in this research project. I contacted a friend, who is a

female fighter pilot, provided her with the participant criteria, and asked if she could identify

potential participants. She connected me with one person, Beryl, who was my first interview. I

found my second participant, Jackie, through an online Google search, and I contacted her

through Facebook messenger. Jackie connected me with two of her colleagues, Marina and

Eileen, who were my third and fourth interviews. Marina connected me with my fifth interview,

Bessie. My sixth participant, Amelia, was found through an online Google search, and I

contacted her through Facebook messenger.

Each participant discussed their experience of being a female fighter pilot in an interview

lasting between one and two hours. I developed four open-ended interview questions to guide

the interviews and exercised my freedom to ask additional questions in an effort to clarify and

further understand the participant's experience. Interviews were conducted via Skype due to the

diverse locations of the participants pre-pandemic. I recorded each interview and submitted the

interviews to a transcription company bound by confidentiality for the initial transcription. I

conducted a final review of the transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of military acronyms and

jargon in preparation for the data analysis phase.

Data Analysis

I conducted three rounds of coding with each participant's transcript. First, I

horizonalized the data by identifying expressions relevant to each participant's experience as a

female fighter pilot in the United States military. In the second round of coding, I reviewed the

identified expressions and eliminated those irrelevant to the experience of inquiry. I also

eliminated the expressions that could not be abstracted. Last, I grouped the remaining

expressions into larger groups to represent the core themes of the experience. I utilized direct

quotes from several transcripts to vividly describe and ground each theme in the data.

The following section will contain a textural-structural description of the female fighter

pilot experience. I will use thick rich description to explain the core themes found in six

transcripts. Emerging contextual factors are also critical to understanding the female fighter pilot

experience, and I will discuss and support these using direct quotes from the six initial

interviews. I constructed a mental model of the relevant themes using the NVivo mind map tool.

This mental model of the important themes includes broader subordinate themes, themes, and

sub-themes (see Figure 1). This mental model depicts the framework of how I came to

understand the experience of being a female fighter pilot after analyzing the six initial interviews

and writing this chapter.

First Round Analysis Results

The participants' experience as female fighter pilots focused on five major subordinate themes: Family, Fighter Pilot Culture, The Mission, The Internal Experience, and Being the Only. Each subordinate theme is influenced by smaller themes. Family was influenced by the participants' experiences with motherhood, partnership, and "Having it All." The participants' experience with motherhood was further moderated by the sub-themes of career consequences and "It's All About the Timing." Experiences with partnership was further moderated by dual-mil status and civilian spouses. The participants' experience with the concept of "Having it All" includes sub-themes of: the decision to get out, the decision to go to the National Guard or The United States Reserves, and out-sourcing labor.

Experiences with Fighter Pilot Culture includes smaller themes of Community Differences, Camaraderie and Cohesion, Hypermasculinity, and Sexism. Participant experiences with sexism were further influenced by Critical Mass and Diversity, Systemic Sexism, and Ambivalent Sexism. Systemic Sexism includes experiences of Institutional Betrayal. Ambivalent Sexism is moderated by both Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism.

The Internal Experience of participants includes navigating Moral Injury, Coping Skills, and holding a Fighter Pilot Mindset. The participants' experiences with coping were further moderated by the sub-themes of Utilized Strategies and Avoided Strategies. The participants' experiences with The Fighter Pilot Mindset were further moderated by the sub-themes of Indoctrination, Post-Traumatic Growth, Growing Thick-Skin, Confidence, and Early Engagement in Individual Sports.

The Mission experience is further detailed by the smaller influencing themes of the participants' Commissioning Source, experiences in Training, experiences during Deployment and Temporary Duty (TDY), and experiences Flying the Jet. Participant experiences in Training were further moderated by the sub-themes of Dropping Fighters, Instructors, and Washing Out.

Being the Only influenced all other subordinate themes, themes, and subthemes. Being the Only was further moderated by Mentorship, Work Ethic and Performance, Tokenism, Loneliness and Isolation, Failure to Follow the Rules, and the Antidotes to the Consequences of Being the Only.
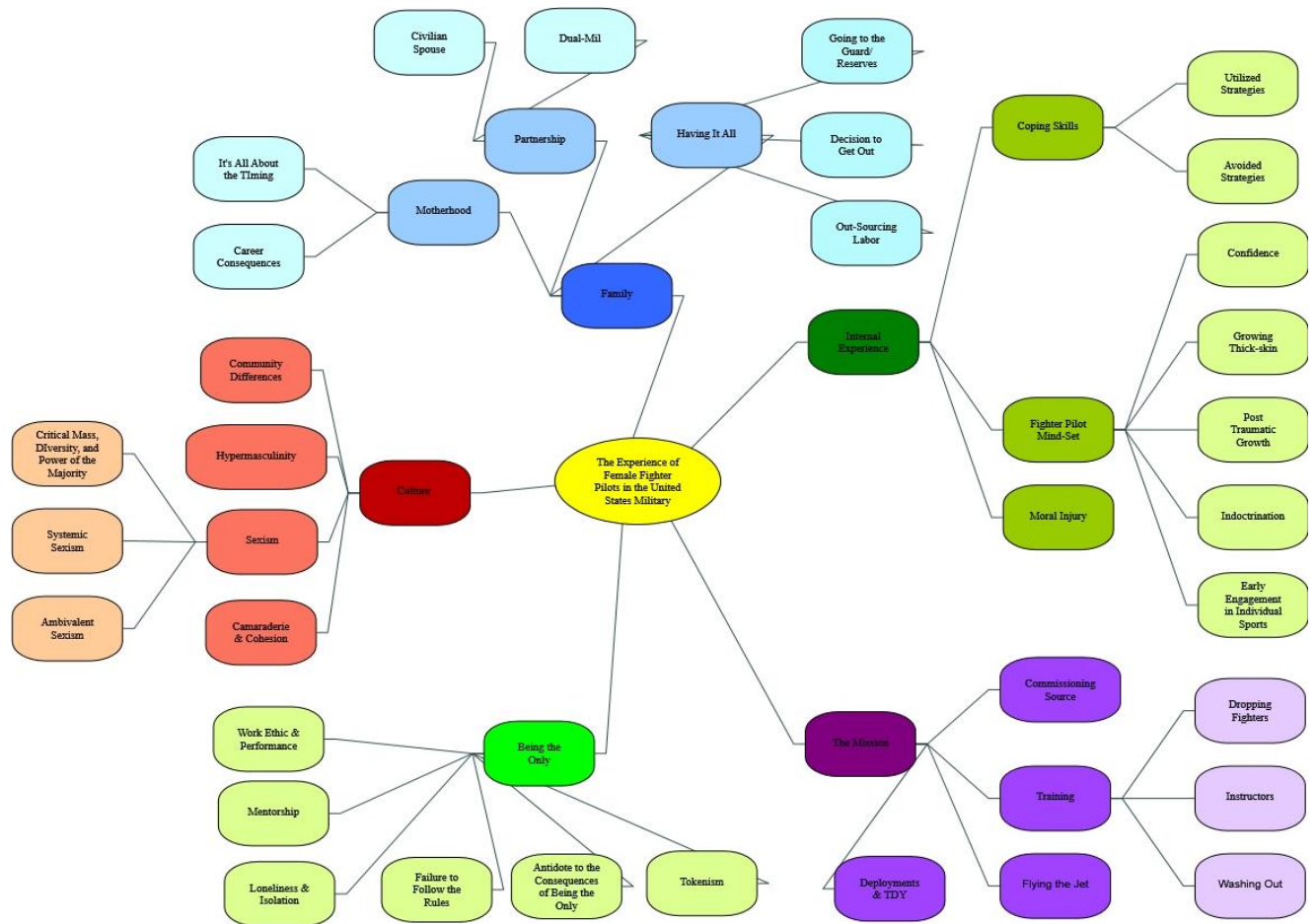
Figure 1: Conceptual Map after round-one analysis

Being the Only

"Being the Only" is a phenomenon discussed by all participants. It occurs when a minority is aware that they are the only one or the first of a certain group to do something. Bessie stated, "So, usually, it's just me. I'm the only girl there." The result is an immense and overwhelming sense of pressure to represent everyone within that minority group in a positive manner. It creates a dynamic where a minority person, in this case female fighter pilots, are charged with carrying the torch for all future female fighter pilots. It creates an environment where there is little room for error, and where the minority feels additional pressure to perform perfectly in all situations. If they don't perform perfectly, the imperfection is attributed to the minority status (ie. being a woman) instead of differences in individual ability. The risk of failure, perceived or real, is always within arms-reach and more catastrophic for the trailblazing individual. This section discusses the multitude of ways in which the participants' minority status increased pressure and added layers of tension to an inherently challenging endeavor.

Mentorship

Several participants described multiple experiences of being the only female at their assignments, or one of very few females. They discussed the importance of mentorship and reported a gross lack of mentorship or interactions with other women over the course of their careers. Jackie stated, "When I went through, no, there really wasn't anything [other women]." Marina reported knowing the few women that were ahead of her from the Academy. She stated, "But there were, there were a few years of classes ahead of me, and a lot of the girls—a lot of the girls, especially from the Academy, we kind of already knew each other."

Jackie reported that it was not until later in her career, when she was an F-16 instructor

that she was stationed with more than one other female. This is when they formed a group of

female fighter pilots called the Chick Fighter Pilot Association (CFPA). She stated,

> There were six of us at [base], and we kind of met each other or had heard of each other. Actually, one of the girls was with me at [multiple bases]. But we started meeting for lunch, you know, once a month or something. That's when, then we went out at night together and-- so, we, you know, somewhat jokingly, but we're like, "We've got to come up with something. We're the CFPA [laughter]." So we started the CFPA, unofficially, of course.

Amelia also discussed the creation of the CFPA after her retirement. She stated, "But I really

enjoyed it when I came back here after I retired. A few of the women that I'm pretty close with,

they had been here as instructors. They were here as instructors and they started the CFPA."

After starting the group, Jackie wondered about the other female fighter pilots. She stated, "And

I kind of thought, 'Well, I wonder who else is out there. What other women are out there flying

fighters and in different airframes.' So, we reached out to them. So now, we have—like, it's a

thing. We have a Facebook group." Several participants described a generational difference in

interest level though. They reported that the initial few generations, kept their heads down,

charted their own path, and simply endured being the only. "A few that were senior, higher

ranking than I was in my group of friends, really didn't have a lot of interest in being part of it.

But now, it's alive and well, and we are talking to the Lieutenants and the young girls and it's a

great mentorship thing that we have."

Marina, another founding member of the CFPA, described how beneficial it was to have

multiple women at the same duty station. She described feeling a sense of community that

didn't exist for the first decade of women flying fighters.

> At our second duty assignment, we were actually stationed with other girls. Because usually when we would go places at that point, we were the only girl in the squadron, maybe even the only girl in multiple squadrons. But we all met up here at [base] for the first time like in [year], and we started the CFPA then. So, we started kind of networking with each other; to help each other out.

She described their motivation for starting the CFPA, "We found it from within, because there really weren't mentors. The core members who formed it, we're all still really good friends. We go on girls' trips as often as we can. Even though most of them are retired now—I think only two of us are still in the military." Amelia discussed how the CFPA community has improved things, "And it's not quite so bad as that now. Because there's a network now. There's actually a thing called the Chick Fighter Pilot Association. We have a Facebook page. We support each other there and help each other with stories, just experiences and congratulations and support."

One participant described the only higher-ranking female mentor she had during her career. Her observations impacted her decision to leave the [airframe], and ultimately, flying all together. Beryl discussed her experience with mentorship and described it as insightful but not inspiring.

> When I was in Germany at the end of my assignment, another woman pilot showed up…she was older. She was a Lieutenant Colonel. And she had her own host of problems, so while it was cool to—'Hey there's this other woman.' And I would try to ask her questions. And she was gracious and would have me come over once in awhile to have a beer and talk. So, at one point, I said, 'You know it's cool to get to know you [Call Sign], because you're my only mentor that I can really look forward—or I mean, look and see, okay. If I follow in her footsteps, that's where I can be in 10 years.

She detailed how observations of her only mentor soured her to the fighter pilot lifestyle. She stated, "That [having a higher ranking female present] was somewhat positive, but honestly, the way that it was positive is that it really forced me to realize that that's not where I want to be in 10 years." She wonders if would have been different for her if she'd stayed. She stated, "I do often wonder if I had, you know, if I had stayed in that community—it's been 10 years later…But if I would've stuck with it, if I would be like who she is, or—so there's that hindsight. You wonder, 'Would I have been like that or is that just based on her

experiences…'" She described what she learned from observing this mentor's attempt to "be one of the guys" to fit-in and be accepted.

> …long story short, she tried to keep up with the guys. And so, she drank as much, and she dipped at much, and she swore as much, and she ate as much. And so, then she got overweight for Air Force standards. And they were very belittling of her because she did all of those things and they really limited her career. They didn't let her progress. And so, I saw that, and I was—and it affected her personal life. So, she's single, never, she said she wanted to have a relationship, but it just was impossible. And then because of the stress and because how hard it was on her body physically, her body really started to have a lot of health problems that I think were directly related to just the lifestyle.

Eileen also described her experience at an assignment where the only other female struggled fitting-in with the guys. Eileen also described a sense of bonding with the other woman when she became pregnant. At the time, breast pumps were not covered by insurance, and maternity uniforms were a personal expense. She stated,

> When I was a FAIP there were other-- not many actually. There was only one other female instructor at the time. And there was not positive, positive opinions about her, let's say, but also, umm, she was not a very confident pilot either in her own instruction and just the way that she flew and everything, so. Like she wouldn't fly solo. She would like refuse to fly solo in the T-6 which was kind of funny because everybody always wanted to fly solo. I mean, I always did. But she was a good role model as far as just like as balancing mom and work life. You know, I remember she gave me her maternity BDUs to wear and she gave me her pump because that was back before insurance buys you a pump and they were like, you know, three to four hundred dollars. So, that was really great.

Both situations discussed by Beryl and Eileen resulted in the participant feeling hesitant to engage too much with their only available female mentor. Aligning with another female who did not fit-in is dangerous for their own social acceptance.

Eileen continued and discussed her other assignments and her interactions with other women. The number of women was so small that she can still name them all, and she details feeling grateful for their presence and mentorship. She stated, "There weren't any females in the B-Course except for [Call Sign]. She was kind of around. She had just started coming back I think after her kiddos when I was going through." Then she described her assignment at

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Misawa, "When I got out to Misawa there were two girls already there. One of them was [Call Sign], the other one [Call Sign]. [Call Sign] out now. Not flying anymore." She continued, "Then—I came back here. So then [Call Sign] was still here and [Call Sign]. [Call Sign] came here when I was here but then, [Call Sign] had moved from [base] through school. She went through ACSC … and then she was here, so. I've had pretty good female role models or at least help in ways. She described her experience with one female who with her at [base]. Having a solid mentor seemed to be a protective mechanism, making the "bad experiences" less negative.

> But I was lucky. Like, I don't know if you know [Call Sign]. [Call Sign] was at [base] when I got there. And she kind of pulled me aside and helped me go through it. She's like, "Okay. Let's put this poopy suit on." And I like tried, and she's like, "No. That's not normal. That's too small. Let's get you another one." And you know, had the AFE guy right there. She kind of walked me through. She like showed me how to use the piddle packs that she uses and stuff like that. So, like, I don't know. I had good experiences. And I had all the same bad experiences, too, but they didn't seem as bad. If that makes sense.

Participants also discussed feeling a drive to mentor future generations of female and male fighter pilots. They describe a deep meaning that they get from impacting the careers of those coming after them. Bessie described her positive experiences on the Women's Initiative Team (WIT) and attending conferences aimed at improving programs and policies for female aviators. She described the benefit of talking to another female fighter pilot about her struggles retraining to a new fighter airframe,

> It was cool talking to just people who had been there and been to Luke. So, this lady specifically, I was talking to, she was at the Pentagon--or she's at the Pentagon now … But she was like, "I've been to [base]. I know what Luke's like. I know your name's being thrown at the OG meetings. Don't worry about it. Just think about the assets that are being pulled together for your training and how much of an opportunity it is, and all the stuff.

Bessie reported that she's had more contact with mentors in the last year due to her work on the WIT. Prior to building this community, she felt as if she was on her own as, typically, the only female fighter pilot in the squadron.

And so, honestly, within the last year, I would say way more emailing and having mentors that I've talked to, but yeah, like early on, I didn't-- it's not like I knew somebody in A-10 or knew a fighter pilot. I was just felt like I'm charting my own course. But I definitely do now within the last year. But surprisingly, none, when I was kind of growing up in NJPT and the A-10.

Amelia reported enjoying her time as an instructor. She described how the assignment gave her the opportunity to socialize male students to the idea of female fighter pilots. She stated, "So, I came back to [base] as an instructor after my assignment in [base]. And I really loved that assignment because basically all these new fighter pilots coming in to the base-- there were nine squadrons at the time-- they all knew that I was there as an instructor so you had-- you created in their mind initially, credibility for women in fighters."

Multiple participants listed some form of mentorship as the reason they agreed to participate in this study. They detailed their desire to benefit others coming along after them and described a drive to advocate for others in a way that wasn't done for them. They report that it is easier to advocate for others than it is to advocate for themselves. Bessie cited her excitement about recent progress as a main reason for agreeing to participate in this study. She stated, "I've been really excited about all the progress especially within the last year of just female gear and having events, and I'm really realizing how important it is." She described a drive to make things better for the younger generation of female fighter pilots. She stated, "So, going to some of these things as—honestly, it's super empowering. I don't really consider myself someone that would use a word like that. Usually, it's been really cool." She described how this newfound community of female pilots and leaders gives her confidence and the motivation to continue advocating.

As I get more and more confidence, I'll keep making changes for the better because…I'm surprised we're not there already. I mean, that's the whole thing with the MeToo movement and all this stuff. It's like, how are we still at this point? So, when I have a moment like that, I'm like, "Well, I'm

going to make sure that we rapidly push past this, and I'm not going to be the one that hears or see something that I think is wrong.

She also described how some of her confidence to affect change stems from moving up in rank and gaining experience.

I feel like I'm at this middle point where I don't have a ton of rank where I can affect this huge change, but I have enough where I know if something is wrong, I understand that there's bureaucracy behind it, there's an AFI behind it, there's whatever, and we can go about fixing this. And I have enough contacts around the Air Force that I could maybe do some-- at least get it elevated or do something.

Her statement illustrates how difficult it is to speak- up as a minority, and especially when the minority is also young, low-ranking, and inexperienced. In these instances, the power dynamic inherent in the military culture is difficult to overcome.

Jackie also discussed a desire to help with community outreach to reach more young women that may be interested in flying. She stated, "I think there are plenty of girls that are young that don't even know it's an option or didn't know it was an option for so long, you know, or are not exposed to it. And so, I think that that's also kind of a, I don't know, maybe something we need to be better at which is why I've been trying to do some more of that, you know, community outreach type stuff."

Jackie returned to the Academy as an instructor. She stated, "I worked at the Air Force Academy. I was an AOC there. I don't know if you're familiar; Air Officer Commanding." She elaborated on this experience and described the passionate way she tried to mentor pilots. She reported,

There, I was on a crusade. Not just women, but to get all of my cadets who were medically qualified, to go fly. You know, I was like, "You don't want to be an engineer. You don't want to be an intel officer. You don't want to do these other things. You can go do those later or if flying doesn't work out. But if you are medically qualified, go fly." And it was my personal crusade to go do that. If you're in the Air Force, you need to be in a flying squadron. You need to go do that.

She described a strong sense of mentorship and care for the cadets she led during this time,

"And so, my first class to graduate… they're coming back for their reunion and I'm having them back to my house, you know, in a few weeks." She described how some cadets still reach out to her, "But I get these emails. I mean, they're less and less frequent, now, but I'm in touch with a lot of my cadets. And occasionally, I'll get an email like, 'Hey. I just, ahhh, graduated Weapons School.' Or 'I just had my first combat deployment and I'm an, you know, an IP now or I'm PCS-ing.' Just little updates. 'Thank you for talking me out of being an engineer.'" She described working as and AOC at the Academy as one of the most rewarding aspects of her career. In that position, she was able to mentor young cadets.

> You know, like, and I love that. I think that's the greatest thing ever. They're all loving their jobs. They love what they do and they're having good experiences. You know and they, they will write me for advice now. I mean, I'm like old as crap and gone, you know, from the Air Force, but I just got two phone calls about a year ago because they're up for the staff jobs. And they're like, "Well, I'm kind of interested in doing what you did. I want to go back and be an AOC or should I go to the Pentagon? Or should I do this, or you know, so I love the fact that they value my opinion and, and you know, if I can help them in some way, shape, or form and have them graduate from the Air Force after 20 years and say, "Yep. It was a great career." So that's why I just—I don't know, I loved it, I really did.

Eileen also described a desire to educate young women about the fighter pilot career path. She recognized that many women choose to do what they see. She discussed how she was unaware of other options until attending the Air Force Academy, where she was introduced to alternative options.   She stated,

> I think part of it is that if it's a girl who's trying to decide whether to do something like this or work like this, part of me is like-- when I was a kid, I knew I wanted to be a mom. My mom was a stay-at-home mom and that seemed like what I should do because that's what she did, you know what I mean? And then when I went to the Academy, I was kind of like, "Oh there's a lot of other things out there."

Eileen also identified a desire to help me finish my educational goal as one reason she agreed to give her time to the study. She stated, "Oh, I don't know. Because I did my master's and I know how much of a pain it is to try to get things done. So, I was like, "Oh sure, I'll do it." Girls

helping out girls." Participants described the impact of being the only on their experiences with mentorship. Because they were mostly alone in their squadrons, they took it upon themselves to create a mentoring network, the CFPA. Multiple participants described the positive impact of this organization, and their desire to increase support for the younger generation of female fighter pilots.

Work Ethic and Performance

Participants reported earning respect and acceptance through hard work and high performance. They also indicated that they have less room for error as a result of their "only" status. Marina described feeling like she had to meet a higher standard to be viewed positively. She stated, "…I can't get away with the same mistakes that the average guy can get away with. I have to be better than average to be judged as average." Bessie also described feeling more scrutiny because she was a female.

> … getting to a new squadron and having more people give you the second look or be more skeptical about your ability or why you're there. And this was early on in my career, which I don't think guys new to fighter squadrons-- I think everybody new to a fighter squadron, especially your first squadron, you're nervous and you feel like you have to perform. You know, everybody goes through that. But I think being a woman, there was a little more scrutiny than guys have.

Amelia discussed a phenomenon similar to imposter syndrome. She detailed an incident that occurred while she was an instructor and was asked to support a female pilot student who was washing out. Amelia stated, "I got to talk to-- there was a-- the first woman to wash out of [airframe] training happened while I was an instructor there and she was in our sister squadron. And I had gone through that squadron for my instructor course, so the squadron commander knew me. So, he had me-- asked me if I'd be willing to talk to her and I said yeah." The student worried that she wouldn't be held to the same standards and would be allowed to pass when she

wasn't qualified. "And she was feeling a lot of the stress that I was, except she was kind of feeling it maybe a little bit the other way in that she was afraid they were going to pass her even if she didn't deserve it, because they wouldn't want to wash out a girl." Amelia shared the wisdom that she had learned during her career. She described her response, "And I'm like, yeah, you can't worry about all that. You worry about you. You know? You just do the best you can, and they'll figure it out. They're not going to put you out there if they don't think you're competent because it's not fair to you or to anyone in that squadron you go to. You know, you have to meet the standard. So, you just don't worry about that part. Let them worry about it."

Marina pointed out a phenomenon that occurs when someone is a minority within the organization. In any profession, there will be people with natural talent, and people who need to work harder to develop the required level of skill. You will have those who excel within that profession, and those who are "good enough." It is statistically impossible for everyone to be the best, especially in a profession where all members are already performing at the pinnacle of human performance. Marina details how a female fighter pilot who struggles with flying will subsequently be ostracized from the group. The skill deficit, either perceived or real, is attributed to their female status. "They struggled in the fighter community of flying. And because they struggled there, most of the people who have had horrible experiences also were not the best pilots. And I would say that that's true for guys as well, but our cross-section of people is so much smaller." She describes how it is easier for a male fighter pilot who performs at a "good enough" level blends in, but it is impossible for a female fighter pilot to blend in at a "good enough" skill level. She stated "Because not everybody that gets to fighters is meant to be a fighter pilot. But if you have five girls that have bad experiences because they struggle flying-- I mean 5 out of 10 is 50%, where 5 out of 3,000 for the guys is-- you don't even think

about it."

Loneliness and Isolation

Several participants identified the loneliness they felt as the only female pilot in most squadrons. Additionally, military members are located far away from family and friends. Finally, it is considered fraternization for Officer and Enlisted personnel to socialize outside work, which further narrow options. These dynamics combined severely limit options for social connection. Marina, who is in a senior leadership position, reported that it became even lonelier as she promoted. The number of high-ranking women is much smaller than the number of high-ranking men. While all leaders' social circles become smaller as they promote, this is especially limiting for female leaders. She stated, "When you become the boss, you kind of move yourself to the outside of the circle a little bit. And then as an [leadership position], I definitely am outside the circle now, and I kind of argue with my husband sometimes, and even as a girl, you kind of sit sometimes outside of the circle." She reiterates that isolation is always an issue for female fighter pilots, but she feels increasingly isolated as she moved up the ladder. She stated, "That's just another aspect to it, because the isolation always comes up of just being either one or very few females together." Marina reported successfully fitting-in, but she also gave an example of sitting outside the circle despite being well-liked, "The guys can go on a guys trip, and they all go, they do their camping trips all the time. I'm not going to go on a camping trip with a fighter squadron full of guys."

Jackie shared her experience with loneliness and isolation. She stated, "That was my first assignment. When I showed up, there was not another girl in my squadron. Our flight doc was a girl but no other female pilots. And sometimes I felt a little left out." She described an awkward dynamic with the male pilots in her squadron,

> You know, like, because naturally, all the guys would, you know, on a weekend or something, "Hey, we're going up to [city]." or "We're doing this." And so, you know, unless I was assertive like, "Hey. Can I go with you?" And this was just initially when nobody knew me, and you know, because I think it's awkward on both sides. "Hey. We don't know the new girl, but do you want to go up to [city] and stay in a hotel with all of us [laughter]?" You know, so by nature, I felt left out a little bit until I got to know everybody.

She described how even having a female flight doctor was helpful to counteract the isolation. She stated, "And having the flight doc there was a huge help because she had already been there and established her relationships with the friends. And so, she would, I was like the tag along." Jackie described how this dynamic continued, "And then same thing, I PCS'd to [base] and my husband was still at [base] and, you know, they're like, 'Okay, who's the-- she's single, alone without a husband but she's truly married. So do the single people invite her out or do the married people invite her out?' It was just that awkward, not really having a place. I guess."

Amelia described how the lack of technology increased the isolation experienced by the early female fighter pilots. "We didn't have—when I was in Germany on our first assignment, we had dial-up. Right? People didn't use email as much. It was harder because you didn't have cell phones where you kept the same number whenever you moved. We're just trying to survive."

Several participants expressed curiosity about other participants' perspectives. It became clear that many women tackled these challenges alone, and they are unsure how others have handled it. There is a curiosity about the "others" that depicts just how isolated and lonely being a female fighter pilot can feel. Beryl seemed interested in hearing the perspective of the first female to fly the [airframe]. She stated, "Man, we've got to be able to find a way for you to try to connect with her somehow. We must know similar people. Would that be great to include her? Because she's like the young side of it. So, she's probably still like as they say piss and vinegar. She's still like full-throttle [laughter]." An important aspect of being the only is the

loneliness. Most military personnel that are stationed far away from friends and family find

solace in their colleagues. As the only female officer in a squadron, it is challenging to establish

a support system, which frequently results in feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Tokenism

Amelia reported feeling that her experience was different than the experience of an equally

qualified male fighter pilot. She described what it was like to be the token female fighter pilot.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think being a woman has made your experience of being a fighter pilot different?
>
> **Amelia:** Yes, I'm sure it did. I'm sure it did. There were just more-- more of everything. I mean, more struggles, probably. I talk sometimes about the good and the bad of it is that everybody knows who you are. Right? The good thing is; everybody knows who you are. So, if your boss is giving out awards or he actually knows you and something you've done. But the bad thing is, everybody knows who you are. There's nowhere to hide. Ever. You know? If I screwed something up when I got to Spangdahlem, everybody in every other squadron on base knew about it.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay. Because you were the token? You were the only one?
>
> **Amelia:** Yeah. And I was the… 'see how this is going to work out person.'

She describes the increased fear of failure, and the nagging fear that they would scrap the

program for all future women if she failed.

> **Interviewer:** So, you felt some additional pressure because you were one of the 'firsts' and 'the only one?'
>
> **Amelia:** Yes, definitely. And I don't know if this is true or not still to this day, but what I felt like was-- I mean, if I was the first woman to go through [airframe] training and another woman didn't go through for over a year, what if I would have failed out? Would they have scrapped it? Would they have said, maybe this isn't such a good idea? Or see, we told you this wasn't a good idea? Because it was the civilian leadership that pushed it, not the military.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
>
> **Amelia:** Yeah. General McPeak, six months before the press conference he headed introducing [Name], [Name], and I, he publicly said he would rather have a less-qualified man on his wing than a woman. He was the Chief of Staff of the Air Force.
>
> **Interviewer:** Wow.
>
> **Amelia:** So that kind of set the tone.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay. So, the military got a little strong-armed into doing this?
>
> **Amelia:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It was Secretary of Defense Aspin under Bill Clinton who said, "No, here we go. This is what we're going to do. Come up with a plan."

Amelia described the unrelenting pressure to adequately represent all future female fighter pilots, and how it eventually became unbearable. When asked how she handled the stress of being one of the first female fighter pilots, she stated, "Well, I really just got to where I tried-- I just couldn't deal with it anymore, so I went okay. I can't take that on. I'm going to go out every day, every flight, and just do the absolute best I can do. And if it's not good enough, then I know that I'll leave here with my head held high. I did the best I could. You know? You can only do so much. Right?" Bessie reported similar feelings, "I think a challenge has been just always feeling like set-- you're setting the example, you're making a great first impression. I definitely put a lot of pressure on myself to do that." She elaborated further, "I definitely think I'm putting unnecessary pressure on myself… I just feel like I put pressure on myself because I don't want people to think that I'm shitty, therefore like every girl, that every female fighter pilot's shitty. I don't want to put a lot of pressure on myself because of that." Beryl described her early experience trying to manage the emotional pressure of her minority status in addition to learning to fly a fighter aircraft. She reported,

> I did struggle a little bit flying. But I would say more so it was in my own head. I was hard on myself on the flying aspect. And then when you bring in all the other stuff that was going on, then it became more emotionally difficult. Which I don't think any of the guys dealt with as much. I mean, they-- it seemed like they could focus more just on the technicality of it. Whereas I was feeling everything that was going on in the squadron, which made it a little bit more stressful for me.

Bessie described the phenomenon of "being the only" from multiple perspectives. On one-hand, she described a single [aircraft] pilot who she felt didn't represent all the other female fighter pilots well. She stated, "Maybe there were a few that gave the community like a bad taste in their mouth, or I don't know. There's one girl I think of in the [airframe] that I'm like, 'I'm not sure she's the best representative for all of us." On the other hand, she identified a need to release herself from the burden of being a representative for all women. She stated,

"That's something that I always have to like kind of release myself of this burden. I very much feel like I'm setting the precedent. Like, if I'm the—there's probably a number of guys in my squadron right now that I'm the first girl they've ever had in their squadron." She described how she heard a higher-ranking female fighter pilot discuss the phenomenon on a leadership panel, which caused her to question the added burden. "One of these TDYs they went on-- they did like a leadership panel type of thing. And she said like early on in her career she would really like get fired up about somebody like tainting the female-- the perspective of females. And I find myself doing that, too." She described how she recognizes herself being harder on female Airmen than male Airmen,

> Like, if I see a female air-- I'm way harder on a female Airman than I am like a male Airman. I definitely think like there's a stereotype… So, I've had to like release myself of that. Like, I don't need-- yeah. I'm always doing my best. But it shouldn't be because I'm trying to like change somebody's opinion of females in their squadron. And I get caught up in that.

She described how exhausting it is to feel as if everyone is watching you and generalizing your performance to every other female fighter pilot. She stated, "And it's funny because in my own squadron, I feel very much like they know me by now type of thing. Sure, I'm setting a good-- or a good first impression early on, but they know me. But I definitely feel when we work with outside agencies or whatever, it's kind of all eyes on you type of thing." Amelia concurred and described the constant need to prove herself. She stated, "After about—we went to Red Flag, I had probably been there about a year or so. And I felt pretty comfortable with my squadron. But every time you went anywhere, people were confused by you and didn't know what to do with you." She described a continuous state of discomfort that was only relieved for short stints, "Any time you got comfortable somewhere in your own unit because generally— only once in my time flying did I have more than me as a woman in the squadron. So, generally, just everywhere you went, you just had to re-establish yourself. And once they

figured out you're okay then it all worked out."

Bessie admitted that "being the only" is the reason she has always hated aerial refueling.

She explained why tankering is so difficult,

> And it's actually the reason I've always hated tankering, going to the tanker, because-- so, I mean, you're not going to be good at it when you first start. And in [airframe], I think it's actually-- especially now coming to another airframe, I think it's harder in the [airframe] than the other fighters because it's [the refueling valve] on your nose. So, you're watching the boom descend towards you whereas the other ones [aircraft], you just park it. You look at the lights, you park it, and they're-- you're not seeing it [the boom] about to hit you type of thing. So anyway, I mean, I'm terrible at tankering or off the bat when I am in the B-course.

She reported feeling self-conscious about her performance as the only female student. She

described how it's easier for a male student who's learning to blend in as just a B-Course

student learning to refuel, whereas the only female voice on the radio sticks out. She said,

> Those people don't get to see me. They don't get to meet me. They don't get to hear that it's my first time. They have no details but now, there are eight of us getting gas. I'm the only girl. I'm one of the two students there and I suck. And so this other student; who cares about that one guy that, sure, they're not going to remember his voice. They're not going to remember anything. But they're going to think like, "Oh, how about that girl? She really sucked."

She described the pressure to perform well and leave the tanker crew with a positive impression

of female fighter pilots. She stated, "That bothered me a lot because I was like, 'Man. I'm

setting this horrible--.' So, I would get even more nervous when I would go to the tanker. And

it's like, who knows? I'm probably never going to meet those people, whatever. But I don't want

the perception to be that, 'She was the only girl and she was one of the two worst at the bottom

of the list or whatever.' So, yeah, I definitely feel the pressure."

Bessie continued and described how she feels a little less pressure now for multiple

reasons. One reason is the confidence gained from successfully completing multiple extremely

challenging courses. She stated, "I feel it less now because I am confident that you make it

through this course and that course and you're doing well." Another reason is her instructor status, "And you're kind of-- I'm an instructor now. Kind of your accomplishments kind of speak for themselves. You probably wouldn't have got there if you didn't deserve it type of thing." Although she feels it less, she still looks back and remembers the crippling nature of the pressure. She also identifies that the added pressure created by "being the only" is a major distractor from the actual mission, "So I care less about that now but there definitely have been times that's really, I don't want to say it's crippling, but it's very much like I'm even frustrated that I'm frustrated about it type of thing and it's taking your mind off what it probably should be on."

She recounted several memories from training where her "only status" negatively affected her. She stated, "So I just felt very aware of being the only-- I've been in this squadron now where I'm the only girl. But I feel way less aware of it than when I was in pilot training for some reason." She described arriving at her squadron and being the only female, "But then coming here to the [new fighter airframe], I had a really interesting time when I first got to my squadron. So, there weren't any females in the squadron when I got here. And it was so strange. It was such a strange environment." She detailed a challenging journey cross-training from the [first airframe to her second airframe], which is a more difficult transition than if she'd come from a [different fighter airframes]. The mission of the [old airframe], varies greatly from the [new fighter airframe's] mission. She reported, "I ended up hooking a lot of rides. Which, again, I have this feeling that I know everybody around base is like-- because I'm getting briefed to the OG commander that our attrition is mostly because of, "We have an [airframe] pilot, blah, blah, blah, and she da, da, da." So, I just know that it's like, 'Oh, some girl in the [squadron] is really sucking.'"

Marina discussed the double-standard that occurs when you are the token female. She stated, "It's such a small group that if you are a female who struggles with the flying part, you have to work really hard at it—You're going to get spotlighted more than a man who has to work really hard too." She points out that any fighter pilot who struggles in certain areas will experience a stigma but acknowledges that it is worse for a female fighter pilot. She stated,

> It's a bad stigma for a fighter pilot if a guy can't become a flight lead. I mean, that's kind of what I'm talking about. It's a bad stigma, either way, but in a community as a whole, if it happens to a girl, it's much more likely to be known widespread. It's kind of the microscope that I talked about, just because there are fewer—there are just fewer—this cross-section is so small.

One participant described a different experience as being the token female. She spoke endearingly about a commander who tried very hard to create an inclusive environment. She reported speaking with him about his communication style with the squadron, and she detailed the outcome, "I got myself in this boat where I become like the token female. Like, 'Is this okay? Is this'-- because he's like, 'When I say dudes, like [laughter] what-- like, what about dudes?'" She respected his efforts and appreciated his genuine willingness to create a positive squadron environment, and it also created some discomfort for her. She stated, "And I'm like, 'I don't want to be in that boat. I just want people-- as much as I think you all value me or a female being here, I want you to say things [laughter] that are kosher with that so that when we get a know-nothing Lieutenant here that they think that it's like a welcoming environment for them.'" Multiple participants discussed the experience of being the token female in the squadron and the stress of being in the spotlight. They described a situation where they never really relax or stop worrying about how they are representing the entire female fighter pilot community.

Failure to Follow the Rules

One participant detailed the severe consequences of going against the status-quo. She described the treatment of one pilot who dared to address inequities within the system, and how

as one of the very first female fighter pilots, her actions were highlighted and vilified. Beryl described how she was automatically compared to that "other female [airframe] pilot," and how the treatment of that pilot affected her own career decisions. This does not happen with male fighter pilots. They represent themselves and they are not automatically compared to "that other male fighter pilot." She stated, "I've always been around her a little bit…. but I was a little bit—I was very much after her, but I was still in her shadow in that it was interesting everywhere I went when they were like, 'Oh, female [airframe] pilot. Let's compare her to [name].' She detailed the consequences that "other" female fighter pilot endured after speaking-up and addressing systemic sexism. She stated, "And they stifled her career. And the community always referenced her—they never said her name, and they never said her call sign. By multiple accounts, this successful pilot who dared to change the culture and address inequity, was tortured by the fighter pilot community for daring to speak-up. Beryl continued, "And that's how they referred to her because she was just this 'terrible person' and 'how dare she…' and 'who does she think she is…' Beryl reported witnessing this treatment and how it affected her, "I saw how cruel they were towards her… and there was another kind of confirmation for me of like, 'Gosh, even if you are the best of the best like she was, like it's just, they're never going to like you or respect you."

Antidote to the Consequences of Being the Only

Multiple participants reported that the rarity of other female fighter pilots impacted their experiences. Outcomes for female fighter pilots would improve greatly if there were more. Bessie describes how simply having more than "one" impacted her ability to speak up. She reported that it is easier to speak-up for others than it is to speak-up for herself. She described an example from her time in ROTC,

I have always thought that, yeah, it's way easier to do that. I mean, even back in ROTC, it's way easier when there's two-- yeah. I think back [inaudible] if there's two people…. So you have two upperclassmen standing around, and one of the underclassmen doesn't say Sir/Ma'am to whoever you're with. It is way easier for me to be like, "Hey. You need to respect him." Then for that person to be like, "Hey. You need to respect me." I've always thought that that's really difficult for me to be like, "Hey. You need to respect me." It's way easier for me to be like, "Hey. This is disrespectful to this other person." … And it's easier for me to be protecting or defending someone else than myself, for sure.

Beryl described the impact other females made for her at one of her assignments. She stated, "Then I was off to [aircraft] school, the only women in my class of I think it was seven. And that really didn't bother me. I actually enjoyed just being with the guys. There were no female instructors. So, I was the only [female] officer in the squadron." Despite enjoying the guys, she reported seeking out female companionship. She stated,

There were four enlisted women who worked -- did all the paperwork, our SARMS as you're probably familiar with. And so, I really tried to develop rapport with them. Of course, at the end of this course-- it turned into a nine-month course and they loved me. The enlisted girls were just like, "You're our favorite." Because I would ask them how they were doing and had actual feminine conversations with them and respected them for what they did.

She reported receiving negative feedback for this behavior. Military Officers are not supposed to have personal relationships with Enlisted personnel. This is referred to as fraternization, and it can have disciplinary consequences. She stated, "But because of the officer-enlisted relations, I had a lot of the guys, 'Hey, you shouldn't be talking to them.' Which was just kind of weird and silly at the same time because it's like, okay, we're just having a female conversation. That doesn't mean that we're fraternizing or anything." She described those limited female relationships as having an important impact on her experience, "So that was, ummmm, interesting that those girls were-- I mean, I enjoyed-- they made the days a lot easier."

Beryl described what she observed while stationed in Germany, and again, reiterates an

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experience virtually void of women. "There was [two different fighter aircraft] units so there was just me and [Call Sign] [in the other unit]." She observed that the women in the [other aircraft] unit appeared to have a better experience. She attributes this to the greater sense of community found in numbers.

> And there were two other-- sort of like three or four women [aircraft] pilots. And they seemed to-- I almost want to say they seemed to do better. They were a lot more positive with one another. They were all similar in age. There was a lot more-- they hung out together. They had, I could see that they had one another to vent over and discuss things more from a female perspective. I didn't have any other female interaction.

She reported that having more women and a greater sense of camaraderie would have changed her experience.

> And I think that was probably another reason why I didn't stay in that community maybe as long as I could have. I definitely think that if I had just even one or two other positive people, women, that I could relate with and communicate with, in more of a feminine style, and share those experiences with, I probably would've been a lot stronger than just being totally isolated in getting through that.

The theme of "being the only" is entwined in all the interviews. It was a sweeping commonality that impacts all the other themes. Participants described increased pressure, responsibility, and scrutiny because of their minority status. Their experiences illustrate the phenomenon of tokenism, and they detail the observed consequences of failing to follow the cultural rules. Participants also described the pervasive sense of loneliness they experienced as a female fighter pilot. They chronicle their grassroots efforts to build a supportive community within the CFPA. Despite their efforts and progress, they continue to describe instances where they sit outside the table.

Fighter Pilot Culture

Fighter pilot culture is an intricate, unique, and long-standing institution. All participants shared things they value about the culture and were hesitant to suggest a need for change. They

recognized the purpose and strengths of fighter pilot culture. They also mentioned aspects of the culture that are or were difficult to navigate, and aspects that were, perhaps, antiquated, and unnecessary. Multiple participants expressed a desire to protect the culture and their experiences in it, while also identifying challenges that are rarely discussed. Through the interview process, participants described experiencing cognitive dissonance regarding several aspects of fighter pilot culture. On one hand, the participants expressed gratitude, described an overall positive experience, identified multiple benefits, and stated that they felt their experiences mirrored that of their male colleagues. For example, Jackie stated, "As far as just overall 20-year experience being a fighter pilot? No. I think my experience matches that of my male counterparts pretty closely." On the other-hand, participants described incidents of betrayal, moral injury, and adversity. They provided numerous examples of ways their experiences differed from their male colleagues.

Beryl described this split, "I prefer to keep the Air Force fighter pilot everything… the way it is. I'm happy with it. I'm not one that wants to raise the red flag and send the whole thing up in smoke. I think there's a lot of value in what they do and who they are and that lifestyle." She also acknowledged that she believes fighter pilots could be just as good or better without certain aspects of the culture.

> I think it could be better without it. I think you can perform and be the best of the best without all that extra crap and trying to force each other to develop thick-skin. But I'm also a realist, and I see that we're not going to get there right now. And this [fighter pilot culture] has developed people who are incredibly talented and capable. It's the backbone of our incredible Air Force, so I'm not going to be the one to disparage it. I would rather keep it on its pedestal, instead of being the one who writes like the Tailhook scandal or something like that. It's like I don't want the scandal behind my name.

Jackie identified a desire to protect the culture by telling her story, which has been mostly positive. She described an interaction with her female fighter pilot friends, where they were

hesitant to suggest that those with less successful and fulfilling careers participate in the study. She stated,

> Because we did, we sat out here on the porch and drank wine last weekend and I think maybe I was texting you or something and I mentioned it to them and I told them-- I don't want to bias, whatever skew any of this, but I told them one of the names I had given you her contact info, and they're like, "Oh, no." Like, because their experiences were so different from ours. Both [friends] are very similar to me. Like, we've run across them dickheads, but we have overall had wonderful experiences.

Marina also described her desire to defend "the guys," the fighter community, and her experience, "But [a female fighter pilot friend] and I, we are like sisters, and our experience has been very similar to the point where like, we are defending the guys and the fighter community as a whole. So, we have had great experiences."

Eileen shared her somewhat lighthearted opinion of fighter pilot culture, "Overall, I think that fighter pilot culture is awesome and that anything you give to a fighter pilot, they're going to get it done. And they're going to do it well. And they're going to do it fairly quickly compared to most people." When asked if there was anything about the culture that she didn't like, she responded with a laugh, and listed one ritual that sometimes accompanies naming ceremonies, where a raw egg is consumed. She stated, "I would rather not have to eat the egg. I'm sure some people would call that hazing, but that was probably the worst thing I'd ever done in my life…. eating that egg." Amelia, one of the first female fighter pilots, who experienced disapproval, push-back, and rejection, was also hesitant to suggest too much negative. She stated, "So, I don't want to be all fighter pilot bashing, you know what I mean? There's been a lot of them that have been very, very helpful and supportive."

Jackie highlighted the humorous and fun atmosphere of the fighter pilot culture. "I loved it. It was easy for me to navigate. I enjoyed, like I said, the camaraderie. You know, I enjoyed

the culture." She listed several aspects of the culture that she misses, "It's funny and it's fun and these are work hard, play hard people. You know, and I feel like you can trust them with anything. There are a few outliers … but for the most part, just the laughs and the camaraderie and the fun, yet the reliability to go out and get the job done." Amelia also lamented about missing the people and commented that the culture was often fun. She stated, "I really do [miss the culture]. And the Squadron camaraderie. The close-knit squadron and I mean, just hanging out with those guys was fun."

Many aspects of the fighter pilot culture occur in the Squadron Heritage Room, also known as a bar, and alcohol consumption plays a prominent role in multiple traditions. Beryl had a slightly different perspective on the "fun" involved in the fighter pilot culture. She described multiple cultural aspects that did not align with her core values and how she was raised. She stated, "So a lot of-- I call it mandatory fun-- was always on a Friday night. We have to go to the bar. We have to tell stories about each other." She described her transition into the culture, "So that was kind of an interesting thing for me. Just the transitioning from-- I didn't drink at all growing up, so jump into this and now she [a female instructor] was like, 'This is good training for you because you've got to be able to keep up with the boys in every way possible." She explained further, "Literally, it's mandatory drinking. The only people that were given a pass to not drink were those that were Mormon." Bessie also described mixed feelings about certain aspects of the fighter pilot culture, and was curious about other female fighter pilots' perspectives,

> I'd be curious what other females think. I hate being in the group environment with the Squadron, Roll Calls, that kind of thing, I don't-- Friday academics, whatever it is. I don't like being in the big group because it's like this group think, group energy, macho, rise to the top. It's this weird thing that happens, and I'm like, "Do I even know these people? What's happening right now?" And I just feel like it's really aggressive, and it's weird, because on a one-on-one level, I have a great relationship with nearly everyone in the squadron. And then, somehow, we get in that room and it feels like I don't even know these people.

Despite struggling with the group dynamics, Bessie has positive things to say when asked about her overall experience, "When I go to air shows or I talk to friends of friends, and they have a daughter that wants to join the military, I have a generally very positive perspective." She also indicated room for improvement, but feels things are headed in a better direction. She stated, "When someone asks me, 'Hey, should I? Is the Air Force or is being a fighter pilot a good fit for my daughter?' I think we continue to move in a really good direction, and I've had, overall, really positive experiences.

All participants described the intricate and complex nature of fighter pilot culture in varied ways. Their responses are nuanced and can't be placed into black and white categories. The remainder of this category further describes their experiences navigating the fighter pilot culture. Decades of trailblazing efforts, experiences, and stories are summarized and categorized.

Community Differences

Multiple participants discussed the culture differences between different aircraft communities. They described some aircraft communities as being much more welcoming to women than others. Amelia described this phenomenon. She stated, "And some communities, different fighters are worse than others." She described the reason, "Because well, some of them just have reputations of being more prima donnas anyway. And it goes back to that—if your ego is too tied up in—and your masculinity is too tied up in what you do, then you're going to be threatened when a woman can do the same thing." Bessie attributed the difference in communities purely to numbers. She stated, "I just think there's been kind of like per capita [laughter] like less females [in other airframes]. I'd be interested to look. But I think the A-10

has had-- like, for how small the community is, like more females than the other squadrons have had or other fighters."

Bessie discussed the differences between the various pilot training bases, and the way they treat minorities. She stated, "Sheppard, which I think is way more-- it's where everyone's going to get a fighter. Or at least everyone goes T-38s. And so, I would say more of an aggressive type environment than what you would see at Vance or Columbus or Laughlin." She reported that a female fighter pilot friend, who is also gay, went to Sheppard, and had experiences that she feels were made worse by that environment. "So, she had some experiences there about people being-- it just kind of very traditional in their viewpoints, and having things to say about it, and her being there."   She continued and described how this friend went A-10's which is typically one of the more accepting communities for women, but that she was assigned to the Reserve Squadron, where they held more patriarchal views.

> And then, she went to the A-10 B course, which A-10 B course, I'm like, "Sweet," except for, she went to the Reserve Squadron. And those guys were on average like five to ten years older. And they just-- it was like a different crowd there, and just really rough around the edges and like-- I mean, yeah, not a good scene.

After the B-Course, she went to [base] for a year and then to Bessie's Squadron. She stated, "And then she got to the [squadron mascot] and it was a great environment-- or she went to [base] for a year. It was fine there, and then got to the [squadron mascot]."

Bessie who was initially in one fighter airframe then retrained into a new fighter airframe discussed several community differences. She stated, "I went to pilot training at Vance and then went to the [aircraft] B Course next. I was in the [aircraft] for three and a half years and now I'm in the [aircraft]. And I think that it's been really different between each of those three assignments." When asked why she feels that the [aircraft] community was more accepting and easier to navigate than the [aircraft] community, she had a theory. She reported that the

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[aircraft] mission is long-standing, important, and has a rich combat history. They are tasked to

protect friendly forces, and the community is filled with pilots brimming with real-world

experience.

> The [aircraft] has been—the missions that the [aircraft] does is the current fight if you will. The primary thing on the doc statement for the [aircraft] is CAS [close air support] and then SAR [search and rescue] is another mission-set. We had guys in our squadron say like, "No, that's a friendly position," and get medals for that kind of thing. Anyway, what I'm getting at is the [aircraft]—you go to the B Course and you're training to something, that when you're not doing a threat reaction as a Lieutenant in the B-Couse, you hear an instructor saying like, "When I was flying over Baghdad in whatever year. When I was doing this," and they have story. They have a reason why the tactics are what they are, that creates an environment that's very humbling. It's very realistic. It's very like, "We're doing the job and I'm training you, in the B Course, to be awesome because you're going to be on my wing someday when we are deployed." So, you have a community that knows you're going to go fight this fight together.

She countered her description of the [aircraft] community with a description of the [aircraft]

community. The [aircraft] is a new aircraft that has a more theoretical mission-set. There are

very few pilots with real-world combat experience in the [aircraft]. She stated,

> When I got to the [aircraft], I feel like so many times like playing pretend because the things that are on your doc statement are so—like it's the Russia fight, it's the China fight. And the thing is you don't know how that's going to go down. Intel can assess all this stuff. You can know all these things, and you can go mission plan forever for whatever you are doing. But at the end of the day, the things you have to fall back on are the shot-kill what it says, or whatever the latest weapons officer said. And it creates this environment of—everyone has their own best technique; the tactics are changing. And this is probably similar in the other—F-16, F-15 as the weapons are changing. And it's not something like, "Oh, we're going downrange and we're"—there's so many weapons they have and trained to but have never been dropped. Nobody really knows.

She described her new community as an environment where the most alpha person dominates

instead of the person with the most real-world experience. She stated, "When you are in an

environment where—almost feel like the alpha person is calling the shots, but it's not like

everyone in the squadron has these experiences to fall back on." Conversely, she describes her

old community as one driven by real-world experience, "That's some of my theory of like when

you are really fighting the fight, like you know that the person next to you is going to go out on

your wing someday. It's a more realistic thing." She indicates that the theoretical nature of the [new aircraft] community results in a weaker bond. She stated,

> It seems like just as a community, as a whole, not even against females. But the community is less tight-knit. People are more willing to throw each other under the bus, or like shit on somebody else's tactics. Like in the [old aircraft], if you shit on somebody else's tactics, they'd be like, 'Well, when I deployed in '09, like this happened. So, what about that?' And you get into a discussion of like, 'Oh, well, when I was working with these JTACs, like I say this or whatever.' And like whereas now [in the F-35], it's like who's right? And you can't share your experiences.

Overall, she described a more urgent sense of "team" and less room for discrimination in her old aircraft community, where the reality of the real-world mission is prevalent in the daily operations.

Jackie also reported that aspects of the culture depends on the community. She stated, "A-10 is good. F-15E, I don't get that dynamic with the WSO." She continued, "The WSOs seem to have a lot more issues in the Strike Eagle versus the pilots, and I don't know if that's a front-seater/back-seater issue… But they seem to complain a lot more because they are in the CFPA, and they seem to complain a lot more about gender bias and being unfairly treated versus the front-seaters…I don't understand that world. But community-dependent—it's very different.

Camaraderie and Cohesion

Group cohesion is an essential part of military culture. Camaraderie is one component of cohesion within a unit, and multiple participants described their experiences with camaraderie and group cohesion. Marina discussed how being a female fighter pilot can be lonely, even when you fit in. She stated, "As a girl, you kind of sit sometimes outside the circle. I never felt that I didn't belong, but there are always things that I wasn't going to be invited to." She identified that she sometimes has different interests or that it might be awkward to do some things outside work as the only woman in a group of men. She continued, "I don't really fit in

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100% with the wives' group. I don't really fit in 100% with all the guys. So, I'm kind of used to it, but it's, it's lonely." She indicates that it's a frequently discussed topic amongst her female fighter pilot support group, "The isolation always comes up – of just being either one or very few females together." She also reported that her loneliness increased as she moved up the ladder. Currently, she is in a leadership position, which adds another barrier and further limits the number of other women she can reach out and connect with.

Marina tried to describe the difference in friendships for men and women fighter pilots. She states that she trusts her female fighter pilot friends more than her male fighter pilot friends. She continues, "I mean, there are a handful of guys that I would trust the same way, but it's still just different. Like, I can't go on a trip with a bunch of guys that I work with. Even though I'm good friends with them, it's still weird." She does not attribute this dynamic to a lack of acceptance. She stated, "I literally feel like a lot of them are like brothers to me. They feel like family. They do not exclude me."

Eileen pointed out the positive, negative, and the exhausting aspects of the camaraderie she experienced. When asked what she liked about being a fighter pilot, she stated,

> The camaraderie. [sigh] I do. It's funny though because I get tired of it at the same time [laughter]. Like when you're in a small [base]-- so we were in Misawa, and it's-- I think my husband actually got more tired of it than I did. Ummm, when we were in Misawa, you'd go to the grocery store and when you want your own privacy, you'd see like eight people throughout the store and in the checkout line. So, you know, when I'm buying my tampons, [laughter] then people, that you know, "I'm like, oh hey! Here I am buying my tampons, cool, now you know I am on my period!"

Despite sometimes feeling overwhelmed, she reported, "I liked, I liked the Roll Calls, I liked the camaraderie. I like that we all try to make each other better, like in a debrief." Jackie also listed camaraderie as one of the most enjoyable aspects of her career. She believes this to be a shared experience among fighter pilots, "The people and the camaraderie, and I don't think you ever meet a fighter pilot who leaves and says, "Oh, yeah. I didn't, I didn't like that. I didn't like the

people." She continued and described the connection she feels to her fellow fighter pilots,

> The camaraderie, the camaraderie was really the number one and it was a unique group of people, executing a great mission. And we were really, really close. And that's what I really loved about it. You know, I truly feel like 20 years and 99% of the people that I flew with and had in my squadron, if I saw him on the street, we would, you know, hit it off just like it was two days ago, and click again, just where we were. And that was the number one experience about it. It was the people and being around them and the fun times that we had and the—the, might sound cliche, but the-- how you execute as a team, you know, the four-ship or the two-ship that you go out with. It just -- It's a, it's a bond that is-- it's hard to describe, but it's an important bond, and that's what made it special.

Multiple participants mentioned the CFPA (Chick Fighter Pilot Association), which is a group founded by several female fighter pilots with the intention of building connection, community, and camaraderie among female fighter pilots. Amelia described the purpose of the group, "And I just think that's the greatest thing ever. So, they started that whole—let's have a network to support each other. Let's have somewhere you can turn to with stories and requests and things. I love hanging out with those women." She described the importance of community when the numbers are so small and the members are spread out all over the world, "We're just different, I think, women that are fighter pilots. We're just different. We have a different perspective on things. It's just very different. So, to be able to hang out with them, I just feel super comfortable." She detailed how they continue to connect, even in retirement, "We're having a reunion at the end of February. We're going to go to Vegas and hang out. And it's one of my most favorite things to do because you're just so comfortable with these people. More so than with other women, more so than with other men fighter pilots, it's just—it's hard to explain…. You know, there's only so many people you can talk to about some of the things that you've been through."

Hypermasculinity

The career of being a fighter pilot is traditionally, a masculine profession. Multiple

participants described, in many ways, how more feminine personality characteristics are viewed

negatively, and masculine personality characteristics are viewed more positively. Bessie

described her feeling that anything "female" is viewed as a threat. She identified that the older

generation of fighter pilots grasped on to the masculine nature of being a fighter pilot, **"**I think

it's almost a hit to their credibility that a female could do the same thing that they're doing."

Amelia supported this view and stated, **"**The biggest fear, I think, it's for some, not all fighter

pilots, the ones whose egos are really wrapped up in it, is it somehow diminishes what they

accomplish if a woman can do it as well." She continued and used a Top Gun movie reference

to illustrate her observations,

> So, if you're the Maverick of fighter pilots, right? If you think you're the best thing since sliced bread, because you're a fighter pilot and then a woman comes along and is as good as you, if not sometimes better, then that's harder for them to handle than when it's another guy. If your ego is too tied up in-- and your masculinity is too tied up in what you do, then you're going to be threatened when a woman can do the same thing.

She described an incident that occurred on TDY. "I was really new to Spangdahlem… it was an

air-to-air deployment, and we were flying against the Eagle Squadron from our base and we

were using these ACMI (Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation) pods so the combat

controllers were… so they can practice basically doing their controlling while we're practicing

our fighting." She stated, "The F-15 Squadron was very concerned about any of them getting

shot by a girl." She continued,

> I went through a couple days, no shots, not even opportunities. Then my weapons officer was like, all right, this is what we're going to do. And he's trying to find ways to get me shots because I spent a whole week of air-to-air training against the Eagles and never got a shot the whole time and it wasn't until later when—I became friends with those guys in that Squadron. So, then we're at Operation Northern Watch and we're hanging out and they told me the story and I'm like, you guys are a bunch of [laughter]. I'm like, thanks for the good training. But they refused. There was no way. They would rather run away than get shot down by a girl.

Bessie described the correlation between aggression and masculinity. She described that

the levels of aggressive and masculine environments vary by pilot training base. She attributed some of this variation to the number of fighter pilot vs. other pilot trainees at each base. "Sheppard, which I think is way more-- it's where everyone's going to get a fighter. Or at least everyone goes T-38. And so, I would say more of an aggressive type environment than what you would see at Vance or Columbus or Laughlin."

Sexism

The theme of sexism is further moderated by: Critical Mass and Diversity, Systemic Sexism, and Ambivalent Sexism.

Critical Mass, Diversity, and the Power of the Majority

Diversity plays an important role in reaching critical mass and changing the culture of a system. The Air Force initiated multiple programs and recruiting techniques to increase diversity among its ranks. Despite these efforts, there are still very few female fighter pilots. Bessie discussed how she thinks younger military members view women, "As you move down the ranks to people that are more my age; I'm a mid-level Captain, I think that a lot of people that I'm working with on a day-to-day basis are really empowering and want females there. They value diversity." She counters that with how she sees the older generations of military members, "Sometimes, as you get into higher-ranking people, they have more biases. They're a little bit more traditional in what they think traditional roles are." Amelia agrees and points out that, despite seeing some change, there are still barriers for female pilots in both the military and civilian sectors, "There is still, even in the civilian side, there's some—I'll call them good ol' boys for the lack of a better term, who think that women shouldn't be doing that [flying]. I think 5% of the commercial pilots in America are women."

Despite women being allowed to fly in combat for 27 years, Bessie reported feeling that there are still a small number of male pilots that don't think it should be allowed. She states, "you can count them on one hand. The number of people that I've truly felt-- think that I shouldn't be in the room." Most current fighter pilots have never known the days when women were not allowed in combat. She states, "So, it's just weird to me, we've gotten this far, and we still have people with certain biases." Jackie discussed an incident where one of her friends expressed his disapproval of women in the fighter community. She stated, "We're at the Squadron bar and drinking and he's like, '[Call sign], I don't think that you should be here. I don't think women should be in fighters.'" Amelia, who retired from the military 13 years ago after a 20-year career, discussed her experience with diversity, "It's a different world now than it was then." She used two female fighter pilot friends as examples, "One is an Ops Group Commander. And the other is the – she might be the Vice Wing Commander now. We are still a huge minority. But it's baby steps and it's not quite the anomaly that it was when I first started."

Amelia offers another idea as to why, in some respects, women fighter pilots are more accepted than they once were. She stated, "I think one of the reasons women fighter pilots are more accepted and respected now is because of the people who support them." She continues and offers three examples of individuals, who have greater power due to their rank, gender, or instructor status, and how they can change the trajectory for women, "The General Officer whose daughter wants to be a fighter pilot. Or the husband who's a fighter pilot who's married to a fighter pilot." She elaborates by discussing the impact of actual interactions versus unsubstantiated biases. "Or the people that---I taught probably 80 different [airframe] students when I was at [base] for three years. Every single one of those people respects me and when

they go out in the combat Air Force; they will say good things about me, not bad things." She

stated, "It's a slow-moving iceberg." Rather than attributing the movement she has seen to

women; she attributes it to the men; who have gender privilege. "It's moving and it's moving

because of the guys, not because of the women. Because of the guys who have interacted with

us who appreciate what we bring to the Squadron, who go out and help defend us when

needed." Ultimately, she is stating that women are unable to earn a greater sense of belonging

and equal opportunity simply by performing their job well. Instead, much of the change in the

arena of female fighter pilots is, instead, the result of support from men in a position of power.

Systemic Sexism

The theme of sexism was further moderated by the theme of systemic sexism. Systemic

sexism consists of patterns in social groups that evolved over decades and centuries. Systemic

sexism has nothing to do with the values we individually choose and consciously live by.

Rather, systemic sexism is a problem of cultural norms and rules supporting 'baked in' power

structures.

Despite becoming a fully qualified and successful fighter pilot, Amelia continued to

experience the dynamics of a slowly changing culture. She stated, '…We [the female fighter

pilots] had a joke about—we used to joke around when you show up to a new squadron, they'd

always ask you, "Oh, are you the new flight surgeon?" Because they still couldn't quite grasp

the woman fighter pilot thing." She relayed another story, that happened later in her career,

where a young student pilot questioned her role as an instructor in the Squadron despite being

dressed in her flight suit with her instructor patches.

> I'm at the O Club (Officers' Club) Bar on a Friday night and this punk Lieutenant-- we call them
> all punks, it's not like that was his attitude-- but with a name tag that still says FNG, which means
> he hasn't been named yet because that's for the F'ing New Guy, right? Comes up to me, and I'm a

> Major and he's a Lieutenant, and he just comes up to me and he goes, "So what do you do in the [squadron]" I'm like, what do you mean? He goes, "Well, you're wearing all those [squadron] patches. What do you do in the [squadron]?" I looked at him and I go, "I'm an instructor. What do you think I do?" He's like, "No, really." I just looked at him. I'm like, "Dude. You see those two guys over there?" There were two guys I knew from his Squadron. I said, "Go talk to them. Tell them [name] sent you-- that's my call sign-- and go ask them what I do. And after you're done with that, you can bring me a beer." And sure enough, he walked over there and then he's like-- goes to the bar, he comes back with a beer, holding his head real low. "I'm sorry, Ma'am. I didn't mean to"-- I'm like, all right.

The culture of the Air Force and the fighter community has changed, but there are still barriers that are being broken, 27 years after women first broke the glass ceiling. The United States Air Force Fighter Weapons School produces doctorate-level tactical experts and leaders for the joint force. It is a rigorous six-month course that graduates an elite group of people that can be identified by the Weapons School patch they wear on their flight suits. Amelia relayed a story of meeting a Weapons School instructor at the Nellis Air Force Base Officer Club early in her career.

> So, we were at Red Flag and my first assignment at [base] and a friend of mine-- we're at the O Club. A friend of mine wants to introduce me to a friend of his who's a Weapons School instructor in the F-16. So, I go over and I-- he says "Hey, this is [name]. [Name], this is so-and-so." I put my hand out and the guy looks at me, looks at my hand, and turns around and walks away.

She stated, "We just now had-- couple years ago, so 20 years after I started-- 25 years, almost, after I started, we had the first woman graduate from F-16 Weapons School. She also indicated that she does not believe female fighter pilots will ever be completely accepted. She relayed a conversation between herself and a friend that demonstrates how slowly the culture is changing, "I have a neighbor who's a friend of mine and —he's like, Amelia, I always thought you were a good fighter pilot but you know, I really don't think you should be in combat. I'm just a Southern boy. I don't think you should do that." She compares this thought process to racism, "I mean, sometimes they're just going to—that's not going to happen. It's like trying to get a

white supremacist to go to an NAACP meeting. You know? Sometimes, it's just not going to happen."

Institutional betrayal.   One aspect of systemic sexism is institutional betrayal. The term institutional betrayal refers to wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution. Institutional betrayal can be both pragmatic (compromised safety, negative career impacts, inadequate training, sexual assault) and psychological (gaslighting, guilt, stress, ostracism). The military is a long-standing institution based heavily in history and tradition. Sometimes the rich history and tradition that, on one hand, creates a strong and unified culture can also breed or maintain systems, practices, and ways of being that are detrimental to minority populations; resulting in institutional betrayal.

One psychological form of institutional betrayal is gaslighting and occurs when the institution fails to create a more welcoming, safe, or fair environment. Instead of changing the system, they place the burden of change on the individual, and if that individual doesn't mold to the environment, they become the problem. Beryl described how the concept of thick-skin provided fodder for institutional gaslighting, "They were just putting me down. Mainly the instructors, but I think other-- it was, 'You wouldn't be here' or 'You're just trying to prove yourself or prove something to the world. You wouldn't be here if you weren't a woman. That's the only reason you are here, but hey, we're just trying to get you to develop thick-skin.' She stated that it was used frequently when someone spoke up or didn't comply with the status-quo. Instead of acknowledging a potential flaw in the behavior or the system, they flipped it around to make the individual feel as if there was something wrong with them as an individual. She stated, "that's just what we do as fighter pilots, and if you don't like it, grow thicker-skin, sort of deal." Institutional betrayal consists of exploitive or unfair workplace practices that cause harm to an

individual who trusts that institution. Institutions, such as the military, have the potential to either worsen outcomes or become sources of justice, support, and healing.

The history of female fighter pilots is steeped in institutional betrayal. Until the combat exclusion law was lifted in 1993, women, regardless of their performance in pilot training, were banned from flying fighters. Military student pilots are dependent on the institution to establish and follow an egalitarian grading and assignment system. They trust the system to reward their performance in pilot training fairly and objectively. One participant was a member of the initial cohort of female fighter pilots. She finished at the top of her pilot training class the year prior to the ban being lifted but was not allowed to select a fighter aircraft due to her gender. She recounts how she was assigned her first airframe.

> I joked with my wing commander about it. It actually said on there, because they taped all these calls. That's how they went back and figured it out, I think, but-- --it actually said, 'Oh, so Amelia, what would you like?' I'm like, that F-16 to-be-determined looks pretty good. And he just looks at me and says, 'Okay, but what would you really like?' I'm like, okay I'll take that [aircraft; base]. You know, and that's how it worked.

About a year after she was assigned her first non-fighter aircraft despite finishing at the top of her class, she was contacted and given the opportunity to fly the fighter that she wanted to fly. She stated,

> My husband and I, we'd gone to Hawaii on vacation. We just got back. And there were four messages on our answering machine, and I listened to the first one, it was boss going, "Hey, call me when you get in." And I'm thinking to myself, well I don't have to go to work til tomorrow, so maybe I won't call you right away. And then, all four of them were from him. "Hey, you really need to call me." Basically. So, I called him, and he gave me this phone number to call the Pentagon and I was talking to the Colonel who worked for General [name], who was the chief of personnel. And he said, "Hey we're not-- nothing's official yet, but do you think you might want to go fly that [fighter aircraft] you could have had in pilot training?" I'm like, yes. Are you kidding me? Yes. He's like, "All right, well, nothing official yet. Don't go tell anybody about this but come to the Pentagon in the morning for a meeting with General [name]." So, I showed up to the meeting and it was me, [Name], and [Name]. And General [name] told us about the combat exclusion being lifted.

She described the ensuing events as a "whirlwind" and recounted the media attention she

experienced. She stated, "And then it was just kind of like a whirlwind. Had some public affairs

training and we went into the press conference with General McPeak and then we had like

media-- I was on the [popular national television show] the next day." She continued and

described her experience after the announcement was made.

> I got asked, I don't know how many times, in how many different ways, "How do you expect to be
> treated by your fellow fighter pilots?" Well, and my answer was kind of, well, it's the military so I
> expect them to follow what their leaders tell them to do and it's a performance-based industry and
> hopefully if they figure out I can fly an airplane it's all going to be okay. And I don't know if I truly
> believed that, but I also didn't want to go out there and say, "Oh I think it's going to suck."

The theme of institutionalized betrayal was further influenced by the smaller themes of

military sexual trauma, workplace environment, anthropometric specifications, flight

equipment, uniform differences, pregnancy/maternity limitations, Guard and Reserve hiring,

Roll Calls and naming ceremonies, sexual orientation, language and humor, and leadership.

Military Sexual Trauma. The prevalence of military sexual trauma (MST) and an

institution's response indicates the type of culture an organization has created. The impacts of

sexual assault on the individual depend greatly on the institution's response to the report.

Institutional betrayal exacerbates the pragmatic and psychological impacts of the assault.

Historically, the military has struggled to create a culture where sexual assault is condemned

and handled appropriately. The military response to sexual assault has evolved in an effort to

respond in a more educated and supportive manner. The results are mixed, and military sexual

assault remains a major challenge for the Department of Defense.

One participant stated that she was the victim of a sexual assault while in a formal training.

She was assaulted by an instructor while on a cross-country flight, and instead of being

supported, she was gaslit and accused of having an "unprofessional relationship" with an

instructor. This is a quintessential example of institutional betrayal. The trust she had in the

institution, the student-instructor relationship, and her fellow military members was broken

when she was assaulted, and the institution failed to protect her and respond justly. She stated,

> Well, there was one of the instructors. We were on cross-country and we were all out drinking, having a good time, and we all went back to my room because I had my own room because other people's roommates were sleeping. So, there was a group of five or six of us still, and then it got to the point where like there was flirting, and I get that, and I was just recently married at this point. Then the rest of my student classmates left, and then I asked the instructor to leave, and then he said, "No." And, at first, and so-- But it wasn't like, thankfully it wasn't really bad. It could have been a lot worse. Ummm, but yeah.

She reported the assault, and despite the instructor having a history of formal reprimands and a

reputation as a "dirtbag" among leadership, he received little consequence for his actions. She

stated, "And, honestly that instructor was a dirtbag anyway. Later, her eventually showed just

how much of a dirtbag he was to people in general." She described another incident where he

required disciplinary action, "Yeah, that was him. So, his really great decision making, you

know, kind of ended up highlighting itself eventually anyways. So. Whatever." She reported

the incident, "I did go to the Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC) and it was fairly late

in the program, luckily, I guess. You know, so, I think that that helped." She described a

meeting she had with her leadership after the assault was reported. Instead of prosecuting the

perpetrator, they turned the incident around on her. This is referred to in the literature as

institutional gaslighting. Institutional gaslighting is when a group of respected people within an

institution are posed as investigators on a victim's behalf, but in actuality, act to belittle or deny

the reality of the harm committed to protect the institution's reputation. Instead of prosecuting

the perpetrator, leadership used classic gaslighting technique of "flipping" the responsibility

onto the survivor. They accomplished this by labeling the incident an "unprofessional

relationship" and making the survivor feel like she was wrong when, it was a sexual assault.

This allows the institution to deny culpability and preserve their reputation. The participant described the situation,

> I brought one of the victim advocates with me to a meeting where they were trying to get me in trouble for an unprofessional relationship, at first, when they found out about the situation. So, yeah. That was not part of the plan.

She reported feeling that she was not given the Distinguished Graduate (DG) award despite being number one in her class, because she reported the assault. Distinguished Graduate is the award given to the student finishing in the top one or two positions in a pilot training class. Academic and flying performance is the most heavily weighted criteria, but there is some subjective discretion given to the flight commander who also considers leadership skills, teamwork, and character. She stated, "I have a feeling that was probably why, but they ultimately decided to not make me DG because they thought I was not a good example or whatever. I don't know." Years later, she became an instructor pilot at a training base, where she had access to the official gradebook software system used when she was a student. Just as she suspected, she was ranked number one in her class based on academic and flying performance. She indicated the student who received DG was also a good student, but she acknowledged that she had no history of behavioral issues that would explain why she wasn't given the award as the top performer in her class.

> So, I mean the other guy [who received DG] was a great pilot too, and he did really well throughout the course too, so it's not like—I don't know. I never had any issues with authority or whatever. I can't remember, but I was just kind of like, "Huh. That's interesting."

Marina, on the other hand, did not experience a sexual assault personally. Yet, she's considered the possibility and had a well-rehearsed response to an attempted sexual assault.

> I've always joked like, umm like, I dare, I dare one of the guys that I work with to try something inappropriate with me. "I dare you to because I would love to cut off their member." Like that would be-- "I wouldn't think twice. I would love to punch you in the nose and break it and watch it bleed. So go ahead, try something." So I've never had a problem-- I have never had a problem.

Her statement depicts the reality of Military Sexual Trauma. The clout of being an Officer and a fighter pilot isn't enough of a protective factor, and awareness of the risk of being sexually assaulted is prevalent enough that Marina had rehearsed her reaction to an imagined assault.

Workplace Environment. Like many organizations and groups, the Air Force environment has made efforts to reduce sexism and harassment in the workplace. Unfortunately, the Department of Defense did not change the derogatory environment prior to the combat ban being lifted. Instead, they waited until the ban was lifted and the first cohorts of female fighter pilots were at their initial assignments before implementing any change to the workplace environment, placing female pilots in a difficult situation where they were personally blamed for the changes. The first female fighter pilots were in the minority and facing an uphill battle. They depended on and trusted the institution to do their part and provide them with an inclusive environment, but instead, were placed in an impossible situation. They describe doing their best to navigate the fine line between trying to gain acceptance in the fighter pilot community without condoning sexist, derogatory, and unfair practices. Multiple participants discussed the intricacies involved in changing a culture, and they described how challenging it was to know how to *be* in the environment.

Beryl shared how she saw the overall Air Force environment change during her career. She stated, "There ended up being somewhat of an Air Force-wide scandal, if you will? And so, then the Department of Defense came in and started saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, we need to remove all the pornography, nothing derogatory towards women." Amelia described a similar experience, "I put up with all the stuff. Like when I first got there, the squadron bar had pictures of topless women in it. This is the '90s in the military." Then she discussed her planned rebuttal, "And I just—I didn't care. My plan was when I got to be mission ready, I was going to

put my own picture in the squadron bar. That was my plan. I was like, all right, cool. But before I could do that, some General came to visit and made them take them all down." The General's efforts ostracized Amelia, and she scrambled to salvage her relationship with the male pilots by explaining that she was not responsible for the change. "They still had them in all the other squadrons on base, but not in mine, so. You know, those kind of things where people think they are doing you some kind of favor. They don't really help you. Then everybody thought it was my fault." She continued and described her reaction and efforts to make it known that the change was not her doing,

> I went in and talked to the squadron commander because this General had come, and he'd flown with me, and we obviously had some kind of conversation. And then, the next day, all the pictures were down in the squadron bar. And I'm like, oh crap. So, I went and talked to my squadron commander. I go, Sir, I didn't say a thing about that. He goes, "I didn't think you did." I said, "Okay, well, could you kind of let the other people know I didn't say anything about it? Because this is not going to look good for me." So, they kind of realized it was a change. It was changed because I was there, but it wasn't a change that I had asked for. And that helped a little bit.

Beryl told of an incident that happened while she was in pilot training. Her class was tasked with organizing a party, and they decided that they would cut out pornographic photos and hide them around the venue to make it more exciting. Again, she was placed in a no-win situation where she could either alienate herself from her class or compromise her personal values to fit-in with her classmates. She stated, "We spent a whole evening, on a Friday night, cutting out pornography so that they could hide it everywhere." She did not want to participate, but stated, "I mean it was, that's just what we do as fighter pilots, and if you don't like it, grow thicker skin, sort of deal." This is one aspect of the military fighter pilot culture that repeatedly left Beryl feeling like she couldn't be herself and also fit-in with her colleagues and produce the necessary cohesion and support for the work.

Bessie, the youngest participant described how the military institution is changing and making a larger effort to create an inclusive and diverse environment. She stated, "I felt like in UPT I had a ton of SAPR (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response) training and EO (Equal Opportunity) and all this stuff. And I don't know if maybe it was different or if times are changing. Even outside of the military, gender roles are very much not as strict as they were 10 years ago or 20 years ago."

Anthropometric specifications. Another manifestation of institutional betrayal is the physical size requirements for pilots. The Air Force currently has a height requirement of 5'4" for ejection seat aircraft. The average height of women in the United States in 5'4" while the average height of men in the United States in 5'9". These body-size limitations currently exclude all but nine percent of the female military population from piloting fighter airframes. The vast majority of the Air Force's aircraft and aircrew equipment was designed to meet the anthropometric specifications of a male pilot in 1967. Due to this physical barrier, more women than men are automatically disqualified from competing for a fighter pilot position. Two of the six participants, Eileen and Jackie, were affected by this regulation. Eileen stated, "I had to get a waiver for both height and sight." She elaborated more on her experience,

> I'm just shy of 5'4". I mean, like half an inch. I literally went on a short bus tour [laughter]. Like, we were in a short bus. It was hilarious. My senior year we went-- I think it was to Vance is where we went and we sat in airplanes and then we drove to Altus, sat in all these airplanes. We did functional checks to see if we could reach switches. And I remember getting into the T-38. They had us lock the harness, hold the brakes, put it in afterburner, and key the mic. And I was like, "We don't need to ever do that. [laughter]." Thank God we never do anything like that. But I, anyway, they were trying to simulate I think being under Gs or holding the brakes on take-off. I'm not sure what they were trying to simulate, but I was the only one I think out of the whole bus that actually got approved for T-38s.

Jackie, a small-framed person, elaborated on her overall experiences with height, gear, and equipment.

> I'm small. I'm 5'4". Anywhere between 110 and 120, depends on the day. And so, things didn't fit. They weren't made for smaller statured—you know, it's one-size-fits-none-type thing. It started in IFF when I went to fly T38's and I had to carry an extra seat cushion with me or a weight balance. I couldn't see through the Piper. And so, I don't know how safe that was, looking back, but thankfully, I never ejected.

There was an assumption by the participants who graduated from the Academy after the combat ban was lifted that they would be afforded the same opportunity to earn a fighter pilot position as the male cadets. Due to institutional barriers, this was not an accurate assumption. The percent of female cadets that were even eligible to compete for a pilot slot was already severely reduced.

Flight equipment. Female specific flight equipment did not exist for the early cohorts of female fighter pilots. This equipment deficit existed for years after women were integrated into the fighter pilot community. Equipment and uniform limitations become a detriment to performance and thus a safety consideration when they do not fit adequately or when it doesn't perform as needed. Being a fighter pilot is amongst one of the most challenging and physically demanding careers, and adequate equipment is a requirement. All participants discussed their struggles with ill-fitting uniforms and equipment or the lack of female-specific items. Eileen discussed how difficult it was to find equipment that fit, then her constant frustration when her specific items were given out to others or lost.

> Yeah, eventually, it was just me and [Call Sign] in the 13th. And they stole my vest all the time. You know how people were complaining about magically disappearing gear…I don't know if you saw that. Mine would disappear all of the time. My harness would too…I was like, "Where did it go?" They were like, "I don't know." Well, just so you know if you gave it out to somebody it's got a gaping hole in the crotch" and they kind of looked at me, "Well, it's not on me. It's on you. You took it then you gave it to somebody. Like, can I have another one because I'm going to go ahead and cut a hole in it?" Because-- part of me is like, "I don't care."

Jackie discussed similar experiences with her gear being loaned to others or disappearing altogether. She attributes this to the fact that there were only two sets of size small gear that would fit a small female body frame on the entire base.

> And then, in the [airframe], the harness-- they had maybe two small harnesses and so any time they got an 18-year-old A1C female, she got to use my harness for an incentive ride. So, my gear was always being loaned out because there were only two of them on base.

Bessie felt that reactions to inadequate and unsafe equipment evolved with the different generations of female fighter pilots. She observed that as time went on, women felt more comfortable advocating for adequate gear and equipment, whereas the early generations made-due with what was available.

> Because people that are older-- and we saw this recently with uniform wear, the female flight suit, and stuff. It's a big focus right now, right, of making sure females have the right gear and all this stuff and making sure it fits, and they're ready for combat, and all this stuff. So what's interesting, when I've been attending some of these TDYs to talk about this stuff, is that people that are at the, almost, 20-year-point, they are very much like, "When we first started, we were just trying to get by. We didn't want to create a ripple. We were like, "Sure the gear fits. It's good enough. I'll manage," all this stuff.

Marina, who has 22 years in the military, aligns with Bessie's view:

> You do what you got to-- You just figure it out. Back then, they only had the ones [urinary devices] that the guys used, so you just kind of worked through things. And my family is a camping and hunting kind of family, and so I knew they had devices because I had seen them when we went places without water. So, we just kind of worked with that… We just put up with it. It was kind of the only option we had, so.

Bessie continued and described how the younger generation addresses the situation differently and are more inclined to speak-up about inequity.

> And now, the younger generation, I think, feels like, "Females have been doing this for how many years? And this is still the best urinary device we have? This is the best? How come it takes seven months to get a flight suit? How is this the way it is?" And people feel more empowered, I think.

Despite feeling more empowered to advocate for herself than previous generations, she describes her own experience with outdated and ineffective gear on deployment.

> My squadron, before deployment, issued me a six-plus-year-old product when the AMXD max had been out for six years. And so, we go downrange with this and it gets a-- so the reason I was emailing [another female pilot] about peeing in the jet and all these other people. When they're like, "You have old gear. You need to get new gear." And so, things were going bad.

She described using "tactical dehydration" as a technique to manage her need to urinate in the jet due to the non-existence of a urinary device for women. Tactical dehydration is when an aircrew member intentionally dehydrates themselves before a flight to avoid the need to urinate. This was a commonly used tactic among female fighter pilots despite the known safety and health consequences.

> [Call Sign] and I both got sick from dehydrating. And anyway, I ended up going up to our DO and I'm telling him this stuff. He's like Bessie, and he's a really nice guy. He's like, "Why didn't you just tell me when you got this gear that it wasn't the right thing?" And I was like, "I have never been issued a piece of equipment from AFE and thought to myself, 'Hmm, this gear sucks. I wonder if they issued me the newest gear?" That's their job.

Jackie describes also using dehydration as a technique. She stated that this technique no-longer worked after she had children.

> And then the poopie suit, like I said, the seals were made for men, so there was a gap in the seal. Piddle-pack; didn't even attempt. I tried Depends. I just never peed in the jet until post-childbirth. Because I just couldn't figure it out. I tried lots of times, but I just couldn't with the equipment that they had, I couldn't do that. But they did come up with another device. While I was on my three-year staff tour, when I went to [base], they had the AMXD device and so battery operated. So, at my 15 or 16-year career-point, I finally, was able to pee in the airplane. Which it's astonishing it's taken so long.

Marina recounted her experience, which was more positive than others' experiences.

> They did the best they could to alter things, and sometimes, I think they might have even girded the edges of the regs to make things a little bit-- I know it's more of an issue now. They want to get things made for girls, but everywhere I've been, people have been pretty helpful at making the situation as comfortable as possible and then once we figured it out, nobody touched my gear. Like, they just, they let me just keep my stuff the way it was.

She reasoned that her more positive experience may have been assisted by her muscular build as opposed to an improvement in the systemic sexism present in the culture.

> I would not say I'm bigger, but I am a pretty muscular person, so all the women's stuff that everybody likes, they don't fit me. It doesn't fit me in the shoulders. So, I actually prefer the men's gear because it fits me better.

Due to the lack of female-specific gear, Marina admitted to making gear modifications despite not being "safe for flight." She stated, "Life support would say, 'That's not approved for fly. You can't do that. It's not safe. Basically, we would give 'em the middle finger, and we would do it anyway.'"

Overall, the lack of female specific equipment equates to a pragmatic form of institutional betrayal. Female fighter pilots formed a back-channel line of communication to share creative and undocumented techniques for urinating in the jet. For decades, they altered their gear and engaged in unsafe practices to accomplish the mission. Many of these practices were not approved for flight, increased the likelihood of a mishap, and posed additional risk had the participants ejected.

Heterosexism. Institutional betrayal occurs anytime an institution fails to protect a member of the institution. Bessie relayed a story of a friend who is gay, and consequently, was discharged, "She went to the Academy. She had a wife, and so she was gay at the Academy before Don't Ask Don't Tell. She immediately got kicked out for it." Bessie described how her friend reentered the military as a fighter pilot, but that her response to sexism was shaped by that early experience, "So, she's always been very hiding, and not wanting to confront people that say things about her because of that." In this case, the institution betrayed a member who trusted the institution to treat her fairly and judge only her job performance.

Guard and Reserve Hiring. One common way of establishing room for both work and parenting roles for many female fighter pilots is to transition to either the National Guard or the Air Force Reserves before they start having children. In many ways, these institutions offer

more flexibility and options for integrating family and career. Despite getting rave reviews for their flexibility from several participants, their hiring procedures are minimally regulated and leave room for subjectivity and bias. The active duty Air Force employs a transparent and objective application process based on test scores and documented performance. Conversely, each Guard and Reserve unit creates their own application, interview, and selection process. Each unit has the freedom to determine the criteria they value and how applicants are ranked.

Marina, who was hired and has acted as a hiring official in the Reserves described the process as "a fight club." She stated, "We do the interview boards with a small group of leadership, and then we kind of—we call it a fight club. We have a fight club meeting behind closed doors and we let everything air, the good, the bad, and the ugly, and then at the end, if you have no opinion, it's fine, but if you have a hard no, I don't want to work with you for 10 years. We don't hire them." She continued, "It's usually people that we know so we already know that they're going to fit into the unit, and if one person in the unit is a hard no, for any reason – whatever reason it is, you don't hire that person." A pilot's ability to get hired at a Guard or Reserve unit largely depends on their social contacts at the unit and the interview board members' personal opinions of the applicants. Applicant likeability, a subjective and inherently biased criterion, plays a large part in the selection process. Eileen described how she and her husband were hired at their current unit largely due to a personal contact, who was also in a dual-mil partnership. "Well, it [being dual-mil] didn't affect it here because [Call Sign] and [Call Sign] were here, and so they know the couple act, they're supportive of it and then there's another couple. She's not a pilot but she's a TR and he's an AGR." She also described how other units were not as accepting of hiring couples or female fighter pilots.

> Whereas the other, one of the other units we interviewed at, pretty much said they wouldn't hire a couple and more and more I-- as my husband's met some of them – went through [airline] training with one of them - I'm hearing that they wouldn't have hired a girl. So, I don't know if that's entirely true. Ummm, my friend, [Call Sign], actually before she was a [prestigious demonstration team] she was there as an active detachment. And they were acting kind of wary [of her]. And I don't know, I think her presence changed that, hopefully. Because that was the first-- they'd never had a girl in the unit, ever. And it was always boys, but they knew it was temporary, I think.

Marina elaborated on the hiring process. She stated, "Yeah. Well, we don't really-- I mean, we don't have any ratios we follow. We just are looking for qualified people and we try to include our, we try to include younger people in the interview process, because I'm going to leave in a year, and you're the one that's going to have to work with them for the next 10." Another difference between the Active Duty and the Guard and Reserves is the age demographic. Most active duty personnel retire after 20 years. In the National Guard and the Reserves, retirement traditionally, can't be collected until age 60. Completing 30 years in the Guard and Reserves is not unusual; making it an older demographic. With age comes priceless experience, but change can also be slower. Bessie relayed the experience of a friend and how the older demographic impacted her experience,

> And then, she went to the A-10B course, which A-10B course, I'm like, "Sweet," except for, she went to the Reserve Squadron. And those guys were on average like five to ten years older. And they just-- it was like a different crowd there, and just really rough around the edges and like-- I mean, yeah, not a good scene.

Pilot applicants trust the institution to employ fair hiring practices. They trust that their performance; not their gender, sexual orientation, race, familial status, or general likability will dictate whether they are hired.

Roll Calls and Naming Ceremonies. Tradition and ceremony are highly valued in the fighter pilot community. The participants discussed how aspects of the military fighter pilot traditions and ceremonies are positive and, how they can also be harmful and contribute to sexism in the form of institutional betrayal. One of the traditions in fighter squadrons is "Roll

Call." Roll Call is an activity where the pilots in the squadron get together to chide each other,

process recent flying events, and build camaraderie. There are superstitious rules referred to as

the Rules of Engagement: Roll Calls are typically held in the Squadron bar on Fridays after

work, and alcohol consumption plays a primary role in the activities. The intent behind Roll

Call is to build the team by providing a fun and light-hearted way to air grievances, but some

versions of the event end up encouraging sexism and alienating minority groups within the

squadron. Bessie described Roll Call like this, "The squadron is getting together and airing out

their grievances against each other. And everyone is drinking, and it gets more rowdy than your

average day in the squadron." She outlined a positive Roll Call experience she experienced at

one of her squadrons.

> Our Roll Calls have been-- they're built around like airing out grievances and giving each other a
> hard time and whatnot. Like, all of it was tactical. Everything was like, "You didn't drop on your
> target," or, "You--" whatever buffoonery like flying-wise, or tactics, or I don't know-- "You left
> your gear somewhere," or whatever it was. It was based on your actions and not like, "You're a
> girl. Isn't that so funny [laughter]?" And so, I had a great experience there [at that Squadron].

She described how that Squadron created rules of engagement that resulted in a positive Roll

Call experience that was still fun.

> The new Mayor - so the guy that runs Roll Call - said, "Hey, we're going to ensafe this policy."
> And it makes everyone laugh when you say it. But we would actually enforce it. And it was called
> RORG. And it stood for Race, Origin, Religion, and Gender. Like, at the beginning of Roll Call,
> they'd be yelling the rules of engagement. And it's like, "Everybody knows about RORG." They
> would flash a slide. It was like, "No degrading comments about race, origin, religion, gender." And
> they're like, "And if you do, there will be this sound." And so they had this, like, big siren for the
> [laughter]-- for like I guess police vehicles or whatever. And they start like wailing on the siren
> [laughter]. It gets way louder even once you've stopped doing that. It takes a few seconds for this
> thing to wind down. And that was like the RORG sound. It empowered everyone in the squadron.
> If someone said something during the Roll Call, that they were like, "That's a degrading comment
> about like something they can't control,"-- somebody would yell RORG, just anyone in the crowd.
> And whoever was the enforcer or sheriff, whatever you want to call it - during the Roll Call, they
> would -- if they heard the word RORG, they would sound the thing. And it would make everyone
> be like, "Oh, that was a comment that probably shouldn't have been said."

She counters her positive Roll Call experience with a negative Roll Call experience in a

different squadron. The result was not conducive to the goal of Roll Call. Instead of increasing

cohesion, it left her feeling uncomfortable.

> In this squadron, they're like, "We're going to talk about tits." That's literally the way the Roll Call
> started. And I was like, "Whose tits? I'm the only girl here what is going to happen?" And then
> they were like, "We're going to talk about barmaids." And I'm like, "Who's the barmaid?" I'm so
> confused. Why aren't we talking about being good at your job? I'm like, "Why is this so funny?"
> And it's a really young guy, whom I'm friends with, as the Mayor running this thing. And people
> are laughing. And I'm just thinking to myself like, "I really think they're laughing because they've
> just heard that somewhere else before." It would be just as exciting hear about-- I keep saying-- if
> we were tactical. But like, things that apply to work and not gender, sex, whatever-- like whatever
> the thing is.

Bessie also discussed one of her negative experiences with being "Named." Naming

ceremonies are how fighter pilots receive their call signs. Call signs are, typically, based on

something funny or dumb, that a pilot does. The pilot being named does not get to weigh-in on

the names that are suggested or given. Naming ceremonies can be a way of building

camaraderie and passing on tradition, but in this experience, it harmed Bessie and ruptured the

trust she had in her fellow pilots and the institution.

> Yeah. I hesitate to tell this story because I hate it. I had a naming in the B Course, and I got named
> something based off how I look. And I thought it was like-- it wouldn't have happened to one of
> the guys. And basically, the girl in the class before me was like a supermodel looking girl. She was
> just beautiful. And so, they named me something related to how I was the opposite of what she
> looked like, and they wished they had her back, and named me something that I think was really
> offensive. And basically, I got back in the room-- because they kick you out for the naming. And
> the funny thing was they had all these names on the board ahead of time that people had thrown up
> as good ideas for stupid stuff you've done, and I saw that name on there a week earlier, or
> whatever, and I didn't know what it meant.

She continued and discussed how her classmates and the commander lied to her about the

name's origin. Being lied to by a trusted authority figure and her classmates lead to a sense of

shame and betrayal.

> And then they bring me back in, and the commander has only been in command for two or three
> weeks, so he doesn't know me really. He's very new to being a commander, and what's appropriate
> and what's not appropriate. And they basically decide to lie to me about what the call sign means.
> They told a story that occurred after that name was on the board. The whole time you ran the
> course they had your name on this board. And at any point, people could throw names up, so

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> maybe it was up there two months ago and this story they told happened two weeks ago. I don't remember all the details, but I knew for a fact that that was not the reason I was named that. And it was also something good I did which was-- your name is never based off that. And so I end up going to one of the guys in my class who I wasn't as good a friend with and I was like, "Hey, what does the name really mean?" and he was like, "I'm not telling you," and I was like, "Okay." And then I go to my best friend in the class and I was like, "What does this name really mean?" and he was like, "I'll tell you, but wait till the next break."

She described feeling betrayed and like she was the butt of a "boys only" joke. Ultimately, she decided not to bring it up, and she endured the ridicule until the course was over.

> He told me, and I was livid about it. I'm walking around the squadron and people are calling me this name, and they all have some boys club, gentleman's joke about what it means. And they are like, "Oh, she thinks it's because she cooks lasagna and brings in food for the squadron." I don't know. I didn't want to bring anything up right at the end of the course. We had a month left to the program.

Language and Humor. Humor and laughter can be a technique to build camaraderie, make unpleasant tasks more enjoyable, and pass time. A military career is full of challenging, stressful, rugged, boring, serious, and uncomfortable experiences where humor acts as an adaptive survival skill and success strategy. Jackie identified humor as one of the main things she misses about her fighter pilot career. She reported, "The people and the camaraderie, hands-down. The laughs in the bar. I mean pilots in general, aircrew in general, even in the airlines, we are a unique group. And I love the sense of humor." Humor and a culture's language can also be a way institutional betrayal is normalized and condoned within the military. Jokes can contribute to a culture where minorities are viewed as less, and when these jokes are perpetrated or condoned by trusted or more powerful people, they result in institutional betrayal. Bessie described one such incident that occurred when an old Squadron member, who is gay, returned to attend a funeral. Another member of the Squadron began to unzip his flight suit and stated, "But with him in here, I was wondering if I should just unzip my flight suit a little bit." And making fun of him for being-- making comments because he was gay."

Bessie described her experiences with sexist language in her squadron, "And as I started to get to know people I was really surprised because they're saying things that are more kind of overtly sexist than in my last squadron." She reported, "I got here and people-- I heard don't be a pussy like four times a day. Any tactic that was aggressive, they would say 'like a man' after. Pushing the wall is an aggressive tactic. So, they would be like, 'Pushing wall like a man.' Or if two people were arguing, I heard like, 'You sound like a bunch of girlfriends out here.' Just it just tons of little stuff that I was like, Man, this is a hostile environment up here."

Luckily, Bessie felt established and respected as a fighter pilot by the time she was exposed to this environment. She'd also had previous experiences that were more welcoming, so she knew a different norm. Despite these advantages, she still wondered how her colleagues would feel if their daughters were in the room listening. She stated, "Imagine their daughter in the squadron 20 years from now. Do you think they'd be wanting them to hear the things that they're saying every day? This isn't really a welcoming environment." This Squadron will eventually train [aircraft] B Course students, so she also wondered how this language might affect less experienced and less established students. She acknowledged the power that instructors have over the training culture and the students.

> I've had the pleasure to get to know all these people, I'm not afraid of them. I'm an established, experienced, if you will, fighter pilot. I don't need to-- I feel they have no power over me. I feel when we're in the briefing room we're on the same level. Whereas if you're in the B course, you're trying to make it through the course, you haven't been in your first squadron, tactical squadron, or whatever yet.

Jackie identified that a culture can feel unfriendly for both men and women. She shared one situation that did not offend her but did offend a male in the squadron. She stated, "I was in the squadron back in weapons one day and there was a, Coppertone or something calendar with a bunch of girls in bikinis and I made the comment, "Oh, February. I don't like February, I'm a

fan of March. Flip to March. I really like March. I was just joking around." A male who was standing in the group stated that he was offended by it. She stated, "Everyone started laughing, thinking he was sarcastic." Instead, the male pilot stated, "No, really. I don't think that's appropriate to have in here." She continues and points out that either gender can feel like a line has been crossed, "So, it doesn't matter your gender. You have your tolerance. It doesn't mean that guy's tolerance is going to be higher than mine because he is male."

The language and humor of the military can also be misogynistic and masculine. Bessie described one example that occurred at the memorial for an Airmen that completed suicide. She felt the Commander's word choices resulted in a missed opportunity to unite the group, and instead, alienated sections of the group and set a poor example for younger Airmen.

> He [the commander] got up there and was saying, "Hey, this memorial really pulled everyone together." And he was like talking about that. And he said in front of-- so usually, it's just me. I'm the only girl there. But, it was our contractors and enlisted. It was another squadron and all their people. And he said, "This brotherhood." And it just like-- it just like hit me the wrong way. I was just like, "Come on."

She also recognizes that opinions differ about the importance of words, but she chose to address the issue with the Commander.

> And I understand some people are cool with that. And other people think like, "Why not say something different," whatever. So, there's differences of opinion. But I kind of-- and he said a lot of other stuff similar to that before. And so, I went and talked to him like, "Sir, I have this goal. I'm trying to improve the comm in this squadron [laughter]. And I need your support. Like, you said 'brotherhood. And that was a perfect opportunity to include all these Airmen and contractors.'"

She described the Commander's reaction, "And he was like, '[Call Sign], what can we do? Like, what do I [laughter]—what do I need to do?'"

Beryl discussed the verbal sparring and insults that are also a part of the fighter pilot culture. She noticed this sparring having different consequences for her:

> I tried to keep up with them a little bit, verbally. They would throw an insult out there, and I could usually come up with a much better insult to throw back but then they—honestly—they would get

their feelings hurt. Because if it was an insult coming from a woman, it like emasculated them. Whereas it was an insult coming from a man, it was like, "Okay, game on." And they could fight with each other, and then be friends. But if I doubled down with an insult, they remembered it, and they took it personally.

She also discussed the hypersexual language that was sometimes directed at her. She gave the following example, "We could talk some of the sexual stuff as far as the guys. Definitely provocative, definitely like, 'Hey my wife is pregnant. There's nobody in the vault. There's a nice couch, let's go." She described another aspect of the culture: the "art" of sexual inuendo.

> Everything was a sexual innuendo. So, there's all these words that you can't say and-- but we will offer in the statement of, "So to speak," to get you thinking about sex -- so we can't say box, so we're going to say container instead. If you do say box, you need to say, "So to speak," because-- and when you do say container, now it's got your mind thinking about sex, but you were thinking about sex anyway and if you're thinking about sex it's going to help you perform better as a pilot.

She continued and offered more explanation of how the sexual language seeps into many aspects of fighter pilot culture. She offers this explanation in a neutral tone indicating that it was mostly benign silliness, but for her, it grew tiresome.

> So, it was always, "So to speak." A lot of derogatory on women and anything sexual, but positive stuff on sexual stuff, too, but it was just this constant sexual discussion going on no matter what. Whether you're talking about a number-- it's not just five feet. It's six to nine feet and now we can be thinking about sex. And it's not just 250 feet. It's 269 feet minus 19 so that we can now be thinking about sex [laughter].

Beryl described how she tried using language and humor to fit-in despite feeling inauthentic when doing so.

> "I think communication-wise, in trying to keep up with them, I would also myself make sexual jokes. Even though it wasn't me naturally. Ummm, but if I made sexual jokes, it was a way to kind of fit in… And then I felt silly, like, "Man, this is so stupid. Like, this isn't even who I am."

The participants had varying reactions to the sexist and hypersexual language common within the fighter pilot culture. Similarly, they also discussed different approaches for addressing or coping with it. On one end of the spectrum there was active participation and on

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the other end of the spectrum, there was a constant degrading feeling of incongruence. Amelia

fell in the middle and identified an ambivalent response and described using an ignoring

technique. Amelia stated, "I was a big tomboy growing up so all the language didn't-- I didn't

care. I didn't go in there and try to make it a different place."

Bessie discussed multiple situations where she took time to think, then choose to address

the topic directly after careful consideration. She shared an experience where she was put in a

position to either speak-up or ignore the language being used on TDY. She stated, "He was our

Navy exchange pilot. He was telling the story one night around the campfire that was just

egregious. It was about his time in the Navy; just gang bangs on the Navy ship; just shit." She

discusses how there were only two females present, herself and a young female enlisted Airman.

She explained how she felt cornered as a female leader and role model. She felt the need to set

a good example for the younger and lower-ranking female Airman, "I feel like I'm now in a

position of, is [Call Sign] okay with these stories? Should I be okay with these stories? Where's

the line? I don't think she should be hearing about this from an Officer, of his shenanigans on

the boat." She chose to express her disapproval by simply leaving the situation. She stated, "I

couldn't think of a good way in the moment to do anything about it, and so I decided to leave so

now I'm not there being complicit." Eventually, she was able to discuss the situation with the

offending pilot. She explained, "I just don't like being in a position where I feel like I should be

speaking up about something like – among pilots, I don't care what you're talking about. But I

just feel like there's a line and I don't want to feel like I should be the one to speak up when

there's E-flight around."

Bessie described another experience that occurred earlier in her career with her instructor

at Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape training (SERE). SERE is a required course where

aircrew and other frontline combat military personnel learn techniques and skills to help them

survive in a Prisoner of War scenario. It is a highly demanding course where students spend six

days in the woods learning to evade and survive. Most groups, referred to as elements, have no

women. The elements with women; have two or three for safety reasons.

> When I was at SERE, a similar situation happened, where our Tech Sergeant that was in charge of us just kept saying really sexist jokes. I think he just heard from somebody else. We were splitting wood, and he was like, "Hit it like she just didn't make you dinner," was a joke he used, like, you should be hitting your wife if she doesn't make you dinner. And then one of the guys, one of the Airmen was on his knees splitting wood, and he made some comment about how men shouldn't be on their knees.

She described how being in the minority adds a layer of difficulty to the situation, especially

when the offender is your leader.

> And there's only two elements that have females in them because there's only five of us out of the 85 that are there, whatever. So, it's me and this other female in our element, and then five other guys, and then there's the Tech Sergeant that is in charge of us. And he just kept on with those kinds of jokes.

In that situation, Bessie addressed the issue with her element leader, and the joking stopped.

She stated that she speaks-up out of a desire to see genuine change and she explained that

it would feel worse for her if people were changing their communication simply because she is

in the room. She reflected on the experience of another female fighter pilot friend, "But she

feels like the conversation changes when she walks into the bar, or when she walks into the

room. And that would bother me way more than them saying, 'Don't be a pussy,' in front of

me." She described her desire to see real change, "If they were saying it when I wasn't there and

then when I am there, they aren't, that would bother me more. I want the squadron to, generally,

because they know it's the right thing to do, say the right stuff." Bessie recognized that others

handle things differently than she does though. She described another friend's method of

addressing inappropriate communication and jokes,

… She reacts to stuff that she doesn't like being said around her is very different than me. So, I tend to choose like, "Hey. I'll talk to this person later," or like, "Oh. I would like to think about it for a little bit," and then I'm like, "How can I affect change?" But she'd throw something back that she thinks is equally offensive [laughter]-- but the thing is, I don't think it ever really is. I don't think that guys care. And so, that's why I don't take that approach. So, somebody will be like, "Don't be a p-- or don't be a pussy," and she'll be like, "You should say, don't be a penis. How does that make you feel?" or "Do you feel awkward?" Don't say, "Don't be a pussy." [laughter] And it's like, what? Like, that just got really out of control. That was a lot of words, what just happened? So, there's definitely different ways to handle it, even among people who've been in about the same amount of time.

Humor was repeatedly mentioned throughout the interviews as being one of the most enjoyable aspects of fighter pilot culture. Multiple participants identified that it's a fine line between being an adaptive skill and being a contributing factor to an unsafe culture. Participants described multiple experiences where they felt comfortable expressing their aversion to language or jokes. They also discussed several instances where they brought their considerations to leadership, and leadership responded appropriately. One participant, who continually compromised her sense of self to fit in, alluded to the exhaustion she felt living in a pro-longed incongruent state. Appropriate and validating responses from leadership and a culture where it is acceptable to speak-up appears to have lessened the impact of these experiences on the participants.

Leadership. Leaders are tasked with establishing the vision, goals, standards, and climate within an organization. The culture a leader creates directly impacts professionalism, moral, and mission-readiness. The strength of an organization's leader dictates how the members of that organization will perform. When a leader fails to stop sexism, both hostile and ambivalent, institutional betrayal results. When a leader refuses to allow anything but respect and professionalism within the ranks, they create an environment where members serve with passion and loyalty as they trust the institution they serve.

Eileen emphasized how leadership positively affected her career, "I've been lucky to have good leadership that has taken care of me and my husband to keep us together most of the time." Jackie also cites her leadership's effort to keep her and her husband together as an impactful contribution to her overall positive experience, "Our leadership always took great care of us. So, I will hand it to our bosses who said, 'No, we want to keep you in the [airframe]' and they would always get us good assignments." Eileen counters that with the way leadership responded when she reported a sexual assault while in pilot training. When asked if she was supported by her leadership, she responded, "By the DO, I was. Ummm, by the Commander, I was not."

Multiple participants described dealing with poor leadership and feeling like their primary coping skill was the understanding that the leader wouldn't be in their position forever. They tended to just "wait out" the bad leadership until a new person arrived. Jackie discussed an incident where she encountered leadership that was unsupportive of her status as a mother. She described feeling thankful when these negative leaders PCS'd (permanent change of station) and was replaced by a leader with a different perspective. She stated, "Thankfully, he PCS'd and the next guy didn't have an attitude like that, and it all worked out. That was probably the one time in my career where I felt like I was blatantly discriminated against."

Leadership can set the tone of a culture. They can affect change and communicate which behaviors, practices, and words will be accepted in the workplace. Bessie discusses how leadership at one squadron stepped in when the discussions at Roll Call became inappropriate. She stated, "There was some sort of sexism and other stuff going on that leadership wasn't happy with. And they were like, 'This needs to be figured out before the [squadron] can have another Roll Call.'" She also discussed how she confronted the Commander who was present at

the Roll Call where she was named. The origin of her call sign was based on a comparison of "hotness" between her and the previous female in the schoolhouse. She stated, "I ended up deciding to talk to the commander about it just because I felt like the previous commander, he would have stopped it." She pointed out how that commander had the opportunity to recognize the line and stop the squadron from stepping over it. She recounted, "He was the stopping point, and he's the one that should have made a different decision." She reported that he had a positive response and appeared to consider Bessie's concerns. She recounted the discussion, "He's like, 'Oh, shoot. I didn't even think twice about it, but I can see how, yeah, we probably wouldn't have named the guys based of the hotness of the last guys in the class.' He was apologetic." Bessie had several stories where she was able to go to a commander directly with her concerns. The positive experiences she's had with their responses are validating and create an environment where reflection and change are acceptable. She compared her flight commanders in the T-6 versus the T-38, "I did have a good flight—or assistant flight commander and flight commander in T-6s. In T-38s, I didn't feel comfortable with the flight commander or assistant flight commander. If there would have been an issue, I don't think it would've been them that I would've went to." She also reported that her leadership encouraged her to speak-up when she was issued outdated gear on deployment. She stated, "I ended up going up to our DO and I'm telling him this stuff. He's like [Call Sign], and he's a really nice guy. He's like, "Why didn't you just tell me when you got this gear that it wasn't the right thing?"

Amelia described feeling very thankful for the commanders she had in her initial squadron. Her very presence was unprecedented and a change to the status-quo and feeling supported by the two commanders made her transition easier. She stated, "The DO was, eh. But both the

commanders were good for me there. I was very happy that I ended up in that squadron." She attributed a part of this positive experience to the fact that the Commander's wife was also an Officer in the Air Force, "My initial Squadron Commander, his wife –we're still friends, by the way, as well. His wife was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force and he didn't really have an issue with strong women, and he was a really good guy to have as my first Squadron Commander. Toward the end of her career, Amelia's son was diagnosed with [a life-threatening disease]. She encountered the difficult decision of accepting a new Squadron Commander assignment in a flying squadron, or retirement. She described how her commander made an emotionally difficult choice easier. She stated, "My Wing Commander was super supportive. He offered me a different Squadron Command at a non-flying squadron."

Eileen described having both positive and negative experiences with leadership during her career. Despite some negative leadership experiences, the positive experiences are emphasized, and she reported an overall positive experience. She stated, "Yeah. So again, I've had good experiences with the bad. I've had other people who have taken good care of me with my experiences. And so those have outweighed my negative view of bad commanders. Do you know what I'm saying? "

In addition to discussing the impact that leadership made in their careers, multiple participants discussed the limited number of women in leadership positions. When you can't see someone "like you" occupying a higher position, it makes it seem like a less attainable goal. Multiple participants rose to leadership positions, and the participants who were in the early generation of female fighter pilots became the first females in these leadership positions. They were the trailblazers that gave the younger generation of female fighter pilots someone to look-up to. Bessie discussed the impact of a limited number of female fighter pilots. She reported

not even meeting another female fighter pilot until the very end of pilot training, and how there

were no females in leadership. She admitted that this would have affected her ability to speak-

up if she'd needed to.

> Because at that point, I have never even met a female fighter pilot by the time I got-- when I was in pilot training. It wasn't until I dropped [aircraft] that, actually, a female [aircraft] pilot, she was ferrying a jet from the Depot to the Michigan Guard, and she stopped in. But yeah, I was so stoked to see this lady there. So, I think that would've definitely been-- if there was some sort of female in the chain of command, I could've gone to them. So yeah. If I really thought something was going on, I probably would've reached back…I had in T-6s, a female that I felt like if something were going wrong, I could've went to her about it. But it's tough when there's no one kind of around there looking out for you or whatever.

Jackie also discussed her very limited interaction with female leadership during her career. She

stated,

> No. Well, not initially, and not at that time. We didn't – so…[Name], she was an IP at [base] when I went through the B course, and I met her. Simply met her, and thought, "Well, that's cool, you're the first [aircraft] girl," you know, so, but no continued talks. At [base] there, yeah. So, nobody higher ranking than me. But when I went to [base]-- so that was my third assignment, went back to [base] as an IP, and there were eight squadrons at the time, and there were six girls that were IPs. All of us in different squadrons for the most part. And we were all peers within a couple of years of each other.

Multiple participants discussed the impact that leadership had on their experiences as a

minority in a highly demanding career. They also discussed how positive and supportive

experiences with leadership had the ability to override the negative and discriminatory

experiences. Finally, they all identified the void of women in leadership roles and reported not

having anyone "like them" as a role model.

Ambivalent Sexism

Different than systemic sexism, ambivalent sexism considers the actions and biases of

single individuals. These biases affect an organization's culture in a negative way, but they are

not, yet, ingrained in the organizational structures, policies, practices, and procedures. And they

are not formally or informally sanctioned by the organization. Individual sexism contributes to

systemic sexism and institutional betrayal when the actions of individuals are the cultural norm and are formally or informally sanctioned by the organization. Ambivalent sexism has two sub-components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism.

Hostile sexism. Hostile sexism reflects overtly negative evaluations and stereotypes about gender. Hostile sexism often views gender equality as an attack on masculinity or traditional values. Amelia discussed her overall experience with feeling welcome. She stated, "It wasn't everybody. That would have been even worse." She compared the environment to a bell curve. She described the people on the more supportive end of the curve. She stated, "They were like, Yeah, we don't care. Just come on. You're part of the squadron." Then she described the opposite end of the curve, "They're like, we're not going to tolerate this, this is not going to work for me." Finally, she described the largest section of the curve, "…they went, 'Well, this is—we're not very excited about this, but we are in the military and this is what they say we're going to do, so we're going to see what happens.' So, they weren't exactly welcoming, but they also weren't making me feel like I should get out, either." She clarified that the largest part of the curve fell short of neutral, "Not quite neutral, but not quite as bad as the other guys."

Amelia had six years in the Air Force when she learned that she was going to pilot training. She stated that she'd never had a difficult time with the military culture during those six years. Instead, she identified the fighter pilot culture and trying to gain acceptance as the bigger challenge. She stated, "It was the fighter pilot culture that I had to break through. And it wasn't—when I say that, I don't want to change – I wasn't really trying to change the culture, I was just trying to get them to let me in. I just want to be part of the team." Bessie added, "You'll always find a couple of people that find a different area of the bar to be in or whatever it is." She continues and compares covert sexism to racism, "The worst kind isn't overt … they

know they need to watch their mouth about the views that they have. It's just a lot of biases …

you just feel like they're not giving you the benefit of the doubt." Jackie had experiences with

overt hostile sexism: "I ran across a few people that would be vocal and say, 'I don't think

women should be flying fighters.' So, I did run into that."

Eileen was exposed to sexist beliefs about what she could or couldn't do before she

enlisted in the military. Eileen stated, "My uncle flew F-15's. He went to the Academy. He

graduated in '86. And I remember at one point he was like, "Women can't fly fighters." I was

like, "Yeah, want to bet [laughter]?" She attributes some of her choice to fly fighters to this

conversation and the experience of being told that she couldn't do it due to her gender. Jackie

discusses how the older fighter pilot generation continues to negatively influence the

community with antiquated beliefs that have been medically disproven. She stated, "I'm on this

old fighter pilot Facebook group, which is somewhat ridiculous. They make up all these

excuses, "Well, women can't pull Gs; they're not physically fit."

Amelia described arriving at her first operational squadron, an inherently stressful and

nerve-wracking event. A new pilot, just out of training, arrives at their first assignment eager to

work hard, learn, and make a positive impression. When Amelia arrived, her Director of

Operations (DO) made sure she was aware that she was not wanted by either squadron, "…

basically, there was four of us coming from the same training class and the squadron

commanders get together and decide who is going to get who and they were arguing over who

was going to get me." She elaborated with, "But like, who *wasn't* going to get me. I call it the

last one picked on the playground. No, you take her. No, you take her." She reported that her

squadron commander ended up accepting her, but with poor intention. "He finally said, yeah,

fine. We'll take her … like he was being magnanimous." Little did the rest of the room know;

that commander already knew that he would be leaving and moving to the other squadron in 4-5 months. She stated, "So, he took me in the [squadron] so that he wouldn't have me in the [squadron]… he knew he would have to deal with me less in the long run."

Beryl described experiencing hostile sexism from an instructor. She reported, "I had an instructor who flat out said, 'I can't fly with her. I can't fly with a woman.' She's, she just 'She doesn't listen well. I don't think she's learning. She's not capable—' I mean, there was lots of reasons why he didn't think he should fly with me. So, he never flew with me again."

Pregnancy and Mothering Discrimination. Eileen, who became pregnant with her first child at the end of Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT), discussed using a mission briefing room as a private space to pump her breast milk and was told by her commander that she couldn't continue to utilize the space for that purpose. She described the way a single father in the Squadron was treated differently, "And what's awful, that same commander had a single dad in his squadron, permanent party single dad—without friction [laughter]. At the time, Eileen was a young Lieutenant and did not do anything about her commander's reaction. She stated that she would respond differently at this point in her career.

> Now, someone tries to tell me 'You can't use the briefing room.' Really? Okay. Where's the command provided place you're actually supposed to give me so that I can go [pump]. Now that I know the rules-- and the law, that wasn't a law at that point. I know that. But my ability to stand up for myself is much different now than it was as a young Lieutenant.

She also described encountering a biased belief that women get pregnant to avoid flying. It's a stigma that her husband, also a fighter pilot, doesn't have to address when, as a couple, they choose to have another child. She described what a coworker said to her, "He made the comment; 'Oh, you must not like AETC' when I got pregnant with my third." When he responded that he was just kidding, she stated, "One person might be, but the other guy isn't."

Benevolent Sexism. Benevolent sexism is a set of attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling and tone. It consists of thoughts and beliefs that label them as fair, innocent, caring, maternal, pure, and fragile. Benevolent sexism tends to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial, but only serve to justify women's subordinate status to men. In many situations, these attitudes may be referred to as chivalry or simply having "traditional values."

Amelia described benevolent sexism when explaining why she feels female fighter pilots remain such a large minority. "One of the reasons that guys were so against women flying fighters is they would think about their wives or their daughters or their mothers, and there's no way they can do that." One way to impact benevolent sexism is by changing the role of women in the military and increasing the number of female fighter pilots. As we do this, our ideas of acceptable gender roles change. As more people have wives, daughters, and mothers who are fighter pilots; we consequently have more people who view this as an acceptable role for men and women. The power of benevolent sexism lies in the perpetrator's ability to camouflage sexist remarks as chivalry.

Beryl described an instance in training where she was the victim of benevolent sexism. She detailed how the simulator instructor labeled her with terms that are, on the surface, "nice," but instead they end up limiting the individual. She stated,

> But at the graduation it was standing room only and then you have all the old simulator instructors, and they were all standing up in the back, and they all did not like me. I mean, they were just like, uhhhggg, "She's terrible. How did she get in here?" But yet, they all thought I was kind, and nice, and-- like, "She's too nice to be a fighter pilot." Kind of those phrases.

Jackie described experiences where she was told that she wasn't aggressive enough in the jet. She questioned whether this was an isolated incident, or if it is an unfair pattern encountered by many female fighter pilots. She checked-in with multiple other female fighter pilots who

reported similar experiences. As a result, she's concluded that the feedback was due to gender

bias on the part of RTU instructors.

> I have texted some other girls that I don't want to say were accused but were told the same thing. I was always told I'm not aggressive enough. And so, in pilot training, I'd never heard that because you're flying instruments. You're doing your formation. You're doing whatever... pilot training. But in RTU, they were like, "You're not aggressive enough. You're not aggressive enough." For example, you would take off on departure in closed or fingertip formation on route, you know, somewhat close and then they would give you the signal to go out to line abreast, tactical formation, you know, a mile away. So, I would do my-- I would bank up my wings and go up to my mile away formation. And I remember an IP in the back seat going, "You're not aggressive enough. You need to bank it up 90 degrees, pull 9 Gs and get it."

At that point in her career, she was inexperienced and simply tried to be a receptive student and

accept their critique. She reported, "You know, and I was like, 'Oh, okay. I need to be more

aggressive.' So, I would bank 90 degrees and I would pull 9 G's to get out to formation. You

know, I mean, what are you going to do? I did it. I just tried to be a good student and take their

advice." She continued by describing what 20 years in the jet has taught her, "And, you know,

once I got more experienced, I'm like, 'You don't have to pull 9 G's every time. You just need to

quickly and efficiently get to the formation that is expected of you.' She's reflected on her

experience over the years and concluded,

> And I look back on it and I think, "That's total BS what I was told." I don't know if it's them thinking, "Oh, she's timid or she's afraid." Or I don't know. But I've heard it from a lot of girls that we were told we're not aggressive enough. And so, it was just a weird thing that has always bugged me. I felt like I was labeled as too, I don't know, timid or not aggressive.

Throughout the interview, Jackie spoke positively of her fighter pilot experience, and was

hesitant to imply that things were any different for her than they were for her male counterparts.

Her hesitation is tangible in her response,

> Ummm, I think it might-- well, I hate to ever say, "Well, they were wrong about it." I mean, maybe. But honestly, I think it was a bias that the men had against having a girl in the Squadron. I mean, and I cringe to say that. I really, really hate saying that because I don't ever think that-- I just hate saying those words. But I look back and I'm like, why would they say I wasn't aggressive enough? I got to my formation and you don't need to pull 9 Gs to get in formation like that. But I

think they're like, "Oh, little girl, she shouldn't be flying fighters. Girls are too timid, and we can—
you know, their mindset isn't strong." I didn't hear it from everybody. There were two specific guys
that were always on my case the whole training. You know, but that bugged me.

Amelia pointed out how the more masculine personality characteristics can also be a bad thing
for women if taken too far. She described the fine line that women must navigate. If they are too
feminine, they are viewed as weak, incompetent, and as lacking in leadership potential. One the
other hand, if they are too masculine, they risk being viewed as too harsh and unlikable. She
stated, "Yeah, so I think a lot of women that are in leadership roles face this problem sometimes
and it's-- you know, if a guy is maybe a little rough in correcting somebody or telling them what
they need to do or that kind of thing, then he's just being a jerk. Right? There's a finer line for a
woman where she just turns into [inaudible] oh, she's just a bitch. Right?" She believed this is a
common issue when women do their job. She stated, "Where really what you're doing is your
job and you're doing it in the same way other fighter pilots would, but it's taken differently. But
I think that's something women have to deal with in lots of fields, not just fighter pilots."

There's No Crying in Fighter Piloting.   Multiple participants reported crying, which
resulted in the participants' perceived emotional incompetence. The participants themselves
perceived this emotional response as negative, and the expression of softer emotions often acts
as ammunition for perpetrators of benevolent sexism. Multiple participants described how they
sometimes cry in response to anger or frustration. Crying is a typical emotional response that is
synonymous with weakness, particularly in military culture. It is also an emotion that falls
outside the neat, labeled box of masculinity. Eileen reported that her natural reaction to anger,
crying, as being detrimental to her career and how others perceive her as a leader. She stated
that she feels it contributes to a negative view of women.

I get angry; I cry, and there's nothing I can do about it. I'm trying not to hit you right now
[laughter], and this is my response. That is a difficult thing as a female in a position of leadership

is that when I get angry, it's very difficult for me to hold my emotions back, visually, you know what I mean? I can have the conversation. I could say what I need to say.

She discussed how she thinks it hinders women in leadership positions, "I think that's one of the hardest things as a female in a leadership position; having it viewed as a sign of weakness." She continues and compares it to common emotional responses for males, "If a guy gets all mad and gets upset and his face gets red; that's a normal okay response, maybe not okay, but that's acceptable … I do find that is a double-standard." She continued with a story of an incident where her crying hindered her career.

> I was angry and I was crying and I told them I screwed up big. I went into a spin without the throttle totally in idle. And I was like, "I messed up," and I was angry with myself. And I remember, later, he told me he would never send me to SOS, which, at the time, was the only thing he could do [laughter].

Bessie also stated that she feels men are less open to talking about their feeling and less genuine about their insecurities. She stated, "I think sometimes the guys aren't willing to talk about how nervous they were for a ride, or how – I don't know. Just kind of like emotions behind stuff." She recounted a couple times when she's cried. She also supported the idea that it is an uncontrollable reaction that frequently seems to be different for women than men. She stated, "I feel like this is something that comes up a lot on female Facebook pages or whatever. As you might tell, I don't want to be crying. I don't want tears to be coming on my face, but that's my reaction whether I wanted it or not." She also stated that it is her reaction to intense frustration. She described it, "It's just my response—it's frustrating to me when—because I kind of associate tears as being sad, but when I'm frustrated, I don't know why, but tears are the response. And I hate that because I want to be seen as I've got my shit together, and I've always felt like getting upset makes it look like my shit is not together." She continued describing how much she dislikes the emotional reaction of crying, "If there was one thing, I

could snap my fingers and change about myself; it would be that." She also discussed her

embarrassment about crying and said that she thinks it will be uncomfortable to read this paper,

"And if it would say like, "Oh, this is something I struggle with," I would really cringe

[laughter]. I would be like, "Don't tell people that [laughter]."

Fighter pilot culture is steeped in tradition and heritage. The unique culture and traditions

serve to build camaraderie, trust, and friendship amongst a group of people who will be sent into

combat together. The fighter pilot lifestyle consists of long days, deployments, exercises, and

constant upgrades. Many of the fighter pilot traditions provide this hardworking group with an

outlet where, as a team, they can relax and release stress. All participants discussed the

enjoyable aspects of fighter pilot culture. Despite the positive aspects of the strong heritage and

tradition, multiple participants hesitantly described ways in which the culture can also be

harmful. While participants described several examples of sexism, discrimination, and

ostracism stemming from the entrenched culture in fighter squadrons, they remained protective

of the traditions and hesitated to recommend change.

Internal Experience

Coping

Multiple participants described the different methods they used to better meet the

challenges of the interpersonal and sociological aspects of their fighter pilot experience.

Participants described utilizing both accepted and unaccepted strategies.

Utilized Strategies

Utilized strategies refer to the strategies used to adapt to the fighter pilot culture and

mind-set. They weren't necessarily positive or healthy and were employed by participants.

Utilized strategies were broken into the following categories: education, diminishing of the self,

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developing internal self-assurance, timing, identifying, and utilizing supports, approaching

people directly, performance, the likability trap, ignoring and avoiding, learned apathy, having a

solid belief system, exercise, manufacturing a break, and personality characteristics.

Education. One strategy was seeking understanding through informal education. Beryl

described reading books in an effort to better understand a style of communication consisting of

constant put-downs, "I read a lot of books and it-- I found it seemed more like it's just a male

communication style of putting each other down instead of this concept of developing thick skin,

ummm, and so it was just constant put-downs by the guys."

Marina reported that her formal education in Psychology and Counseling helped her

better understand people and the fighter pilot culture. She stated, "My Bachelors is in

Psychology and then my master's is in Counseling. Ummm, yeah. It has served me so well."

Bessie stated that she was excited to become a flight commander where she will be in a formal

leadership role for the first time. She felt it will help her better understand the fighter pilot

dynamic and how men handle stress and emotional vulnerability compared to the way she

handles it.

> I'm kind of curious as I move into flight commander to see if people have-- what people's reactions are to adversity or bad news or struggling in a program or-- because we're going to get a B-Course here for the first time early next year. And I'll be a flight commander for that, so. I'm just kind of intrigued because I never see the guys in very vulnerable situations because I'm saying when something like that's happening with me, it's a very one-on-one I'm not getting upset in front of the group. And so, I'm curious to see how that changes when I'm in a leadership position in the squadron.

Diminishing of the Self. This accepted coping skill refers to the participants' attempt to

embody inauthentic personality characteristics. Several participants mentioned highlighting their

feminine characteristics through actions like baking, caretaking, and downplaying their

masculine characteristics to solicit a nonthreatened and accepting response from male colleagues. Maria stated, "And I joke with my husband. I'm like, 'Well, the trick that I use is I treat you guys all like you're kindergarteners.' And it works splendidly. And he's like, 'What?' And I'm like, 'Well, I do it to you, too. Don't worry,' [laughter]. There definitely is a mom aspect a little bit, like a sister-mom aspect, when you're the only girl around. But it doesn't bother me."

Another tactic used was adopting more traditionally masculine and aggressive behaviors such as drinking, chewing, cussing, and hypersexual or aggressive language. Several participants labeled this strategy as "trying to be one of the guys." Beryl described a fellow female fighter pilot, "She tried to keep up with the guys. And so, she drank as much, and she dipped as much, and she swore as much, and she ate as much. And so, then she got over-weight for Air Force standards. And they were very belittling of her because she did all of those things and they really limited her career. They didn't let her progress." Beryl described her own journey with trying to "be one of the guys." She reported reaching a point in her career where it became too difficult. She stated, "I just finally got to the point where I was like, "I can't be one of the guys. I'm not one of the guys, and I can't sustain that for a career or for a long period of time. And there were…at that time, I mean, I'm young. I'm 21 years old and there were no other women to really talk to."

Several participants described having more masculine aspects to their personality. They attributed these personality characteristics to growing-up with brothers. They associated their androgynous personality characteristics with their early socialization rather than to a conscious attempt to be "one of the guys." Marina stated, "I'm kind of a guy's, again because of my brothers, I'm kind of a guy's girl if you will. I've always been a tomboy. And I am more comfortable doing things with groups of men than I am with doing things with groups of

women." Regardless of whether the participants had a naturally androgynous personality or they made a conscious effort to "be one of the guys," it was clear from the interviews that masculine personality traits are viewed as positive while feminine personality characteristics are viewed as negative or less threatening within the fighter pilot culture.

Jackie described another technique of molding the self to the fighter pilot culture. Multiple participants discussed the strategy of keeping quiet and making an intentional effort to not change the culture. She stated, "I'm trying to think of it from the guy's perspective. You know, if because I, they didn't worry about offending me or they didn't have to change their behavior." Another strategy is to keep quiet and avoid any type of attention; hoping to just blend into the culture. Bessie talked about a fellow female fighter pilot who uses this strategy. She stated, "But [redacted] keeps things to herself, so. They wanted to do a public affairs article on her, and she doesn't like the attention and all that stuff."

The participants discussed several ways they were able to understand and fit-into the fighter pilot lifestyle. It was clear that there are times when participants consciously choose to either suppress or emphasize both masculine and feminine characteristics to gain acceptance. Several participants also discussed the need to reassure their colleagues that they did not intend to change or impact the status quo.

Internal Self-Assurance. Multiple participants discussed how they developed an internal self-assurance over the course of their career. Amelia stated that it was difficult feeling as if nobody wanted her around. "It was pretty tough. It was. But I'm by nature a pretty stubborn person." She described the internal dialogue she developed,

> I just think that I'm not going to let other people tell me what I can do. That's kind of my personality----to begin with. And I just wasn't going to let people-- I wasn't going to give them the

opportunity to change what I wanted to do. Once I got the opportunity to fly [aircraft], I was amazed. Right? So, I'm going to go be the best fighter pilot I can be. You know? I'm just like, no, you don't get to define me. I get to define me. Through my performance, through my attitude, through the things that I accomplish, I will define myself.

Jackie described her internal dialogue,

I say that I don't want to screw up, but I didn't, that wasn't my focus, that's kind of behind me. I didn't go into like every day, "Don't screw up, don't screw up, don't screw up." You know, it was, like, that was the afterthought of it, you know, but you go into it thinking, "I'm gonna really be awesome at this today." So, I always think the positive and what I am going to do, not worry about what I hopefully don't do.

Eileen provided an example illustrating when her internal self-assurance provided a response to a male colleague who accused her of getting pregnant to avoid flying.

I just give them crap back. I'm like, "Yeah. That's it, I just hate flying." "Really?" I just kinda… then they're like, "No, no, I'm kidding." I'm like, yeah, okay, sure you are [laughter]. I'm like, "You might be. One person might be, but the other guy isn't." You know, and I don't know, I don't really care about their opinion, to be honest, because I'm at that point in my life where I don't really care what other people say about me. You know? I guess I'm sure, on some level, I still sort of do but just because we're humans."

Beryl discussed the evolution of her internal dialogue. She described her internal dialogue as initially being distorted. Earning the Top Gun award, a prestigious award given to the person with the most accurate weapons employment scores, provided a reality check. She stated, "That was a huge revelation for me that took a lot of time for me to actually think about and come to terms with, but it really made me think about how, wow, this internal dialogue that I had going on was just that." She reported coming to an important realization, "Like, I really was just as good and better than all these guys, but the words that-- and the communication style were very different and that was a big experience for me."

Multiple participants discussed their internal dialogue and how they developed and learned to rely on an internal self-assurance that helped them combat the stress of the fighter pilot

career.

Timing. Several participants described a timing strategy of "waiting it out" when colleagues or leadership that were not supportive. They simply waited for a new leader to move-in. Jackie talks about a commander who wouldn't put her in a leadership position because she had two children. She reported coping with the injustice by waiting it out, "Thankfully, he PCS'd and then the next guy didn't have an attitude like that and it all worked out." She continued and described her thought-process at the time, "All right. You're an idiot. You're on the way out. Goodbye. Don't-let-the-door-hit-you-in-the-ass kind of thing [laughter]."

One participant described another form of "timing." Eileen described how there is usually one supportive commander that "off-sets" an unsupportive commander at any given assignment. This was true when she wasn't given access to a briefing room to pump. Having one supportive leader who accommodated her balanced out the impact of an unsupportive leader, "But luckily, they [unsupportive leaders] usually weren't at the same time and like kind of off-set each other. Do you know what I mean? Because that would have been ridiculous. And I was a young Lieutenant. I don't think I would have ever done anything about that."

Identifying and Utilizing Supports. Multiple participants discussed reaching out to others as a coping skill. Eileen discussed reaching out to her support network via phone calls when she was finishing training as a single mom and feeling lonely.

> While I was pregnant, my husband went to PIT. And then he was a FAIP. So, once I went [to PIT], my son was three months to seven months old. And I was in [city name] by myself. It was very lonely because everybody in the class was single, and they're all floating the river in their spare time. And going to the bars or whatever. And it was very lonely. So, I called, ahhh, I called people and talked to them on the phone a lot, and yeah, it was not my favorite time.

When asked about her support system, Bessie listed her husband and friends from her pilot training class.

> I definitely think my spouse. My husband has always been super-supportive of-- just always listening to me. And then I've always had a decent time making friends with people, so I think having a couple close-- and guy friends, though. I mean, I'm not-- there were other females in my class, but one of them didn't want fighters and the other one ended up washing out. But anyway, it's like-- I haven't generally found that my closest friend ends up being the girl in my squadron, but I think just having other people around to talk to.

Marina also listed her husband as a major support. "My husband." Because she is in a leadership role, she also listed several other female fighter pilots, also in leadership roles, that she reaches out to and uses as a sounding board. She stated, "That's why I still stick close together with like [Call Sign] even though she's retired. And you're going to interview [Call Sign] I think. [Call Sign] is probably, she's my-- I'm texting her constantly. She's my sounding board, so she's in a very similar situation as me."

Beryl and Amelia listed their family as main sources of support. Beryl discussed the impact her mom had on her experience, "My mom's a counselor. Literally, my mom, yeah. I mean, I had her on speed dial. She was there when, like, I was going through-- she came to visit me in Germany a couple times." Amelia stated, "My family was also very supportive. There was nobody-- nobody that I knew before I got this opportunity was telling me, hey, I don't think you should do that."

Amelia discussed the importance of identifying at least one person in the Squadron that she could rely on if needed. She stated, "There were a few people—everywhere I went, there were a few people that I could point to and say, okay, if I need something, I can go to that guy because he's going to help me out." She also reported reaching out to an old flight instructor, "I actually called one of my pilot training instructors. He was my P-38 instructor. And he had been an F-16 guy. So, I actually called him and asked him---'What do you think?' He's like, 'I

think that's awesome. You're going to do so great.'" She stated that she had the support she needed from those that had been in her life previously, but it became harder to find it after becoming a fighter pilot, "So, I did have support, It was just once you got out there into the training environment or into the [fighter] world, you had to go find it."

Overall, Amelia emphasized how critical it is to reach out to those who support you while ignoring those that don't. She stated, "You just have to accept that if you're going to do something like this, you focus on the people who are going to give you a chance, the people who judge you as they would any other fighter pilot, by your performance primarily, and then by how you fit in with the squadron secondarily. And those were the people—those are your people." She continued with an acknowledgement that there are also plenty of the opposite; people who didn't give her a chance, "And the other people can just go pound sand because you can't do anything about them. It's kind of how I look at it. I mean, you just can't. There's nothing to be done." Despite the added barriers, Amelia described maintaining some close and lasting friendships with the guys she flew with. She stated, "I've got some good pilot friends, we're in a fantasy football league together. I've got my sponsor from [base]. We go on vacations together. We're going out to dinner tonight. I mean, I have plenty of [fighter aircraft] friends."

Approaching People Directly. Another coping skill used by multiple participants is approaching people directly in a one-on-one format when something needs to be addressed. Bessie described how she learned to approach people directly with issues. When she arrived at her first duty station for her current airframe, she found the culture to be aggressive and unwelcoming to females. It especially bothered her, because it was a different experience than she'd had in her previous community. She started approaching people to discuss her perspective: "And so, I started talking individually to the guys in the Squadron." She continued, "I ended up

talking to the commander as well because he – it was frustrating to me." Bessie also discussed seeking out more experienced and established female fighter pilots for mentorship and discovering that they did not address the issues head-on like she did. Instead, they took a different approach. She talked about one mentor figure that came from an earlier generation of pilots. She attributes some of the difference in strategy to generational differences.

> She's 10 years older than I am, she's probably been in 17 years or something like that, 16. And so she definitely, I think, grew up in a different time. I think it'd be interesting in your study, depending on the age of somebody, what they think of all this, and what their approach is. Because people that are older … people that are at the, almost, 20-year-point, they are very much like, "When we first started, we were just trying to get by. We didn't want to create a ripple." I think that her perspective, someone that's older thinks that like, "Oh., I'm just going to try and make it by. I've just gotten earmuffs," whatever it takes.

She discussed another friend, who is also a female fighter pilot, but she has the additional minority status of being gay. She described a conversation they had about speaking up. Bessie attributed some of her friend's hesitation to her past experience of being discriminated against. She was kicked out of the Academy for being gay prior to the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy.

> And she was like, "Man, I really like that you're willing to speak up about stuff." She's like, "I just don't." She's like, "When people start saying stuff or I hear things, or whatever, I just feel like I cave. I just like-- I don't want to be here, I don't want to be here, I don't want to be the topic of conversation. I don't want the focus to be on me. I want people to forget about this. Whatever is happening in this moment, as soon as possible.'"

She detailed several incidents that occurred while at SERE. Her instructor was telling sexist jokes. She asked the only other female in the group, a lower-ranking enlisted troop, if the jokes bothered her. She described her response, "I asked her-- I'm like, 'Hey, does it bother you the stuff that this guy says?' And she was like, 'I mean, yeah, but I'm not going to say anything about it.' She described her response to the comment, "And I was like, 'Why? I expected it to be fixed.'"

Overall, she said her most used strategy is speaking up, and she feels that her ability to do that is somewhat influenced by changing times. "I think that if you don't-- I ultimately think that coping mechanism is telling somebody about it … in my experience, if you tell somebody that, 'Hey, dude, what do you think about not saying that' or if you're genuine about it, I find that people aren't trying to offend you." She described her drive for improvement like this, "I feel like it's my job to fix stuff. I don't know why, but I think I always am just thinking I want things to get better. And I know the way that, that's going to happen is by me speaking up." Marina also described being a direct person and how that personality style works well in the fighter community, "But that's one of the reasons I think I love the fighter community is because I am a more direct-- I'm obviously, a type-A person, but I'm definitely more direct, let's solve the problem, let's move on, let's get it done and, and just get it out of the way, and get our jobs done. I credit my brothers for that."

Multiple participants reported approaching people directly when they have an issue with the culture. Although, they acknowledged knowing other female fighter pilots that don't believe they can speak up. One participant linked the differences in approaches to age and generational difference, which implies that the culture is changing.

Performance. Multiple participants described finding solace in the fact that aviation should be a performance-based career field. Marina described it as one of the aspects of her job that she really loves, "I love that what I do is based off of like how hard you work and how, how you can do your job. I don't feel like I have the job because I am a woman. I feel like I'm here because I earned it just like all the guys. So, that part is nice." Eileen shared her feelings about who should and should not be a fighter pilot. She believes the determining factor should be performance, not sex.

To me, there are plenty of men I wouldn't want flying fighters. Plenty. So, it doesn't mean I want all women to fly fighters. I think that there's still a standard. I think, in general, the women I know, we are better pilots than most men just because of the way our brains work, and because of the ability to multi-task, and just physically, like the whole center-of-gravity thing. Like, anyway, so there are plenty of factors, I think, that are of benefit. But, again, there are still plenty of women I don't want flying fighters. You know what I mean? Like, I've seen plenty of them and I'm like, "You would not be a good fit [laughter]." But that's the same for men. Like, I know plenty of men that I'm like, "I would not want you to fly a fighter, either." So, to me, it's like each person needs to be held to a standard.

Amelia, who was of an earlier generation of female fighter pilots, verified that performing well helped her earn some level of acceptance by the male fighter pilots in her squadron. She stated, "Once I got to be mission ready, combat ready, they figured out once again I was a decent wingman, then they kind of went okay, well, I guess this isn't so bad." When asked how she ultimately managed to fit into the squadron, she attributed it to her performance. She stated, "Performance is all I can say."

Bessie linked her increased confidence to her repeated successful performance. Early in her career, she described the pressure to represent all women in a positive light. She describes how career progression and performance in each formal upgrade or training validated her right to be there and increased her confidence.

I am confident that you make it through this course and that course and you're doing well. And you're kind of-- I'm an instructor now. Kind of your accomplishments kind of speak for themselves. You probably wouldn't have got there if you didn't deserve it type of thing. I care less about that now, but there definitely have been times that's really, I don't want to say it's crippling, but it's very much like I'm even frustrated that I'm frustrated about it [the pressure to represent all women] type of thing and it's taking your mind off what it probably should be on.

Amelia described how this phenomenon affected the way she approached things during her career. She stated, "I'm not going to walk into the commander's office with the book and say, hey, they shouldn't be saying these things about me. I'm going to go, hmm. I guess I need to show them they shouldn't be saying these things about me." She described her hope that the

career field has evolved into a genuine performance-based field.   She also implies that it was

not as simple as her performance despite that being the party line throughout her career.

> Interviewer: You also said that you're starting to do some speaking on this, and so you've
> had a chance to sort of look back and think some things over. What do you hope or wish or what
> do you want people to know and understand about the female fighter pilot experience?
> Amelia: Good question. I hope that it's gotten better. I hope that it can be truly a performance-
> based industry where if somebody can fly the airplane, they are part of the team. Right? If you can
> count on them to be a good wingman.

For example, Beryl, who earned the Top Gun award in the B Course, and by all accounts,

had a successful career and was a good pilot. Despite her performance, she still chose to end

her flying career due to the incompatibility of the career field with her morals and future goals.

She described how she feels after talking to a good friend who is still a fighter pilot:

> "I just go, oh, wow, I don't miss it at all [laughter]. But yet, I think there's the little bit of the ego in me,
> that sometimes doubts myself. It's like, man, if you could have been a little bit stronger, if you, the
> circumstances could have been a little bit different, what could you have accomplished? But I'm very
> much an accomplishment-oriented person."

Her statement indicates that her struggles to navigate the fighter pilot culture were based on

more than her ability to fly and perform well.

Both Bessie and Marina describe the role of work ethic in the fighter community. Bessie

stated that she struggled with some concepts when she moved from one fighter aircraft to

another fighter aircraft with a different mission set. She reported feeling like everyone on base

knew that the only female in the airframe was struggling. Despite a challenging transition, her

work ethic was recognized and valued.

> But if you spend your time thinking about what everybody's thinking about you then it's a waste of
> time. But I know that, in the Squadron, that people know I'm putting the work in. It's way more
> difficult of a climb to come from [her first platform] than basically any other platform. So I had
> really good support in my squadron, letting me know that like, "Hey, yeah, you suck at this, but
> everybody knows the effort's there, and we're going to teach you and get you there."

She continued and reflected on the lesson she learned from this experience. She stated, "I think just that-- I really do believe if you put in the work, and you're-- you can be seen at the same level as all these other guys." Marina also described the fighter pilot's relationship to performance and achievement, "Because what do we do? After we fly, we pick on everything we did wrong. We rarely ever say, 'We rocked at that.' You say, 'Nope. We were one second late. We can make it better next time."

The problematic piece of this is that men don't have to prove their legitimacy before earning the right to sit at the table. Instead, they are given the benefit of the doubt from the start, and poor performance can eventually erode that right. Conversely, women start at a deficit and need to prove their worth in the hopes of gaining the right to sit at the table or be treated as equal. Marina stated, "I can't get away with the same mistakes that the average guy can get away with. I have to be better than average to be judged as average."

Multiple participants described an ideal where acceptance within the fighter pilot community is truly based on performance. They experienced juxtapositions between believing this ideal, and the reality that performing well was not enough to gain full assimilation into the community. Their experiences illustrate an uphill battle to out-work their gender; an attribute they cannot change.

Likability. The flip side of success and high performance for women is that their likability decreases. If women speak-up, they are too assertive, they risk becoming unlikable, and their careers can suffer. Essentially, women become less likeable as they become more successful. Alicia Menendez (2019) calls this the "likeability trap." As the participants of this study work to prove themselves and earn acceptance through performance, they run the risk of becoming unlikable by their peers and leadership, resulting in a different type of suffering.

Beryl describes how one of the first female fighter pilots and now Arizona Senator, Martha

McSally, challenged a simple difference in the male and female uniform regulations. She

describes how she was consequently ostracized for speaking-up despite her success as a fighter

pilot.

> One of the things she pushed was, normally, we have a male flight cap and a female flight cap. And the female flight cap is rounded in the back, so it kind of contours to your head, whereas the male flight cap just stays straight. It's just a parallel rectangle. And she pushed it that – oh, and there's this tradition. So, if you're a fighter pilot, you put a little dip in the back of your flight cap. So, you'd put on your hat, and then you'd take your fingers, and you'd just kind of cup it down kind of in a Robin Olds look where you would see the dipped flight cap on the top. And she said, "Well, you can't do that on a female flight cap." So, she pushed it so female fighter pilots could wear a male flight cap, could do the male, little flap, how you doing thing. And they hated her for it. And yeah, they really ostracized her….it was somebody I wasn't close to. And so, I didn't really get to—but I saw how cruel they were towards her…there was another kind of a confirmation for me of like, "Gosh, even if I'm the best of the best like she was, like it's just, they're never going to like you or respect you."

Ignoring and Avoiding. Multiple participants described employing some sort of ignoring

or avoiding mechanism as a strategy. An aspect of this coping skill is that it requires the user to

minimize their experience. Participants described a conscious choice to ignore and avoid their

thoughts and feelings. Consistent with what we know about trauma, avoidance is a commonly

used coping skill. Avoidance can take many forms, and the participants described several.

Eileen described using avoidance after reporting her sexual assault, "I – I don't know. I

just did. I'm pretty good at compartmentalizing, I guess. I've always been kind of that way.

Like, there's nothing you can do about certain things and so you just move on." Beryl described

her attempt to ignore the sexual inuendo that was prevalent in the culture, "And I just tried to

ignore it. I set my own personal standards of, 'I'm not going to get involved with anybody.' Just

keep trying or just ignore it like it doesn't exist." She described another situation where she was

expected to help her classmates cut out pornographic images. She stated, "I just tried ignoring

it. Ummm, I tried to just stand my ground and like, 'No, I'm not going to cut out the

pornography.' And I just tried to busy myself doing other things."

Bessie described how she sometimes avoids her emotions, when she doesn't want to start crying, "I have a lot of things I want to say, but sometimes I don't say them because I just know I will get upset. And I don't want that. I would rather not have someone be able to think, 'Oh, yeah, she was crying during whatever.' It's not worth whatever I had to say. Several participants described their use of compartmentalizing, ignoring, and avoiding when challenging situations arose.

Learned Apathy. Webster defines detachment as an aloofness from worldly affairs or the concerns of others. In the context of this study, the participants described a process where, over time, they developed a type of emotional detachment consisting of an apathetic response toward others' opinions. Their detachment appears to be a learned coping skill, shielding them from naysayers and critique. When asked how she handled the stress of being one of the first female fighter pilots, Amelia described how she developed and employed this skill.

> Well, I really just got to where I tried-- I just couldn't deal with it anymore, so I went okay. I can't take that on. I'm going to go out every day, every flight, and just do the absolute best I can do. And if it's not good enough, then I know that I leave here [inaudible]. I know that I'll leave here with my head held high. I did the best I could. You know? You can only do so much. Right?

She also described her apathetic response to others not liking her,

> I got this as a question this other day by a relatively young person who was like, so how do you handle that when you know they don't like you? I just look at them and I go, well you can't fix stupid. You know? It sounds silly, but you just have to accept the fact that, if you're doing something unusual, you're going to bother people. We don't care about those people because you're closed-minded and don't want to give people a chance and they're resistant to change. And you're never going to change their opinion if they don't start to change it for themselves. So, you can't let those people define your experience or you.

She also shared how she differentiates between a desire to be liked versus the desire to be respected. She stated, "I think sometimes, in today's society, that we get so wrapped up on the

fact, they should like me. Well no, they don't have to like you. They should respect you. They should give you the opportunity to earn respect, but you can't make people like you. If you're trying, you're going to have a rough life no matter what you're doing, I think." She provided an example of detaching from coworkers who didn't think she belonged, "But I was like, 'Dude, that's your problem. That's not my problem. Maybe you need to find a different community or something.' You know, like, that's not my problem."

Marina discussed, with apathy, how she handled the people who weren't supportive, "I mean, yeah, you run into A-holes everywhere you go, but ummm, for the most part, that has never held us back." Amelia found a quote depicting how apathy can be used as a mental coping skill. The quote resonated with her and became ingrained in the way she engaged with others throughout her career. She stated, "When I finally came through in training, when I was super stressed, I found this saying from somewhere. I don't know who told it to me or whether I read it. Who knows? But it's basically, 'Those who matter don't mind and those who mind don't matter.' It's a famous quote from… I don't know. But that just basically became my—how I was going to go through life." She elaborated on the perspective she developed after tiring of caring about others' opinions.

> I'm like, you know what? The people I care about, they're good with what I'm doing. And if you're not good with what I'm doing, then I don't care. I can't worry about you guys anymore. I can't care what you say about me or what you think about me. Your opinion—if you don't even give me the chance then your opinion is not going to matter to me.

Bessie described how detachment became an adaptive response to deal with the unbearable pressure to represent all women in a positive light. She stated, "Ultimately, I've learned to care less and less. It's like, I know I'm a good pilot. I know I make mistakes. I know I have strengths and weaknesses. I'm not going to let other people's opinion of me change my actions." She described how she worked to release herself of undue responsibility, "Yeah, I think what I was

saying before of not putting the pressure on myself that I'm the representative of females in the military. Just kind of releasing myself from that duty title."

Jackie also described her attempt to detach from a situation that happened to her. When asked if, looking back, she would handle the situation any differently, she responded,

> You know, that's tough to say because you don't-- at least, I never wanted to ruffle feathers or do anything to—you know, you just, I hate to say "blend in," because I was never one to just blend in. But at the same time, I didn't let things phase me. If people said things that were-- not that anybody said hateful, but things that were kind of negative, I was just, 'Whatever, dude. You can have your opinion. You're an idiot for it, but I 'm not going to let you 'bother' me,' was kind of my attitude throughout my whole career. And, 'Move on, like, pssht, whatever. I'm not going to hold onto that. You're—'

Multiple participants also utilized detachment when dealing with the less emotional topics throughout their career. For example, when Marina was asked about her experiences with Aircrew Flight Equipment (AFE) and properly fitting gear and equipment, she indicated that apathy felt like the only option, "To me, it wasn't—I don't know if we just put up with it. It was kind of the only option we had, so." Amelia shares this sentiment and discussed how her apathetic response to some things common in the culture helped her fit in. She described one way that she used to fit into the culture, "Not getting fussed about stuff like, I didn't walk in and go, oh my god, there's topless women's pictures in the bar, we have to take those down. Right? I went, oh. That's just how they do things around here. I'm basically in a locker room. All right." She also stated, "And I was a big tomboy growing up, so all the language didn't—I didn't care. I didn't go in there and try to make it a different place."

Beryl described detaching from aspects of fighter pilot culture that were outside her control. She reported learning to focus more on herself in response to her powerlessness to change the situation. She identified two other female fighter pilots who did not fare well as they attempted to navigate the culture, and she did not want to follow in their footsteps.

> And so, I took more of the mindset of; I can't fix it, so I would have to try to fix myself and ultimately at the end of what I thought I decided, I don't want to keep this going anymore. It's like, well the only way I can fix myself is to remove myself from the situation, and do it in such a way that I don't end up like [Call Sign] and that I don't end up like-- oh what was the other the girl's name. I can't remember her name. But it's like, I don't want to be one of them. And so, how can I fix this and remain, you know, sane [laughter]?

Amelia described how apathy almost becomes a requirement when you are a trailblazer. She stated, "Look at Jackie Robinson in baseball…There's always going to be people like that. There's still people like that. You just have to accept that if you're going to do something like this."

Having a Solid Belief System. Multiple participants reported that their belief systems supported them as female fighter pilots. One participant described how having a strong personal belief system that both helped her and hindered her. She stated, "For me, the line-- I guess getting like super personal, but it doesn't matter. I had made a personal commitment based on my, I guess you could say, relationship with God that I was not going to be sexually active at all until I got married." She described how having her strong convictions helped her when she was faced with the hypersexual aspects of fighter pilot culture, "And so for me, that was very easy because that's my line. And it was also a protective line, you know, so I was able to banter, knowing that my line was set in stone. So, I can banter with you all I want, but that's all that it is. So that was actually easier for me because I had a boundary." She also describes how her upbringing helped her develop clear boundaries around the fighter pilot culture's relationship with alcohol consumption. Yet, the constant need to reestablish her boundaries eventually resulted in burnout.

> But I also grew up in a family-- my father's law enforcement, my mother was the principal of a school, so I was a straight shooter. And I had heard hundreds of stories from my dad and my mom about-- as soon as you get drunk, you're no longer in control. And my personality type is that I do like to be in control. And so, when I was growing up, my parents would be like, "Hey, you're the woman. You're always in control. Now, if you get intoxicated, you're going to lose control." And

so, I personally made a decision, established another boundary like, "I like being in control, and I don't want to be ever out of control, and so I'm never going to get intoxicated with these people.

She described having these strong beliefs before she became a fighter pilot and reported that it helped her avoid some of the difficult situations that she saw other female fighter pilots endure.

And, to me, that was another protective barrier because I would watch other people get intoxicated and then everything went wrong. Like in the other girl, a lot of her drama came about because she tried to keep up with them drinking. And, and then things happened that she didn't know, and then she was out of control, and it kind of spiraled out of control from there. And so, there were lines that I'm not going to cross.

Another participant spoke of her Christian faith, and how it helped her navigate the competitive nature of pilot training. Marina described how her faith assisted her through training, "I have like I'm a, I have a Christian faith, and so I figured that if it was meant to be, then I'm going to work my hardest and I'm going to go. I did want to fly fighters, but I didn't feel like I was competing against anybody other than myself." Several participants described how their faith system helped them navigate some aspects of being a fighter pilot.

Exercise. Two participants mentioned that they used exercise to cope. Beryl stated, "I was an exercise fiend. I mean, I would spend hours running every weekend. If I didn't get six to nine miles in, I didn't feel good. I mean and I had to-- I ran my butt off. That was a huge stress reliever." Marina discussed how important weightlifting is to her well-being. She stated, "I used to be in college, I was a competitive powerlifter, and I lifted, I carried that with me, so lifting weights is my outlet that's my me-time every day, so my hardest days are my rest days when I don't get to workout. I'm kind of mean when it comes to that."

Manufacturing a "Break." One participant discussed how she manufactured a break in flying fighters when it became overwhelming. She realized there were aspects of the culture outside her control that were taking a toll on her well-being, so she accepted an opportunity that

allowed her to continue flying in a different community. Beryl accepted a temporary

assignment flying an Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance aircraft in Afghanistan that

offers a different type of lifestyle and culture.   She stated, "There came this other-- this short-

term flying opportunity. And so, it was a way for me to get more flying hours, to get out of that

atmosphere for a while. And none of the fighter pilots wanted to do it because it would hurt their

egos. And so, I saw it as a great kind of break, a sabbatical, a getaway." She continued and

described how it was a rare opportunity that felt like she'd won the lottery, "It was just going to

be a six-month gig… to give myself a break. And that was just a total timing because that

opportunity has never really come up before. I mean, usually, you get in your platform and then

until your next assignment comes around, you don't switch anything. And so, it was a kind of a

lottery ticket really." Despite feeling relieved and incredibly thankful for a break, she describes

how she had to maintain the fighter pilot persona by pretending to "take one for the team." She

reported the opportunity provided the relief she needed to heal from years of emotional

incongruence with the fighter pilot culture, "It provided all those things. It provided me a way to

take a break and to reflect and to kind of almost heal, in an essence."

Somatic Manifestations of Stress. One participant discussed how somatic stress

responses could "Manufacture a Break." Beryl described how it was common for fighter pilots

to manifest physical ailments and medical issues that she, at least in-part, attributed the

phenomenon to the stressful nature of the fighter pilot career. Beryl stated,

> One girl that I knew, she-- I think the stress, she developed some physical ailments and was like, "I'm done with this. I'm, I'm out of here." So, I really started to notice a trend of-- even let's see, one of my other [airframe] pilots, his wife was an [airframe] pilot. She too developed some physical ailments and kind of got out of it. And so, I was like, 'Wow, this is interesting."

She considered two possibilities: on the more egregious end of the spectrum, that some

symptoms are made-up, and on the more innocent end of the spectrum, that cures aren't actively

sought out in an effort to bow out of the fighter world gracefully. She seemed to believe that the stress of the fighter pilot career does produce more somatic ailments. She stated, "I didn't know if it was-- like the first gal, is it something that you've kind of made up because you can somewhat easily-- I mean, you have to be tip-top to maintain your fighter-pilot status. You have to be-- if you say, if you sneeze wrong, they worry about you and then they isolate you and so it's like, "You know I wonder how many of these situations are fabricated or how many of them are because it's so stressful, your body really does respond with these physical ailments. So that was an interesting thing that I noticed."

Beryl described her own experience with physical ailments that she partially attributes to the stress she was under as a fighter pilot. She stated, "I ironically, I started to get a lot of, we'll just call it chest pain. And I think it was one of those, there again. It was, is this because I'm so stressed? Or is it emotional? Or? And I honestly to this day, still don't know what it really was." In response to her physical ailments, she approached a flight doctor, who immediately sent her for multiple heart evaluations. She stated, "It gave me a block of time I where I wasn't surrounded by everybody, because they are like, 'Well, they're testing your heart. So, let's put you in this back office for a while'. And I started to realize, I was like, wow, this is kind of what happened to all these other women."

Being Just Masculine Enough.   Despite available research showing that male and female fighter pilot personalities are more similar to each other than they are to civilians of the same gender, multiple participants discussed incidents where they felt discriminated against based on traditionally ascribed feminine personality characteristics or having certain personality characteristics that were different than the traditionally ascribed masculine characteristics.

Interviews revealed that traditionally male characteristics are more accepted and valued within the fighter pilot community. Marina describes how many of her personality characteristics, that she considers more masculine and adaptive within the fighter pilot culture, helped her career. She attributes some of these characteristics to growing up with two brothers. She stated, "I credit my brothers for that [her direct communication style] …. they tortured me growing up, so. They prepped me very well." She also pondered how her personality may have contributed to her career choice and associated several adaptive personality characteristics, such as confidence and toughness, with men rather than women.

> I kind of knew what I was getting into, to begin with. Maybe my brothers, and I kind of identified more with the male personalities, like the tougher male personalities, and maybe that's why I picked it. And I don't know, and I don't know as a whole-- I mean, there are definitely other women that I know that are fighter pilots, so I don't know. That's the thing though. And a lot of it is personality-based I think and confidence-based.

Marina also described the conflictual nature of the fighter pilot personality. She stated, "Yeah. Well, fighter pilots, as a whole, we kind of have a bad reputation, even the guys, amongst everyone, you know. "Oh, they're all a-holes. They're all--". She continues and described the purpose behind the strong fighter pilot personality. She stated, "But I would argue that the Air Force trains us to be this way." Like, they train, they train us to be very precise. To find, to make quick decisions. To be accountable for the results. To analyze things quickly. And to find problems." Different ways in which traditionally masculine characteristics are viewed in a more positive light emerged in round one. Female fighter pilots walk a fine line: they need to be viewed as strong and competent while also displaying just enough femininity to remain likeable.

Avoided Strategies

Emotional Authenticity. The participants also described several strategies that were avoided. One stress management skill that was avoided was crying. Bessie stated that one of her

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primary responses to stress and anger is to cry. She stated, "People walk in your office and they close the door… I'm glad they closed their door because I'm like, 'Well, there may be a few tears [laughter].' And I don't want the entire squadron to know I was in here crying." She qualified and felt it was important to know that she's not always emotional. She also reported that she's not crying over mistakes but that she cries more when she feels overwhelmed or stressed about something she genuinely cares about. She stated,

> I don't want to make it sound like it's always an emotional thing. I find it very-- I can make mistakes and stuff. I'm not getting upset at mistakes I make. I'm very happy they're like, "Oh, [inaudible] in the debrief or whatever." But I'm trying to think of the times that-- I think it's generally when I feel like a couple of times [inaudible] where the climb was just too much. I just didn't see how I was going to get from the ride I just did to where I needed to be or what my perception was of what the standard was. I don't know. I'm trying to think of what the primary emotion is when that's happening. I think it's just like when I care a lot about something or I'm trying to explain why. It's generally not tactics related.

Bessie described her curiosity about typical emotional responses to stressful and challenging events. She detailed an experience she had with a male student pilot. She stated,

> I've been the IP in a scenario. These were, actually we were training with the Turks for a while…And I was providing one of the student's feedback and-- yeah, I mean, his response to me was he just stopped looking at me. He was looking straight ahead. I don't know. And just it was interesting to me. I'm like, "Oh, that's like--" Because I didn't even feel like I was being that hard on him. I was just pointing out the things he needed to fix for the next event or whatever, but it's interesting to see people start to shut down or what happens.

Marina described her experience giving difficult feedback as a leader, "Not with the guys. I mean, I've had a few people since I've been a boss that I've had to discipline. But for the most part, I think that they would have been upset, whether it was a guy or a girl disciplining them. I've never really had trouble with the guys." Several participants reported variations of emotional avoidance. The fighter pilot career is highly demanding and stressful. Long term performance at this level produces emotions that seem to be avoided.

Counseling/Chaplain. Counseling from a civilian mental health professional, military

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mental health provider, or by a military chaplain was an underutilized coping skill for all

participants, and it was not naturally identified as a strategy by any participant. When

specifically prompted to speak about their experiences, if any, with counseling or their opinions

of counseling, the following responses were received. Beryl, who listed her mother as her main

support through much of her career, revealed that her mother was a counselor by profession.

She stated,

> And so, yeah, most people don't have a cool mom like that, so just to be able to dialogue. Because that's what counseling, I think, is why it's so great is-- it's not your counselor solving your problems. It's somebody that you can dialog with to bring in a new perspective. Because you're overwhelmed, and you're stressed, and you're not thinking.

Despite having a mother who was a counselor, and an overall positive impression of

counseling, Beryl identified several barriers that prevented her from using the resource formally.

One barrier was the lack of confidentiality regarding mental health or medical issues in the

military, and particularly the fighter community. Beryl stated, "…it's a small base. And so, if

you did go to anything, people would have seen your car there." She continued, "…if you were

gone to an appointment, then they wanted to know what kind of appointment so that they could

put it on the scheduling board, you know?" She also described how the typical work schedule

acted as another barrier to treatment. The long days are not conducive to off-base counseling

with a civilian counselor, which would provide a solution to the confidentiality barrier. She

stated, "You didn't have time. There was, you worked from 6:00 in the morning to 6:00 at

night." The third barrier she identified was her own ego, and how the Air Force trains fighter

pilots to be confident and self-sufficient. She stated, "And honestly, I don't know that I would

have. I mean, my own ego. I think a lot of it too is just ego. Like, you were taught that you were

the best of the best and that nobody is going to be as good as you or relate to you. And so, it's

like, I can deal with my own problems and there's no way to fix what I'm in the middle of." She

also reported feeling like what she was dealing with at the time, was so big that there was no solution, which made counseling seem pointless, "It's like you know, isn't that one of the signs of depression, where you feel like there's no solution? Well, there's no-- because it's, how do you fix a fighter pilot culture? And it's like, well I can't fix--it sounds so big. It's the culture, it's not one particular person or thing or incident." Finally, she discussed a perceived lack of multi-cultural competence, knowledge and understanding, and felt that a counselor wouldn't be able to understand her experience. She stated, "But also back to that word of feeling isolated. I just couldn't imagine that anybody could understand what I was going through. You know, you would have a civilian counselor who would have no idea. Or you would have a military counselor, that was maybe a woman, but had no idea." She stated in an exacerbated manner, "Like, you would have to start from the beginning to explain the challenges and the nuances and I just—"

Beryl also felt that counseling, outside of base Chaplains, was not readily available or very popular at the time when she was flying. She stated that she believes it is more popular now, "We had a male Chaplain who would cruise through the squadron once in a while. But at that time, there was no mention of counseling. It was only if you were suicidal." She feels that it's become more popular in recent years and that the Air Force has tried to get creative to fix their mental health crisis. She stated,

> And the counseling really didn't really become popular I think until maybe in the last six or seven years. It seems like now that I've seen a lot more advertising. We've had counselors come into units and say, "Hey, now I've got a top-secret clearance so we can actually talk about stuff that's top-secret if you want to." That was kind of cool. I was like, "Oh I'd never even thought of that." Not that I'm stressed about top-secret stuff.

Marina, who is in a dual mil relationship, reported going to a civilian counselor for couples counseling. She identified issues with their careers as one of the main stressors that prompted

them to seek counseling. She stated, "Yeah. I mean, I have with my husband because we've had challenges, you know, like I think every married couple does. But specifically, with our careers and stuff." Despite having experience with couples counseling, Marina stated that she did not feel that the counselor was able to understand the military aspect of her life. Instead, she relies heavily on a female fighter pilot friend, who also has a degree in psychology, for emotional support. Overall, she seemed hesitant to endorse counseling as an individual coping skill. Instead, she felt it might be helpful for women trying to decide on the fighter pilot career path or women struggling with self-confidence. She stated, "I really, I really don't know if counseling is—I think maybe in tempering people's expectations. I know a few girls that wanted to be fighter pilots. And they're like, 'What do you mean I have to drop bombs on people and maybe kill them?' Like well okay, I mean you kind of signed up for this." She suggested a couple other possible uses for counseling, "I just think it's more personality-based. Most of the girls I know that have had like confidence issues, I don't know that you can counsel that out of them…. So, I would say that—I haven't really thought of it from a counseling perspective. But I would say that people kind of need to know what they're getting themselves—you just have to know what you're signing yourself up for." Amelia also hinted that she doubted a counselor would be able to understand her experiences. She seemed to prefer using the other women in the CFPA and stated, "You know, there's only so many people you can talk to about some of the things that you've been through. Yeah."

Participants didn't report a negative view of counseling, but several described multiple barriers to receiving counseling services. One important barrier is the perceived lack of understanding. They felt that it would be exhausting to detail the unique aspects of the fighter pilot career to a counselor that couldn't understand. Interestingly, they even felt that military

counselors wouldn't understand their unique experience. They described a situation where the risk of a confidentiality breech, the inevitability of missing work to make reoccurring appointments, and the likelihood that the counselor wouldn't understand their situation outweighed any potential benefit.

Moral Injury

Moral injury is the trauma the occurs when a person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct. Moral injury is further described as the inability to contextualize or justify personal actions or the actions of others and the unsuccessful integration of these experiences into pre-existing moral schemas. Often moral injury is understood in the context of war, but moral injury can also result from repeated and multiple smaller compromises of an individual's moral compass that occur repeatedly over time. Multiple participants described situations where they felt they had to compromise their personal morals to fit in to the fighter pilot culture. They described needing to participate in events and traditions that contradicted their previously developed moral schemas.

Beryl described using one technique where she minimized her more masculine personality characteristics that could be perceived as threatening or competitive, and exaggerated her more feminine personality characteristics so she would be perceived as sister-like. She stated, "I noticed that it was like, 'Okay, we're competing with one another, but they think of me as a sister. At least some of them do. And so how do I be more like a sister than their competition?" She described how she attempted this, "That's where I tried to do more sister-like things, like I would bring in cookies and I would bring in baked bread, and it was something appreciated, and it was like, 'Oh, great. [Call Sign] brought in dessert today.' She described

how the technique worked, but it was incongruent with who she was at the core, and eventually,

became an unsustainable endeavor.

> And it, honestly, I think it did work for them, but for me, eventually, it wasn't something I could sustain because there was so much pressure to be one of the guys and to be like "them", and I just finally got to the point where I was like, 'I can't be one of the guys. I'm not one of the guys, and I can't sustain that for a career or for a long period of time.'

Beryl also stated that the heavy cultural emphasis on drinking did not align with the way

she was raised and her strong sense of morality, "I'm not a big drinker," and she describes the

difficulty she had navigating this aspect of being a fighter pilot. "I was not permitted to *not*

drink. And so, you're the only woman-- and they're drinking eight, nine, 10, 15 shots of

Jeremiah Weed or whiskey or something. And so, I had to come up with a way—like, how am I

not going to get intoxicated?" She listed several techniques used to cope with this aspect of the

fighter pilot culture, but none involved having the freedom to be herself.

> And so, top secret, I didn't tell anybody, but I would go up in front of everybody … I would tip the glass, and I'd smile, and I'd walk back to my chair. And then, I'd take another drink of, you know, the beer that they had poured for me, and I would spit it out. And that was the only way that I could stay, you know, keep up-- was just to not let it go down the pipe. And so, I had little coping mechanisms like that, that ummm, I think kind of protected me a little bit more.

She also frequently offered to be the designated driver, which allowed her to remain a part of

the group and attempt to fit-in without drinking. She stated, "So, I was like, well, I'll drive you

guys. So, I tried to be the DD." Another example of Beryl compromising her deeply held

beliefs was her participation in the sexual inuendo that is a tradition of sorts in the fighter pilot

community, "I think communication-wise, in trying to keep up with them, I would also myself

make sexual jokes. Even though it wasn't me naturally. Ummm, but if I made sexual jokes, it

was a way to kind of fit in." Over time, incongruence can lead to discomfort, anxiety, stress,

and frustration. When the cause of incongruence is linked to an external source, and the individual has little to no ability to change or escape the source; moral injury can result.

A moral injury can also occur in response to acting or witnessing behaviors that go against an individual's values and moral beliefs. Beryl discussed a scandal of sorts where non-flying women in her Squadron filed complaints against her male fighter pilot colleagues. She stated, "It created this ripple effect of—so, the pendulum kind of swung the other way and it turned into, 'Don't talk to the women because you're one complaint away from losing your wings as a pilot." As a result, she was placed in the morally injurious predicament of needing to invalidate the women's' claims to maintain her accepted status with the male fighter pilots.

> Then it became awkward again. Because I've just ignored it. But now the women are speaking-up about it. And now, I'm the bad guy. And you don't want them [the male fighter pilots] to lose trust in you. But now they've kind of lost trust in you because of other women. There's a real delicate balance of like, "Oh, I'm not like that guys." But at the same time, you're like, "But I'd appreciate it if you didn't do that." So, you know.

To maintain trust and camaraderie with her male colleagues, she minimized the women's complaints despite feeling like they were valid and important.

> I'd say I almost had to be more affirmative of them, that they weren't bothering me with what they said. I almost had to belittle the complaints of the other women to maintain their [the male fighter pilot's] trust. Even though I fully valued the complaints of the women. And I understood the complaints of the other women.

Morally injurious events can be as simple as behaving in a manner that is inconsistent with one's strongly held morals and beliefs. The conflict between ones' sense of self and ones' actions can lead to moral injury. Participants in these predicaments experienced a no-win situation, and unresolved incongruence that continues to stand out in their memories.

Fighter Pilot Mindset

Indoctrination. Multiple participants described how the indoctrination into the fighter pilot mind-set began early in Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT). Eileen discussed how a T-6 instructor helped her learn the "attitude of it" after she told him that she wanted to be a fighter pilot. She stated, "I remember him being like, 'Don't walk behind me when we're walking to the jet. Be confident. You walk with me or slightly in front of me.' Like, it was just small attitude things he kind of taught me. And he was like, 'Just be confident in your answer.'" She also stated that she found the mentoring helpful and necessary, "And he just, he really helped coach me through that from the beginning. And I don't know if I would have been able to get through-- that if somebody like that didn't help me out."

Beryl recounted how her indoctrination into the fighter pilot mind-set started the minute she "dropped" a fighter airframe in UPT. Beryl recounted, "And as soon as the selection happened there was like a dividing line into you are now being ushered into the fighter-pilot world." She described the difference in the way they were treated compared to the non-fighter pilots. "All the families were there, and so all the other pilots, they kind of-- because they graduated from the first program, they went to lunch with their families. There was a celebration, but the five of us that were more of the top-end, we'll call it, we were immediately ushered out of the area. We weren't allowed to go talk to our parents." Immediately, the instructors began teaching the fighter pilot "isms." She continued, "It was, Hey, you need to rip these sections off of your flight suit because you're no longer just a pilot you're a fighter pilot and so we don't want you having -- there's an extra little tab on your flight suit. Take that off. Your life is going to be different from now on." Beryl stated, "The initial training to become a fighter pilot really, really worked on establishing the mindset."

Marina described the strength of the indoctrination, and the exclusivity and pride that comes with being an operational military fighter pilot. It's an arduous path that leads to membership in an exclusive club. She expressed frustration toward female Weapons System Officer's (WSO's). WSO's fly in the back seat of F-15E, or the Strike Eagle, and operate the targeting and weapons systems while the pilot is flying. She stated, "Most WSOs I know, like they're in a fighter squadron. They want to be fighter pilots. They call themselves fighter pilots, but they're not. They're badass in what they do. I mean, without them, we would not be as lethal as we are. I just wish they were proud to be WSOs, instead of having to say like, "Oh, I'm a fighter. I fly F-15s." No. You don't really fly F-15s."

Beryl discussed how membership in the fighter pilot club never leaves you. She stated,

> Every time you go anywhere, they're like, "Oh, what did you do in the Air Force?" And you're like, "Well, I flew." "Oh, what did you fly?" "Well, for a little while I flew [aircraft]." "Oh, my gosh, you flew [fighter aircraft]!" Yeah. And so, then they tell all their friends and then before you know it, everybody knows and it's so funny how something like that, where it was kind of an emotionally dramatic time of my life. It, it never leaves you. It will always be part of who you are.

Several participants discussed their indoctrination into the fighter pilot culture and described the "fighter pilot attitude." They also discussed the eternal nature of being in the "fighter pilot club," and the pride that comes with membership.

Post-Traumatic Growth. Eileen described how she organized and made sense of her experience. She recognized the strength of character and resilience she developed because of adversity. She stated,

> Yeah, overall, it has been. I mean there are things I could change or would change, but like. I also think some of those experiences are what made me into the person that I am now… you know what I mean? So, you have to go through adversity sometimes in order to know what it's like to be on either side of it, if that makes sense? You have to know where the negatives are to feel like there's positives.

Growing Thick-Skin. Multiple participants described having thick-skin as a necessary attribute in the fighter pilot world. Jackie attributed some of her love of the fighter pilot culture to having thick-skin, "I have very thick-skin, so things don't bother me … it was very much a good-old-boy culture." Marina also indicated that having thick-skin helped her adapt quickly to fighter pilot culture, "I grew up with all brothers, so walking into the culture and after going to the Academy, it wasn't a big deal. I could dish it out. I am not easily offended." Bessie also described a type of thick-skin. She stated, "I don't think I offend easily."

If a participant didn't enter the culture with thick-enough skin, they were encouraged to develop it. Beryl described her introduction to the development of thick-skin, "We [the male fighter pilots] need to get you to develop thick-skin." Having grown up with older brothers, I have just always thought, "Okay, I'm tough, and I don't complain, and I just do what I'm supposed to do." But I never really thought of-- okay, as belittling one another as developing thick-skin. Marina discussed her curiosity about how thick-skin is developed. She stated, "We try to figure out why somebody could do or say something to me and it doesn't bother me, but if you say it to somebody else and they crumble on the inside. I think a lot of it just comes to personality…. And how you were raised and are you a person that can stand up for yourself? Do you? I don't know. Do you have confidence?" Within fighter pilot culture there is a common mantra that thick-skin is required. Some participants reported having thick-skin while others described struggling with this concept and the ways it can be used to protect systemically rooted sexism.

Confidence. Confidence is a topic that came up in several ways throughout the interviews. Marina described her sense of confidence about flying, "I am lucky because the flying part of it is easy for me so it's a little bit different. Like my husband has always had to work everywhere

we've gone. Like, he's had to work in his upgrades and I am like one of those weirdos. Flying is natural for me. It's not hard. Briefing isn't hard. I don't lose sleep over it." Eileen reported gaining confidence as an Undergraduate at the Air Force Academy and learning to differentiate between being confident or disrespectful, "Umm, but the, but then the Academy teaches, you know, when you're kind of confident you do this or you do that. You know like, that level of confidence is a little bit different, too, if that makes sense. I thought I was being respectful. You know, it was just a different line I think I had to learn, like being respectful, but yet, confident if that makes sense." Bessie stated, "Somehow, getting to the point where you have the confidence. But I think that's really-- if I were to try and give advice to younger Lieutenants, or young Captains, I think that just comes with time and experience, and your confidence builds over [time]-- even for the guys." She offered additional advice about her process of gaining confidence, "The advice of release yourself of the pressure because without the confidence of: I have made it through all these programs and all these upgrades and all these hoops to jump through, it's hard to have the confidence on the other side of it."

Marina described how the confidence that fighter pilots need to do their job can also contribute to the negative reputation. She stated,

> I will say of lately, I feel like they're starting to get more-- we, as a culture, are starting to get whiney. I mean when we're like, "Yeah. We're the best. And we need you to do everything for us." It's like, "C'mon, like." At the same time, I agree with you. That it's stupid that finance is closed every time I try to go do something, or that you know like those kinds of things. But I think that some people are starting to get like, "I'm better than you" and you know, that side of it. Like, there's a negative side of it, if that makes sense.

Multiple participants discussed the role of confidence in their ability to be successful as a fighter pilot. Several described the process they went through to gain confidence early on in their careers. All agreed that is a necessary trait in their profession.

Early Engagement in Individual Sports. All but one participant described participating in competitive individual sports throughout childhood, and two of those participants also competed through college at the Air Force Academy. One participant described playing team sports. They attributed some of their success in a highly competitive and intense career to the early lessons they learned in their respective sport. Eileen stated,

> I was a gymnast for 18 years. So, I was used to being, you know, confident and on my own and always critiqued. So as far as dealing with that, like everybody pointing out everything you did wrong, and maybe saying something good about what you did, was like already kind of there. You know what I mean? And being singled out wasn't a big deal for me.

Jackie stated,

> I swam through college at the Academy. I was a swimmer. And I feel like there were a lot of parallels in flying and performing as in the same, you know, when you're competing for an athletic event. And so, it's kind of that same mental mindset of you put all doubt aside and you just go out there and you, you train to win. I mean, it's very cliche, especially to say it out loud, but there are some parallels. And so, I think having been an athlete helps out in that you just, you put all doubt aside and you go out and do the job. And you don't think about what could happen, you just perform to the best of your ability.

Amelia was the only participant that identified team sports, instead of individual sport, as helping her learn certain qualities and develop the mind-set, "I had very little issue at all with the military culture. You know? I grew up playing team sports, I'm a tomboy, I fit in fine. I didn't have any issues." All but one participant reported participating in competitive sports throughout childhood and into early adulthood. Several participants identified these early lessons in performing under pressure as being helpful in their current career as a fighter pilot.

Family

All participants discussed the interaction between their familial goals, their familial status, and their experiences as female fighter pilots. Specific themes present were: Motherhood, Partnership, and the concept of "Having it All."

Motherhood

Within the subordinate theme of Family, the theme of Motherhood was especially prevalent. The interviews highlighted multiple concerns that female fighter pilots consider when deciding to become pregnant, and consequential planning strategies. The five participants who are mothers discussed their efforts to minimize and navigate the inevitable career consequences resulting from pregnancy. One participant determined that it was not possible to do both, and she chose to stop flying before starting a family. One participant has one grown child, and she reported getting parenting assistance from her civilian husband. Three participants have multiple children and are all married to fighter pilots.

Career Consequences

One concern mentioned by several participants is the well-known negative impact pregnancy has on a female fighter pilot's career. Jackie described her experience deciding to have children, and the burden of being a gender minority in the fighter pilot career field. She described feeling that her decision to have children impacted the entire female fighter pilot community.

I was a little bit on that front edge of women who flew fighters, and I didn't want to ruin it for the rest of the girls behind me, I guess. I felt a little bit of an obligation not to, you know, get, be the first chick knocked-up in a fighter squadron and be Duty Not Including Flight (DNIF).

A successful fighter pilot career depends on the completion of multiple well-established, critical, and time-sensitive milestones. Beryl described the snowball effect that a pregnancy can have on the ability to meet those milestones within the required timeline.

Several of the complications with it being in the fighter world is that as soon as you're pregnant, you're out flying for one year, completely. Pretty much a full year, if not longer. And so that means retraining. Ummm, I mean a little bit. You can usually do it locally. But I'm trying to think. But it also means it sets you back because now you don't have as many hours, you don't have as much experience, you probably missed an upgrade. So now, you're not as eligible for any type of award or anything like that.

Marina echoed this sentiment,

Even though the Air Force says that having a baby is fine and everything is good, if you're a pilot your career suffers regardless. Just because if you're going to have two or three kids that's three years of non-flying. So, my husband and I had exactly the same careers. He's going to end up with a-- well, he retired. But he's going to end up with 1000 to 1500 more hours flying in the long run than I will just because I was not flying for my entire pregnancy and then the recovery.

She also alluded to how challenging it is to resume flying after a substantial break,

I mean, eventually, you can, you can kind of break-even. But it definitely is more of a struggle especially flying fighters, because going back to fighters is no joke after having a baby.

Multiple participants described how childcare needs resulted in career consequences. Eileen, who did not plan her first pregnancy, discussed the ensuing career and personal consequences. She was the only participant to report an unplanned pregnancy which occurred at the end of Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT). She was encouraged to request an assignment as a First Assignment Instructor Pilot (FAIP) out of Undergraduate Pilot Training (UPT), an assignment sometimes viewed as a "career killer." This assignment was the only available option for she and her husband to remain in proximity of one another. Although, it was not considered a profitable career move, it minimized the amount of time Eileen would spend as a single mother while also finishing her fighter pilot training. Even with this concession, Eileen completed Pilot Instructor Training (PIT) as a single mother with an infant. She paused her training while pregnant, and her husband continued with his training. He was already assigned to his first operational assignment by the time Eileen was cleared to resume her training. She described this experience:

While I was pregnant, my husband went to PIT (Pilot Instructor Training). And then he was a FAIP. So then once I went [to PIT]—my son was three months to seven months old. And I was in San Antonio by myself. It was very lonely because everybody in the class was single, and they're all floating the river in their spare time. And going to the bars or whatever. And it was very lonely.

Eileen disclosed how having her son in-between pilot training and Pilot Instructor Training (PIT) resulted in a large time gap where she was working as an instructor, but her efforts weren't counted as instructor time. She stated:

What was difficult is when I had my son, I hadn't gone to PIT, so again, I wasn't an instructor. So, my time as an instructor did not start until a year and a half after I finished pilot training. So, I had a whole bunch of time that didn't count for anything and then I had to go to PIT.

She also described how motherhood affected another aspect of her career, Professional Military Education (PME). PME is the professional training, development, and schooling of military personnel. It encompasses many schools, universities, and training programs designed to foster continued leadership growth in service members. One required PME course for Junior Officers is SOS, or Squadron Officer School. It is a formal training course that must be completed between years four and seven, and it must be completed to achieve the rank of O-4. It is a full-time course that is attended in-residence. Eileen stated, "My husband already had PCS'd to the B Course. And I went with the two kids, took my two oldest by myself for SOS. You know, and that was also difficult and very hard [laughter]."

It's All About the Timing

The participants described several methods used to minimize the career consequences of having children. All five participants who are also mothers reported using some version of timing. Jackie described how she waited until later in life to minimize disruption to her flying career. "We, we, the hard thing was deciding about starting a family. I would have liked to start, we both would have, earlier in our careers. But I didn't want to have kids while I was still flying the jet, you know." Marina also waited to have children, and she described timing her pregnancies with her separation from the Active Duty and transition to the Reserves, "We waited to have kids until we were done with the Active Duty. Just because I didn't want, I

didn't want that deployment schedule and all of the craziness." Marina described the risk of

waiting to have children, "I was old because we waited, so I was just older when we started. We

thought we wanted four kids. And so, if we wanted four kids, we had to jump on it." She

continued:

I really wanted to be the one to raise my kids, so I didn't—and that's just a personal decision. I did not want my kids in a CDC for five years straight before they hit school. But we risked it and had them late, and who knows, I might not have even been able to have kids at that point.

Another method is timing pregnancy to coincide with a non-flying assignment. Jackie

stated, "So, we, we waited an extra assignment. And it all worked out fine and we ended up, both

kids were born at a non-flying three-year assignment." Timing pregnancies later, when older,

increases risk of not being able to become pregnant. These timing methods also assume if a person

wants multiple children, they are willing and medically qualified for back-to-back pregnancies to

remain within a 2–3 year window. Non-flying and "staff" positions aren't appropriate until the

rank of 0-4, a rank requiring a minimum 8 years of service for attainment. If the pilot is on a

traditional career path, they entered pilot training between the ages of 22 and 24 years old. This

makes most fighter pilots 30 -32 years old before they qualify for a career-enhancing staff or non-

flying position. If all these factors align; they have a short window to have children and not affect

the flying portion of their career.

Eileen also described how the timing of her pregnancies with more conducive assignments

and age considerations resulted in a large age gap between her two older children and her two

younger children.

That's where there's an eleven and a half and ten year [age gap], so I had another one when I was a FAIP and then I didn't and then we got back here and I have a two-and-a half and a four month old. So, that's why the big gap is because we were in the CAF and I was flying the [aircraft]. But then I realized; if we're going to have kids, we're going to do it now or we won't do it because I'm getting older.

Another timing method was compartmentalizing adulthood into sections of differing focus. This method assumes that the participant will stop flying before they reach their 20 years of service. Beryl described this method,

Because at the very beginning of my whole quest to be a fighter pilot I was always in the, I want to just go all out as long as I can and be the best of the best, but I want it all too. I do want to get married and I do want to have a family. And so, in my mind, I was just, I was just timing it. Like, "Okay, the career crash course for ten years and then jump into being a wife and a mother in the next ten years."

Participants acknowledged a unique reality of the female fighter pilot's experience. They identified the need to brainstorm alternative fertility options from the beginning of their careers, despite being young and healthy. While most women start this process only after becoming aware of a biological reason they cannot become pregnant; female fighter pilots are faced with this reality simply as a side effect of their chosen career. Although none of the participants had adopted themselves, one participant gave an anecdotal account of another female fighter pilot who adopted. Beryl stated, "One of my other F-16 pilot friends, she chose to just adopt, so that she could still be a mom, but without stifling her flying career." She described what she wishes she had known about the strict timeline, requirements, and challenges at the beginning of her career. She depicts just how challenging it is for female fighter pilots to have a successful career and a family.

I think if you had somebody-- like the day that I chose to go fighters, if I had somebody who sat down with me and said, "Okay, now, what this means is you're only going to fly like here. And then you're going to have to make all these upgrades by here. And here's the period of time that you can get married. And then you probably need a staff assignment to have your two kids. And then you're going to go back to-- and then when you do get married, you're going to need to find a guy who can accommodate all of those things." I guess if you had somebody to explain all of that to you, and say, "Okay, so you're good with only having two kids. Okay, good. And you're good with having a stay at home husband for a while. Okay, good." And then you can kind of go into it a little bit like, "So yeah, you could do it as long as you're good with those expectations or boundaries."

Discrimination

Despite making efforts to time pregnancy and avoid career disruption, multiple participants discussed experiencing discrimination based on their familial status. They described how leadership impacted their ability to have a family and a career.

Jackie described how a Vice Wing Commander's views of motherhood negatively affected her career:

When we showed up to Aviano, we were both working in Wing-level jobs and so we were working for the Wing Commander, but he pretty much delegated to the Vice who we communicated with and did everything with. And this guy was-- so he was about to PCS and my husband was told he's going to be DO, go from a Wing job to Squadron DO. And so, this Vice talked to me and he goes, "I'm sure you're probably wondering what we're going to do with you." And he said, "Well, my plan is just to leave you in place because I cannot, in my right conscious mind, move you into a leadership position with a husband who also flies fighters and two kids." And he said, "Maybe my replacement will have a change of heart, but I cannot do that."

Jackie described the discrimination she experienced throughout her career as amplified when she became a mother: "It was more at the end of the career because we had kids, versus early on in the career because I was a woman." She continued,

Luckily, the next guy didn't have that same attitude. But I look back and I'm like, "How could he tell me that?" I should have said, "Hey, I'll worry about my family. I'll come to you if I need help with something or a different job, but you judge me on my performance and what I'm doing, not who I'm married to and my child situation." That didn't interfere whatsoever in that job. And I look back and I'm like, "I should have filed an IG complaint."

Eileen described her commanders' impact on her motherhood experience. Different leadership styles made her experience either easier or more difficult. In several instances, the more empathetic commanders were also married to female fighter pilots or had recently become parents themselves. She described one commander who was not empathetic to her need to breast pump, but how a lower-level commander stepped in and helped:

And then he [her commander] found out I was using one of the briefing rooms for pumping. He was like, "That's not what briefing rooms are for." I was like, "Okay." And so, my flight commander looked at me and was just-- he was a dad. And he was very understanding. He was-- just come kick me out of my office anytime. It doesn't matter what I'm doing. I will leave my office. And you can use my office.

She described how another commander, whose wife is also a fighter pilot, made getting back to flying much easier after her last pregnancy. She attributed some of his understanding to the fact that he'd just had a baby and watched his own wife go through the process:

He, no kidding, had to disenroll me from that IPUG course and reenroll me in another one, because otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to do an OPR for that year. I could care less, but they wanted to be able to not keep me on student status and give me a job.

She went on to describe how he made the process easier and less consequential while also following the flight regulations:

I would have done the same thing for somebody. He proficiency advanced all those things up to the point at which I was. So basically, it was as if I had just picked up right where I'd left off. I got a couple of number two sorties, and then I started right back into where I was. So, it was just a little bit more difficult, but because my IQ check was still fairly current, and my flying currency was less than 12 months. If they'd gone over 12 months their hands are tied. But because it was kinda in that gray area between, let's say, whatever 226 days and 12 months, that's when it can be a squadron directed program.

Marina also reflected on her experience with commanders while she was pregnant.

There are not as many of them around anymore because, remember, I'm a little bit older, but of men that you work with, and they definitely frown on women flying fighters and being pregnant, and when I got to the child-bearing age when I was in Korea, my boss told me, like, "Oh, you want to have kids next? We need to get you a non-flying job." And I said, "No. I don't want a non-flying job. My husband doesn't want to go someplace non-flying." And he's like, "Well, but if you're going to have kids, you can't go to a flying squadron." And he, I got assigned a non-flying job, which is why I separated into a non-flying job in the Reserves.

Jackie told a story of another female fighter pilot's experience as a single mother:

And [call sign], if you talk to her, she can tell you her story about – she had a commander. She was active duty until her 15-year point, and she was a single mom, and she essentially, you know, her boss said, "Well, what assignment are you looking for next? Where do you want to go? You're up on the VML." And her boss essentially said, "I would never recommend a single mom as a command…any kind of leadership position." I mean, so again, family oriented. So, she was like, "I'm out of here." She went to the Reserves [where she served in several leadership positions].

Overall, it was apparent that the participants spent a notable amount of effort planning how to have children and a successful career as a fighter pilot. The overarching realization is

that women are faced with the false dichotomy of choosing family or career. If they choose both, they must reconcile the career consequences. Although the dual-mil participants reported that their husbands also made career sacrifices for family, they acknowledged experiencing more overt, inevitable, and severe consequences

Partnership

The theme of partnership was prevalent for all participants. They described the impact of their partnership status on their careers and described the importance of having a supportive partner. Marina described how her husband, who is now retired, made things easier for her at work, "So, my husband is now-- he retired a year ago. So, he is now retired, and he is home a lot. And so that kind of helps, because he has become basically like Mr. Mom and manages everything. He is my, my stay-at-home husband and it's been a lot easier to concentrate on work and doing well at things."

Dual-mil

Three of the six participants were or currently are in dual-mil relationships, meaning that both people are, or were at some point, military members. The three participants in dual-mil partnerships are married to fighter pilots or retired fighter pilots. Eileen describes her experience in a dual-mil relationship:

> Obviously, our careers, I say obviously, our careers have had to suffer in progression, if you will, because of the dual military, but I mean I feel like that's just part of it. I think the only way to not have to make sacrifices in your career is to either be single [laughter] or have somebody who doesn't work at all to be able to support from home.

When asked about her experience in a dual-mil relationship, Marina described one positive aspect of having a better understanding of each other's experiences. She also describes a sort of built-in ally and partner in her personal life and at work.

I mean sometimes there are challenges, but it's been kind of nice doing the same thing because we know all the same people and we know what the other person is going through. And when he retired, he was a [leadership position], and I'm the [same leadership position] now, so he like knew my job better than I did. And we're the same rank, the same year, so we kind of have gone on the whole journey together, and it's been nice.

Jackie described a common downfall of being dual-mil. She described how one commander's policies limited what she could do with her husband. She stated, "The Ops Group Commander there said, 'I don't want them airborne at the same time.'" Jackie continued,

That was just a really strange thing, we're like, "Wow, it's been 20 years in this Air Force-- or 18 at the time. We've done everything you can possibly do, combat deployments, you know, flying together; we've flown on each other's wing; we did a "fini"-flight together at [base]. And then we go to [base] and we have this old curmudgeon that says we can't be airborne at the same time? So, that, you know, I think the Air Force as a whole and the fighter community was very, very fair and didn't blink an eye about joint-spouse or women, but if you happen to get an individual commander that was one of those old-school, they could ruin the experience.

Multiple participants also discussed the reality of being apart when in a dual-mil relationship. Eileen stated, "I've been lucky to have good leadership that has taken care of me and my husband to keep us together most of the time. She continued by describing how her leadership mentored her and her husband when they became pregnant, suggesting they accept a less desirable assignment, but one that would allow them to be stationed in the same location.

And they were like, "Oh well, you guys should FAIP." Both of us were like, "No." They were like, "No seriously, you should FAIP because he's going to move on. You are going to be separated for the next year. You're going to have to stay here. At best, you go with him for a year to [base], but then you'd have to come back and be like some sort of spin up to go through IFF, but if you FAIP then we can extend his tour, we can shorten yours a little bit to try to line you guys back up. And so that's what they did.

She describes how that was not ideal for career progression, and looking back, she realizes that leadership was helping them choose the best option in a difficult and stressful situation. She stated "So, we eventually conceded like, 'You're right. That's a much better way to do it, to be together,' because otherwise he'd be in [base] while I was trying to go through IFF as a new mom by myself, you know what I mean. So that would have been really, really, tough." She

continued and described a point in her career when they had a new infant and were unable to be together. "I think it was every other weekend it came down that I would see my husband. So, he would come down once a month, and I would go up once a month. I think maybe once or twice we might have met in the [location] area."

Marina also shared her experience being in a dual-mil relationship, and her ability to stay together with her husband.

> Our timing was pretty lucky because we both went to—we did not know each other then, but we both graduated from the same academy class. And then, we went to the same base for pilot training, and he had an emergency appendectomy and ended up graduating in my pilot class and kind of washed back a class. And then we were in the same FTU class. So, our assignment cycle was always aligned. So, we only spent time apart when-when we went to [country name]. They split us up in [country name]. And each of us went to a different base. We were there for a year tour. But we stayed longer. And we were there for a year and a half.

The inevitability of a separation was a driving factor in Marina and her husband's decision to separate from the Active Duty and move to the Reserves. She stated, "I knew the Air Force was going to split us up eventually, it just kind of was—it was written kind of for us already. So, that's why we went over to the Reserves. Just to have a little bit more stability when we had kids." Jackie elaborated on the need to constantly weigh the reality of being separated with the option of getting out, when in a dual-mil relationship. She attributed their ability to stay together over a 20-year career to good leadership. She stated, "I was joint-spouse and my husband also flew F-16s. And we just played it assignment to assignment. And I'm not kidding, that every time we considered, well, we want this assignment, or we'll try and do this, and if it doesn't work out, we'll probably get out." Overall, she reported getting great assignments despite admitting that they would have accepted any assignment if it allowed them to stay together:

> You know, and so every assignment we had was good. I mean, we had great assignments. And then our last five years, we were pretty much committed at that point, because we're so close to

retirement. But they sent us to Aviano. They always wanted to send us to ALO or UPT or something because they're like, "Oh, we've got you. Two, pilots." Our number one priority was always to stay together. And so, we would have accepted anything to stay together.

She reported that Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) tried to give them bad assignments on occasion, but that their leadership always advocated for them. "And so, AFPC knew that and they tried to give us bad assignments for things we didn't want. But our leadership always took great care of us. So, I will hand it to our bosses who said, 'No, we want to keep you in the [aircraft].' And they would get us good assignments." Even with good leadership, Jackie had a time in training when they were unable to be together. But overall, they were more successful than some couples. She reported, "So, from 2001 when he showed up to [Base] until we retired in '15, we had every assignment together."

Multiple participants in dual-mil relationships reported more difficulty as a mother in comparison to a father when having a family and career. Marina discussed the difference she's observed between being a fighter pilot as a mother, and being a fighter pilot as a father,

> But where I think it's different for us than it is for the guys, there definitely are more pressures on the home front and the mom thing. And I, maybe it's just because we're the ones that are pregnant. And we have to breastfeed. Or you know, it's, it falls more on us. I definitely, it has been more stressful for me when I'm working than it ever was for my husband.

Beryl agreed that women carry a heavier weight, "And more of the weight is on the woman. So, the woman has to really know and have, I think, good boundaries and good expectations and understand kind of how that's going to work."

Civilian Spouses

Amelia, who is married to a civilian, discussed her experience with partnership as a fighter pilot. She thought being married prior to attending pilot training was easier. "Yeah. I think it was slightly easier, maybe, that I was already married because I didn't have to worry about any

kind of relationships with other pilots." She stated, "We met in high school, my husband and I.

Got married while I was still in college after field training for ROTC." She discussed the career

consequences that civilian spouses endure, "He just got new jobs everywhere we went." Bessie,

who is also married to a civilian, discussed how her flying career impacted her husband's career.

She stated that her decision to switch fighter airframes was a decision largely made for his

career:

> So, I was up on the VML and then it was all—it was the first choice on my list. So, there's some people that, coming from the [aircraft] especially, that it's not on their list and they've been getting told to come here. It was on my list because of the location, specifically. If I was single, I would have stayed in the [aircraft] forever. But it's kind of a family decision based on my husband's job and he had followed me around and taken on bad deals for a long time. And it was kind of getting up to the bigger city would be a really good opportunity.

Beryl, who is now married to a civilian but was single during her time as a fighter pilot,

described a difficult dating life. She stated,

> I went through a lot of boyfriends because it was, this is just my 10-year career stint. I'm not looking for a serious husband. And so, I was just constantly-- I mean, I joked I would go through boyfriends faster than running shoes. Just because it was just like-- I called it "sport dating" you know? Like, "Oh let's go have fun. Let's travel to Greece and then that's it."

She describes her interactions with her now husband, "I can't imagine-- you know if I hadn't met

him, I'd still be single, I'm totally convinced." She eventually transitioned to a non-fighter

aircraft before separating from flying all together to marry and start a family.

> But as I started to chip away into that ten-year point-- well, and there were a lot of the guys who were like, "Let's get married." and I'm like, "Marriage? Pfff.... fighter pilots don't get married. That would be horrible. You would actually have to have feelings for somebody when you're out there doing something where you could die." I didn't want to mix those two things. But I really started to realize and to see all of these other women who had kind of gotten past their ability to even establish relationships or to have kids. That started to affect me a lot more where I was like, "Wow, I can't squander all of this time."

Participant experiences with partnership varied greatly, and several common themes

emerged in the data. Overall, the importance of having a supportive partner is crucial for the

female fighter pilot's career. Several dual-mil participants described their commitment to

remain together: even at the risk of accepting a less desirable assignment. Other's reported

feeling supported by their common careers. They described how helpful it was to have a partner

who understands their career. And participants married to civilians described the repeated

career sacrifices their spouses make to support their fighter pilot careers.

Having it All

The on-going debate about whether it is possible to "Have It All" in regard to a

successful career, partner, children, and overall happiness has been waging since the 1963

classic, "The Feminine Mystic" by Betty Friedan. Since then, differing trends in beliefs have

emerged. More recently, Cheryl Sandberg's 2013 New York Times best seller, "Lean-In"

advocates that it is possible to have it all. One resounding commonality in the interviews is that

this is a conversation that only women have. Male fighter pilots don't need to decide between

family or career, instead, it is assumed that they will have both if they want it. The participants

discussed their experiences and attempts to "Have It All."

Eileen describes her situation, "I do have [multiple] kids and my husband, he's also a fighter

pilot but now he's part-time [in the Reserves] and flies for [Airline] as well, so now we're

juggling three jobs and [multiple] kids." Jackie described having multiple small children while

also being in a leadership role overseas:

> We would have liked to start earlier. Thankfully, we were together all the time. But the hard part
> was afterwards. I mean, having kids-- so when we moved to [base] we were brand new Lieutenant
> Colonels in leadership jobs and we had a four-month-old and a two-year-old. And that was the
> biggest challenge was, you know, the OPSTEMPO and having babies and all the [mission] stuff
> kicked off when we were there and we went 24/7 ops and alert and, I mean, one thing after another.
> So that was our biggest challenge was the balance of the family and the Air Force.

Beryl, who remains very close with another female fighter pilot describes her curiosity about their differing life choices. One chose family and one is choosing career, but neither attempted to have both. She stated, "I think we both mutually respect each other immensely. There's definitely emotions involved there-- I think from both sides." Her friend chose her budding career over having a family, and Beryl describes some of what she sees emotionally in her friend, "She's seeing me have a family. So then, it went from—she loves this, and she loves the job, and she loves this. And now she's saying, I've given up my life for this." Beryl also described how she watches her friend's career progress and finds herself questioning her own choice to quit flying to focus on having a family. She stated, "I can kind of look at my life and be like, "Wow! This is where I could be." She embraces the ambivalence and describes the struggle like this, "It's kind of a beautiful thing, at the same time, that we have that ability to do that [openly reflecting on individual experiences]."

When asked about challenges experienced in a fighter pilot career, multiple participants described the struggle to adequately balance family and career. None of the participants were confident that they'd done a good job, and several either directly stated or alluded to feelings of guilt. Eileen stated, "For me it's balancing family life with it." She elaborated,

> You know because when I'm at work I'm enjoying it, I get fulfillment from it, I think it's great and I…I used to find it difficult to leave on time, you know what I mean? To go be with my family and then when I'm there, it's, that's all I want to do too. You know, so it's kinda, it's very difficult to find that balance especially with physically having children versus a husband who, you know, was able to deploy and I did not.

Eileen continued and described her long-standing desire to be a mother. She stated that it is possible to do both, but also recognizes that it is a challenging path.

> When I was a kid, I knew I wanted to be a mom. My mom was a stay-at-home mom and that seemed like what I should do because that's what she did, you know what I mean? And then when I went to the Academy, I was kind of like, "Oh there's a lot of other things out there." You know

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and, to be a mom is still good, but it doesn't mean-- you can have everything you want, it's just not necessarily going to be easy.

Jackie also reflected on her attempt to balance family and career. She admitted guilt and questioned how well she balanced the two. She describes feeling torn between a career that she loves and being a mother to her children.

> But the balance. You know, we look back and I don't know how we did balancing, you know. You try and be in the Squadron. But sometimes, there were days that I just had to-- like a Friday night when you're sitting there doing weapons academics at 8:00 PM. And I finally—you know, there was one night that I literally was sitting in weapons academics in the vault at 8:00 PM and I just thought, "I can't do this. My kids are at home. I haven't seen them all day." And I got up and left. Which is a-- you don't do that, you know [laughter]. But I was like, "I had it. I have to balance this family thing, as well."

The participants described using three options to balance their desire to have a family and a successful fighter pilot career: the out-sourcing of labor, leaving the Active Duty for the National Guard or the Reserves, and leaving flying or the military completely. Overall, participants described an unsettled feeling and the frequent questioning of their choices. Guilt was prevalent, and it emerged in a multitude of ways across the participants' experiences.

Out-Sourcing Labor

A common method used to assist with the demands between family and career is to out-source labor. When asked if it was possible to "Have it All" as a female fighter pilot, Beryl described what she's observed in those that are trying: "They have two kids because that's kind of all they can manage or afford to have a live-in nanny for you know." Eileen weighed in and described having help as a requirement if you are going to attempt to have a family and career.

> I suppose you can [have both] if you got plenty of money, and if you have really good, like, parents who can come help out all the time. That's what I feel like I have the most difficulty with is not being near family. You know, even here we don't have family. It's like, those times when you want to go do something cool or whatever, you don't have that support system, you know what I mean, to just like, help out with the kids. Or you can get a nanny, sure so they can live in with you but then you've got to deal with somebody living with you and it costs a lot of money you know.

Jackie stated how crucial help was for her and her husband while they were in a demanding assignment. She described it as the only option for them at the time, but also reported feeling guilty.

> So that's really what the crutch was for us. We had to have somebody in [assignment] helping us with our kids. And that, and I mean, that was-- it was a necessary evil. I hate to call it evil. That sounds bad [laughter]. But, you know, we didn't want somebody else raising our kids. So that's why you carry some guilt with you. Like, "Oh my gosh, I have somebody living in and they're watching our kids all the time." But we had to because the schedule, it's not like a 9:00 to 5:00 job over there, so.

She continued and differentiated between two different assignments and their need for outside help, "The au pair was critical [in one assignment]. And then our last assignment after that was back to [Base]. And there, we just used before and after-school care. We didn't need a live-in nanny or anything. So, that was a much more stable schedule and no deployments."

Eileen described needing help once when her husband was deployed, and she was Temporary Duty [TDY]. She relied on her parents to take her children, but also alludes to feeling guilt over her children spending two months without both parents. "My kids had to go back to Nebraska to my parents and his parents for two months and that was a long time to not have both parents. My older two have been through quite a bit, but yeah, so that's probably one of the biggest difficulties for me is finding that balance between family and work."

Eileen also reported needing a nanny for her infant son while she completed Primary Instructor Training (PIT), a highly demanding course, without her husband. "So, you want to talk about experiences, I had to go to PIT, and the commander at pilot instructor training was, ummm, [inaudible] with your son because I took him with me." She continued and described how she managed being a single mother while also finishing her demanding fighter pilot training, "I had a nanny. She was great. She lived really close by. I had really easy care and

an easy drive. I had an apartment because they wouldn't let me have a baby in the billeting. So,

I had an apartment."

Beryl verified that out-sourcing labor is a common way to balance two demanding roles.

She described her observations and identified having a family and a career as doable, but not

easy or without compromise.

> It is possible, and there are women doing it. Is it… definitely not easy. Is it the best for the family and the kids? I don't, I don't think so. Because what you hear everybody say is that one person's career ultimately has to take. You can't have two dominating careers. And interestingly a lot of the female pilots, fighter pilots, they end up marrying other pilots. And they have live-in nannies because that's the only way you can do it. And so, like I'll watch someone on my Facebook, and they will show video of their kids with their live-in nannies. And so that's how you make it work.

Eileen discussed the impact and importance of childcare availability. Military personnel

typically have access to the Child Development Center (CDC) on military installations. The

CDC regulations and availability greatly affect the ability to balance work and motherhood.

Most flying assignments require long irregular hours, and the CDC is the only available

childcare option. Typically, the CDC is a great resource, but they often have long wait lists and

regulations that don't accommodate parents with more demanding and irregular work

requirements. When both parents have these work requirements, the situation can be even more

challenging. Eileen described one difficult situation with her CDC.

> …there's a reg in the CDC saying you can't have your kids there more than 50 hours a week. So, my CDC's interpretation of that is you can't have kids there more than 10 hours a day, which that's what the average is, right? But when you're both working 12 hours, you try to offset as much as you can, because you're on different flights. He was in the one squadron, and I was in the other. Whoever dropped off, didn't pick up. That's how we worked it, so they were there the littlest amount, right? So, if you were the latest one to go in, that's who you dropped off. And then that way the other one, who went in earlier, got done earlier, and would pick them up.

She continued and described her frustration at being charged extra when she and her husband

were both at work doing the mission.

> Sometimes it would be a little more than 10 hours, so we found out we can't do that. And they were charging us additional money, and it wasn't a ton, but like it was enough to where I was like, "Why are you charging us like we're—doing our job. We're not out having a good time. We're not even working out right now. We're just doing the mission."

When she inquired about the charges, she was left feeling guilty about her choices as a mother. She described feeling torn between her commitment to the mission and her commitment to her children:

> And then, "Well, you need a letter from the MSG commander that says you can have your kids more than 10 hours a day." And I was like, "Well, you show me where it needs to say that." And they're like, "Well, in the reg, it's 50 hours a week--" I'm like, "Where is it 10 hours a day?" "Well, average, it would be 10 hours a day." I'm like, "Yeah, got it. So, like, 12 one day, 8 the next, we're good." So, then I'm talking to the director and they're like, "Well, I mean it's in there because it's a form of a child abuse." And I was like, "I'm sorry, what?" They're like, "Yeah, neglect." And I'm like, "So you're saying I'm neglecting my kids, but it's okay if it's for the mission, as long as the MSG commander, who doesn't know me or what I do, signs off on it [laughter]?" He is not my boss, and of course, I'm bawling because you're telling me that I'm neglecting my kids.

All participants described the crucial need to out-source childcare, and they also described how difficult it was to balance being a mother and having a successful career. Another method reported by participants was moving from Active Duty to the National Guard (Guard) or the United States Reserves (Reserves), which provided them with more flexibility in their quest to have it all.

Going to the Guard and Reserves

Another commonly used method of balancing family and career is moving to the Guard or the Reserves. This career move often offers more stability and flexibility, as it is possible to hold a full-time position or a part-time position. Eileen stated, "I'm a Reservist and staying here, try to make it easier and better on our kids." Although she never left the Active Duty, Jackie observed how the stability and flexibility of the Guard has benefited female fighter pilots attempting to "Have It All", "So the Reserve is a lot more accommodating and they-- I think

they are awesome." Marina also identified the added stability as her reason for moving to the

Reserves:

> Just to have a little bit more stability when we had kids. I think it was the best decision that we made. My husband still got an active 20-year retirement, which is what he wanted. My kids ... They've never moved. They were born and raised here.

Eileen also described how the flexibility of the Reserves helped her balance family and career

better,

> I like the flexibility of the Reserves and flying the-- I don't know. I like the atmosphere right now of like, "Okay, if you've got something with your kids you can do that as long as you're providing enough times to fly, if that makes sense. You know what I mean? Like if I was blocking something every day, that's one thing, but once or twice a week taking my kids to whatever, whatever then—

Marina also described the benefit of being able to move between being part-time and being full-

time in the Reserves. She was able to go part-time when her children were young, then move

back to full-time as they got older.

> I did OSW and OIF. So those were my only deployments. I've been a Reservist for-- I have never deployed since I joined the Reserves, surprisingly. Because I'm in the [squadron]. So, and I'm actually a part, I'm a part-timer. I took off like four years when I had kids and worked one day a week for four years. And then I came back to flying [full-time] after that.

She continued by describing how this flexible system allowed both her and her husband to

continue with their careers while also having a family,

> We both came to the Reserves. And he worked full time. He was an AGR. And I stayed as a part-timer. And basically, right after we separated [from the Active Duty], we had our kids back-to-back.

Eileen described how the flexibility found in the Reserves fit for her family at the time. She also

describes how she and her husband decided who would work full-time in the Reserves, and who

would fly full-time for the airlines and be part-time with the Reserves,

> So, at the time that this was going down, we had a new infant. And, actually, we got hired when I was on maternity leave. Or we went through the hiring process while I was on maternity leave with my two-year-old, so, I didn't really want to be gone with an infant. You know, like once they're a

little older, I think it's not a big deal, or I believe it's not as big of a deal because I was still nursing too, so it was a lot harder. And it also came down to just kind of what my husband wanted. He seemed a lot more interested in the airline life.

Overall, the National Guard and the United States Reserves offers female fighter pilots much needed stability and flexibility as they attempt to have a successful career and a family. Unlike the Active Duty, military members can remain in the Guard and Reserves until they are 65-year-old; allowing women more time to earn their military retirement. Offering the ability to go part-time allows women to remain engaged in their career while also being able to have children during childbearing ages. The Guard and Reserves also offers many full-time positions that are available if military members are ready to reenter the workforce completely.

The Decision to Get Out

The decision to get out is a complicated choice ripe with emotion. One common reason for deciding to get out is the conflict between family and career. The three participants who are retired or separated from the military: Jackie, Beryl, and Amelia all cited family as a main reason. Amelia described the opportunity to stay in and keep promoting, but instead, she decided to get out when her son became sick.

> I was ready. I was ready. We had our son – that was my last assignment, and our son was two, not quite three. And he was diagnosed with [disease] while we were at [base]. So, he's perfectly healthy now. Happy and enjoying life as a freshman in college. But basically, if I was going to be an [aircraft] Squadron Commander – I was DO at [base]; I was going to have to go to [base]. And I was unwilling to go to [base] for a year while my son was still in [treatment]. Didn't seem like the right choice for any of us. So, it became, well, what are you going to do then? My Wing Commander was super supportive. He offered me a different Squadron Command at a non-flying squadron. And I'm like, you know, I think it's probably just time for me to retire.

Beryl described her decision to stop flying fighters so she could find a partner. She felt that she could not do both at the same time.

> That definitely affected my decision to stay-- kind of to bow out of the fighter world. Because it was like, you know what? I haven't established real relationships. I've only…they've been crutches. I've created these little fun relationships. There was no depth. And so, I definitely got to a

point where I was like, "Am I even capable of having a deep relationship with somebody?" A lot of self-doubt there too of—It's not… I can get a boyfriend tomorrow if I need one. It's not that I have this problem. It's more of, emotionally, can I sustain a relationship because this lifestyle teaches you to check relationships at the door. That they're not meaningful. That they're insignificant.

She continues by describing the difficulty of her choice, and her continued ambivalence about whether she chose correctly.

I probably don't value-- I should, but I don't value being a wife and mom, maybe as much as I should. I'm very accomplishment oriented. And so it is-- and I think probably all women deal with this, but it is very challenging to just to be at home with a toddler, because you don't feel that significance of where would I be if-- so there's that little part of just you're not feeling important.

She counters that with the level of significance she felt while in the deployed environment, and how she feels as she watches other women make strides in the fighter world.

When you're in a deployed environment, you're like, "Yeah, we're getting the job done," you're part of the fight-- part of the team. And when you're in a little small house on the side of a mountain, and there's nobody else and you're like, "Oh, I could be, I could be doing this," or there's this other girl flying the F-35, and you're like, "Well, if I had just-- if I had just stuck it out or found a friend and got some counseling, I could be flying the F-35 too."

Marina discussed her reasons for delaying getting out despite having 22 years as a fighter pilot. One of her reasons is the sense of family she gets within her unit.

I love flying the [aircraft]. I've been doing it for 22 years, and I need to retire. But I don't want to retire, because I don't want to stop flying. I'm not excited about an airline career. And I'm a Reservist so I have been with the same guys for 13 years. I did 10 years on active duty, and now I'm working on my thirteenth year in the same unit. I love, I love the guys that I fly with. Like they are my brothers. They are my family. And I love [aircraft]. So, umm, I feel, I feel l blessed that I could still be doing a job that I like.

The interviews indicated that female fighter pilots who get-out by choice, often cite some sort of family issue as the reason. Multiple participants indicated the moving to the Guard or the Reserves provided them with a middle option that allows them to better balance career and family commitments. During first round interviews, all six participants discussed the role of

family on their fighter pilot careers. The Subordinate themes of Motherhood, Partnership, and "Having It All" emerged in the data.

The Mission

The fighter pilot mission wasn't always an available option for female pilots despite completing the same rigorous training. Amelia, one of the first female fighter pilots, described how she was chosen to be a part of the first cohort of female fighter pilots, "So, they had three criteria. One, you had to not be in a major weapons system. So, the Air Force was going to have to retrain you anyway." Two of the selected females were at three-year pilot training assignments and one female was in the C-21, which are temporary assignments. The Air Force would, inevitably, need to retrain them for a new mission, so ultimately, their retraining did not incur an added cost to the government. Second, the selected candidates were required to have finished at the top of their pilot training class where they would have been offered a fighter aircraft if they were male. She stated, "And then you had to have a fighter available to you when you chose your assignment." The third criteria was a positive recommendation from the current squadron commander. She stated, "And then they called your current squadron commander to ask about your performance. And to see how you were doing and if they thought you would be a good fit."

All participants, regardless of their current military status and overall experience, reported loving the mission. None of the participants reported negative experiences with the mission or flying the aircraft. Despite the added pressures already addressed in this paper, all participants excelled in training and finished at the top of their classes. Instead, the negative, difficult, and stressful experiences were more related to the culture, the added pressure of being the only, and trying to be accepted into the "boys club." Beryl, who eventually stepped away

from flying, describes second-guessing her choice to do so. In moments of solitude, she questions whether she did everything in her power to manage the non-flying aspects of being a fighter pilot. She stated, "And when you're in a little small house on the side of a mountain, and there's nobody else and you're like, 'Oh, I could be, I could be doing this' or there's this other girl flying the F-35 and you're like, 'Well, if I had just—if I had just stuck it out or found a friend and got some counseling, I could be flying the F-35 too.'"

Commissioning Source

Multiple participants discussed their commissioning source, and their experiences commissioning into the Air Force. The Air Force has three commissioning sources: The Air Force Academy, Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), or Officer Training School (OTS). The three commissioning sources are structured differently, but each source culminates with the swearing-in of new Air Force officers at the rank of Second Lieutenant. Multiple participants attended the Air Force Academy, which is a rigorous four-year service academy where graduates incur a service commitment in exchange for their Bachelor of Science degree. Acceptance into the Air Force Academy is highly competitive and requires four years of intense training and education. Several participants describe their Academy experience as being formative while others highlight the more difficult aspects of the experience. Bessie relayed a story about a gay friend who attended the Academy. She stated, "She has a wife, and so she was gay at the Academy before Don't Ask, Don't Tell. She immediately got kicked out for it." Eileen reported that she attended the Academy as a gymnast, "But I ended up finishing – doing all four years in gymnastics there." Beryl also attended the Academy. She stated, "I went to the Air Force Academy. I would say, the majority of Air Force pilots go through the Academy. And then there's a lot through ROTC, and then there's a portion that are from the Guard." The Guard

sends their pilot candidates through OTS.

Marina reported meeting her husband, also a fighter pilot, at the Academy. "Our [her and her husband] timing was pretty lucky because we both went to-- we did not know each other then, but we both graduated from the same Academy class."   Multiple participants discussed their experiences at the Air Force Academy. After commissioning, officers who are medically qualified to fly proceed to pilot training at several different pilot training bases.

Training

Participants discussed their varied experiences in pilot training. Bessie reported having, an overall, positive experience in training, and she stated that it would have been difficult to deal with negative experiences. She reasons that she may not have known what was acceptable or unacceptable due to her inexperience. She stated, "I'm not sure I had any—looking back – experiences at pilot training that I thought were really out of line. I think it would've been tough. If I would've had experiences at pilot training at that time, I wouldn't have known that it wasn't right. I think it would have been tough to deal with." Jackie also reported having a positive experience in pilot training. She stated, "I liked pilot training, I had a great experience. I did very well. "

Marina also described having positive experiences in pilot training. She stated, "Well, since I went to the Academy, pilot training was my one year of real college experience, so I had a blast. I had a blast at pilot training. It was, it was challenging, but it wasn't any more challenging than I kind of anticipated, if that makes sense? UPT was awe…I loved UPT." She also described her FTU experience as enjoyable. She stated,

> I went through the FTU with all the same people that were pretty much in my UPT class, and then I, everyone else-- my class, we were all Lieutenants, and all of us except for one were in the same Academy class, so most of us knew each other already, and it was a lot of

fun. I've had a lot of fun along the way. I haven't really had a bad assignment, so I've only, I've only run into a few bad people along the way, but for the most part, I've had awesome assignments.

In pilot training, students compete for a class ranking, which dictates which airframes students are eligible to receive. Marina described her competitive experience. "You know, I never really, I never really looked at it as-- I think some of the guys always competed against me, but I never looked at it as competing as other people. I just always went out and tried to do the best that I could."

Eileen described the atmosphere of the advanced trainings that follow UPT and IFF. These advanced trainings are typically more cooperative and focused on learning. She stated, "We all try to make each other better, like in a debrief. And there's not usually this like, 'You, you know, you're terrible.' It's not like that, at least not in the CAF it wasn't like that, and it doesn't seem to be like that here even in the B-Course anymore." She detailed the more recent attitude at the training bases, "… it's like, 'Alright, let's do this, let's be safe, let's do it the best that we can, and if we don't know the answer to something, let's go look it up together.' She acknowledged that it was different at pilot training and Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals (IFF). She described a more intense and less cooperative environment, where the focus was on evaluation versus learning. "You know rather than like, like it was in pilot training where it was more like, a little more like that, you know what I mean, kinda the IFF, I really saw that more in IFF than…"

Again, the participants described their experiences in pilot training as mostly being positive. They all reported performing well and enjoying the flying and training aspect of fighter pilot training. Throughout UPT, students are deciding what type of aircraft they want to fly in

the operational Air Force. The most competitive aircraft are the fighters. At the end of UPT,

pilot students receive their aircraft assignment at an event called "drop night."

Dropping Fighters

Multiple participants discussed how they decided to compete for a fighter airframe and

how they performed well enough to earn one. Beryl described the process, "You go through

pilot training, and then you get through initial T-6s, and then you get selected. And they say it's

based on the needs of the Air Force, but it's also based on your performance in the T-38s. So,

you start with a class of about 30, and then they take the top 5 to go into the T-38s." The first

aspect of dropping a fighter is choosing the career path. Being a fighter pilot comes with a

unique lifestyle, and students must decide what type of lifestyle they want for the duration of

their career. Beryl stated, "That initially, was a hard decision for me because there's the, 'Wow,

it would be so cool to be a fighter pilot,' but yet, a lot of people would say, 'I don't like that

lifestyle. You don't want to have the lifestyle.' She described how her ego played into her

decision. She stated,

> There was one guy who was ahead of me in capabilities. And so, he could have become a fighter
> pilot. And he was a close friend going through the training, and he's like, "No. I don't want that
> lifestyle. I'm not going to do it." But I kind of was a little bit-- my ego was like, pssshhh, "I can do
> it. I'd rather just go all out now and try for it."

The second aspect of dropping a fighter is performing well enough to earn the option. Only

pilots that finish in the top of their class are given the choice to fly a fighter aircraft. Class

ranking is mostly based on flying and academic performance, but there is some consideration of

peer rankings and flight commander ranking. Beryl stated,

> I did have…at that level, there were other guys who really wanted to be fighter pilots, but I was
> ahead of them. And part of the scoring in how you would become a fighter pilot, or who would get
> selected for those five positions, was a peer ranking. And so, I had—, one of the guys who wanted

to be a fighter pilot since he was like five years old, he started trying to manipulate me into not wanting it.

Beryl described this experience as being her first introduction to the "dog-eat-dog" nature of the fighter pilot culture. She stated, "And that was kind of my initial, I guess, realization that it's a really kind of a dog-eat-dog world like, "Hey, we are going to be constantly fighting each other. We're not really friends, even though we're trying to pretend to be friends so that we can rank each other higher or lower." Beryl described her experience of "dropping" the fighter training track, "I ended up getting selected for T-38s, and as soon as the selection happened there was like a dividing line into you are now being ushered into the fighter pilot world." Once in T-38's, a student is guaranteed a fighter or a bomber aircraft, but the specific airframe is still dependent on performance. She described her T-38 follow-on training, "We're training in T-38's and then it's still competitive because you're competing for whatever spots are available."

Later in her career she was faced with another situation where she could again choose to continue flying the [fighter airframe] or transition to an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, aircraft with a different lifestyle. She sated,

> I had the decision. I could jump back in with the [fighter aircraft] grind and keep going. Or I could take this new assignment and it would be more like a three-year break where I could still always go back to the [fighter aircraft], but this was a sure one-time thing. They're standing the program up for three years and then they're going to stand it back down. Do you want to do it? And so that was a huge decision point because it was like, your future… I stuck with the [ISR aircraft] and yeah.

Marina described how she ended up flying and her surprise when she loved it, "I didn't know if I was going to love flying. It was just, I wanted to try it because I didn't want to sit behind a desk for my whole career, and I loved it and I was good at it and it sort of surprised me. An important aspect of pilot training is the experience with instructors. Multiple

participants described their experiences with the instructors and the impact they had, either negative or positive, on their budding careers.

Instructors

Multiple participants described their experiences with instructors while they were students. Several participants discussed how rare it was to encounter a female instructor pilot. There were very few female instructors, and this appears to be the point in the process where the participants start identifying struggles, although they don't center around flying, performance, or success in training. The issues they disclose appear to be more related to the social/cultural aspects of being a fighter pilot. Jackie described encountering very few female instructors while she was going through her flight training. She stated, "We didn't—so, [Call Sign] was an IP at [base] when I went through the B Course, and I met her. Simply met her, and thought, 'Well, that's cool, you're the first [aircraft assignment] girl,' you know, so, but no continued talks." She reported positive experiences with instructors overall, but she emphasized the positive impact that having a few female instructors had on her experience. She stated, "I had great instructors. There were a few women that I knew that were FAIPS that I knew from the Academy that were T-38 instructors when I got there, and they were incredible, incredible mentors."

Marina described her rare encounters with female instructors. She reported, "Well, there were a few. So, the combat ban on women in fighters ended just a few years before I went to pilot training, so before all that, all women were getting heavies." She detailed how she had one female T-38 instructor who hadn't been trained in a fighter platform yet due to the ban recently ending. She stated, "There was one of my T-38 instructors, obviously she hadn't flown—we didn't have any fighter pilots, female fighter pilots at the pilot training base at the

time because the ban had been so new. So, when I went through pilot training, the first women were just starting out flying fighters."

Bessie stated that it was difficult without any female instructors and she described feeling very excited when a female instructor arrived at the schoolhouse when she was in T-38s. She stated, "I think it's difficult too, because in T-38s, there's no female instructors, so when I-- it's kind of wild. I'm trying to remember her now. Right as I was leaving, there was a female instructor that showed up, and I never got to fly with her. I'm forgetting everyone's name. I was stoked that she was there and was like, 'Oh my gosh. This is awesome'… blah, blah, blah."

The participants identified both positive and negative experiences with instructors over the course of their training. When experiences with instructors were negative, there was often an intersection of experiences of sexism. Eileen described her experience with instructors as being positive despite being sexually assaulted by an instructor on a cross country training flight. She stated, "Besides that [the assault], it was good. I had, umm, pretty good instructors." Beryl also disclosed experiencing an instructor that sexually harassed her. She detailed some of their interactions,

> Then there was an instructor who was very flirtatious. And kind of manipulative with it. So, like he'd yell down the hallway, "Hey, [Name] did you put my name by yours so that we could fly together? Because you really like me, don't you?" And it was like, first of all, no, we don't touch the board at all. And now you're insinuating that I like you, and what does that have to do with anything?

She continued and described how she was put in a difficult position, because on the surface, he acted like an ally, but the intentions were ill. She described this experience,

> And even though he was probably my strongest ally as like, "Hey, we've got a woman." For him, it was more of a-- probably more of almost a sexual ally. Like, "Hey, if I'm really nice to her, when they're done with training, I might get something out of it." It was that kind of feeling. And that actually followed on after I was done with my training, which kind of confirmed for me that's why he's being so friendly.

Bessie also reported mostly positive experiences with instructors. She highlighted one

instructor she struggled with, but she was unsure whether it had anything to do with her sex.

She stated,

> So that was really the only person there that I felt wasn't-- because, I mean, he was one of my IPs, I flew upgrade rides with him. And I always hated it. I felt like he just gave me the minimal info and would just-- he would do this to other people, though, I would try to mission plan with him and he would just be like, "Well, we'll just see what you got tomorrow." And just really aggressive about stuff. And I'm not sure it would have been any different with the guys though. So, I wouldn't highlight that specifically.

Bessie also described the incredible pressure she felt to make a positive impression on the

instructors in UPT. She stated,

> I really felt like I had to make a first impression, an epic first impression with every single instructor encountered, because I just didn't feel like I was getting the benefit of the doubt. I felt like people walked into a brief thinking I was going to fail. Or thinking I wasn't going to measure up. Or I was going to make errors. And the realistic thing is everybody's making errors but, for some reason, I really put a lot of pressure on myself to make a great first impression.

She described how her experience in the [aircraft] community as feeling different; a difference

that she attributes to the number of women in the [aircraft] community. She stated,

> And it wasn't until I stepped into the [aircraft] squadron where there have been a ton of trailblazing awesome females in the [aircraft], and I was like, "Oh. I'm on the same-- they have the same expectation of me as every other student in my class." And it was just this really weird realization. And then the [her first fighter] community, honestly, was awesome.

Bessie reported one negative experience with an instructor. She stated, "I was pretty

convinced on one of my checkrides that I didn't get as good of a grade because of this guy's

bias." She detailed the experience, "So, basically, on your formation checkride, you're in one

jet, and another student is in another jet, and then you lead for some of it; they lead for some of

it. And so, I got to see exactly what this other student is up to compared to me, and I got a way

worse checkride score than he did." She described the outcome with hesitation, "And I really

felt like that IP that I had was really just like-- I don't want to say had it out for me but just really wasn't-- the baseline going in was way lower or higher - I don't want to say it- than for all the guys."

Beryl also described a negative experience with an instructor. She reported, "I had an instructor who flat out said, 'I can't fly with her. I can't fly with a woman.' She's, she just 'She doesn't listen well. I don't think she's learning. She's not capable—' I mean, there was lots of reasons why he didn't think he should fly with me. So, he never flew with me again." Beryl described how the instructors made training more difficult on her, and how they "got into her head" causing her additional self-doubt. She stated,

> They called my name as winning the Top Gun award, and I was just flabbergasted. I literally, my mouth opened, and I looked at all the instructor pilots that were sitting there, and they were all smiling, and I said, "Is this a joke?" Because they had been so hard on me like, "We're going to kick you out. You're no good. It's horrible." And then I'm like, "How can you say that I'm horrible and then I win this award? Like, you're messing with me. This must be a joke." And they're like, "Zip it. Go get the award [laughter]."

Only one participant, who's now an instructor herself, gave an example of an especially positive experience with an instructor that occurred during her transition from [one fighter airframe] to [another fighter airframe].   Bessie described the transition as challenging, but she appreciated the way the instructors recognized how hard she was working. She describes feeling how she was given the benefit of the doubt; an experience she hasn't always had. She stated, "I had really good support in my squadron, letting me know that like, 'Hey, yeah, you suck at this, but everybody knows the effort's there, and we're going to teach you and get you there.'" Another experience of pilot training is the risk of washing out of training, and multiple participants reported their experiences with this aspect of pilot training.

Washing Out

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Washing out is a term used when a pilot student doesn't achieve passing scores in a training program. Subsequently, they are funneled into a different career field; a process officially called "reclassifying." Bessie discussed being aware of her "only" status and that female students were washing out at a higher rate than the male students. She reported,

> It was interesting in pilot training how I really felt a need-- and I guess to back this up. I didn't think any of this stuff in pilot training. It wasn't until I got to the [airframe] B course that I really felt like, there, I was just one of the students. I was just another Lieutenant in their B course making student errors. I didn't feel any different than any of them and it was really weird because I suddenly, in retrospect, realized that, at pilot training, females are so few and far between. And, honestly, washing out at a higher rate and just they talked about-- I feel like everybody knew there was only two girls in T-38. So, I just felt very aware of being the only.

Bessie provided her thoughts on why female students washed out at higher rate when she was going through pilot training. She attributed much of their struggle to being a minority and to a lack of female mentors. She stated,

> I honestly think some of it is that when a female LT starts struggling, they just think that like, "Maybe I'm just not cut out for this." And it's because they don't have the-- because it's what I feel happened to the girl on my class. She started hooking rides and struggling. And I think she just started questioning herself, so she was-- just as far as diversity goes, female, Hispanic, gay. So just a lot of things. And I'm sure that there wasn't someone there that she looked up to that was like, "Man, that person has been through the same things I have," and like, "Look where they're at," and someone to look up to.

She described her observation that female students didn't get the benefit of the doubt when they struggled. Instead, there is a default assumption that they may not belong versus the assumption that a concept could be taught differently. She also described a systemic ignorance about the added pressure faced by minority students. She reflected on one incident that occurred in pilot training. Now that she is an instructor pilot herself, she has a different perspective about the incident and how it was handled.

> And yeah. I mean, I think, in her case, she started struggling, and it just got worse and worse and worse like-- usually, when you're struggling, you hook a ride. It's a wake-up call for the whole squadron and the whole flight, whatever it is. It's like, "Hey. This person either has a different learning style. We didn't do the academics required; retraining is required. This IP wasn't teaching

> it right that's why--" I wasn't in T-1s with her, and she washed out with T-1s, but it just - from an outsider's perspective - seemed like when the retraining was required, there was just more questions of like, "Well, should she even make it through," not like, "Oh, we need to find a new way or different way or--"

She highlighted the additional self-doubt that often accompanies a minority status. She felt a female student pilot needs a higher level of personal commitment to endure the grueling training; especially when encountering the inevitable challenges.

> I don't know. And it probably just has to do with a lot of self-doubt of like, "Well, I'm not the same as these people and--" because she didn't always want to fly. She just did really well at her ROTC attachment, and they were like, "Oh, hey. You could get a pilot slot with these scores," and she's like, "Oh, cool. That's what the Air Force is all about," so just not a huge commitment to it personally. And then once adversity struck just kind like, "Well, maybe this just isn't something I'm meant to do,"

Amelia described her interaction with a female student that was washing out when she was a pilot training instructor. Her description details a very lonely experience as the only female student. She stated, "Because she's a Lieutenant and I'm a Major and I'm an instructor and she's not-- I mean, we're talking a little bit, but she's not exactly opening up to me. Just trying to give her whatever support I can." Multiple participants discussed the washing out process, and they offered anecdotal accounts of incidents where minority status and being the only, contributed to a higher washout rate for female students.

Deployment and TDYs

Participants described deployments and TDYs as one of the most memorable and enjoyable aspects of their careers. They also listed missed opportunities to deploy as regrets. Eileen reported that her single biggest regret about her experience as a fighter pilot is not being able to deploy. She stated, "It's very difficult to find that balance especially with physically having children versus a husband who was able to deploy, and I did not. That's probably my biggest regret, you know, when my squadron was gonna go to Jordan and they were planning to

go there merely as a presence and to just do CT training while they were there." She continued and described the difficult choice she had to make.

> They said, "Well, you could go to the Wing, which would help you get to your Major's board because you were a FAIP," and we had multiple FAIPs, we had four FAIPs at Misawa passed over for Major… "This would look good and we could get you a Wing Strat and you could go to the Wing and be attached. Or you can go deploy with us for six months to fly CT."

She chose to stay home and bolster her promotion package, but described being excited when she thought there might be a need for more troops after her unit had already deployed, "So having not been able to deploy, and when things did start going when my squadron was over there, I thought they were going to do a request for force, so I got everything done within a week then they decided not to….so we never ended up deploying out there with them." She reported that her husband was able to go again the following year, and she again, couldn't go. She explained, "And then the next year the other squadron went, my husband went for six months, so." Jackie also reported missing out on TDY opportunities due to her dual mil marital status.

> I did miss out on some TDYs because my husband … I was attached to the squadron he was the DO of. And so, they, you know, if there was a TDY to Bulgaria or to Spain or something like that, we both didn't go. And I was the sacrificial lamb because I was the attached flyer versus the assigned flyer. So, I was the one that stayed home. So, I missed out on that type of thing. Which sucks.

Marina reported deploying twice, "I did OSW and OIF. So those were my only deployments." She also mentioned that her husband was able to deploy more than her. She stated, "So, my husband deployed three times." Marina reported that her deployment was one of her favorite aspects of her career. She stated, "I think about being deployed, and that was always my favorite time, because you just are down and dirty in the mission. And you don't have to worry about—at least when I deployed, don't have to worry about laundry or cooking food or cleaning a house. It was just 100% like doing what you are trained to do." She detailed that she no longer gets to deploy due to her leadership position, "That's the part that I miss the most. I

am in a deployment position, but I'm an [senior leader] so I don't, like, nobody wants me to go anywhere with them, let's be honest."

Multiple participants described the rewarding nature of deployments and TDY's. Several of the dual-mil participants noted that their husbands deployed and went TDY more frequently while they stayed home.

Flying the Jet

Some participants described flying as being easier, while others emphasized the challenge and discussed times where they struggled. Regardless of the ease at which it occurred; all the participants finished at the top of their classes. Marina described how both she and her husband dropped fighter aircraft. She stated, "I had already gotten my assignment. He was in the class behind me actually. Three weeks behind me, and-- but he was number one in his class, and they had already determined that. So, he had whatever he wanted out of that drop. And that was a [aircraft], and I had already gotten a [aircraft]."

Multiple participants described a natural flying talent. They reported that they found certain things easy while they observed others struggle. Eileen stated, "But T-6 was so, such an easy plane. It wasn't difficult either time." Marina also reported that flying was easy for her. She compared her and her husband and stated, "Like my husband has always had to work everywhere we've gone. Like, he's had to work in his upgrades, and I am like one of those weirdos. It's, flying is natural for me. It's not hard. Briefing isn't hard. I don't lose sleep over it."

Bessie detailed her transition between two fighter airframes. She described struggling with aspects of the transition. It's important to point out that she voluntarily accepted an additional challenge when she cross-trained to one of the Air Force's newest fighter jets instead

of remaining in the [aircraft] where she was already experienced and proficient. She stated, "And then I finished the-- I did the transition course and you go right into the instructor upgrade, which is painful when you didn't come from the [fighter aircraft] where all the mission-sets are basically the same. So, for me, I did air-to-air, like long-range air-to-air. I did that one time in the T-6, and then I was expected, on the next time I did it, to teach to an instructor level."

Beryl reported loving her experience flying the [aircraft], and she described ambivalent feelings about the complexity of the aircraft. She stated, "And so flying the airplane, I love it. The [aircraft], very easy aircraft to fly. Your first flight, you're by yourself. It was very complex. 16 different switches on the hands-on throttle and stick. So, a bit overwhelming. It was challenging, though."

Jackie discussed her experience flying the F-16, "Well, the opportunity to fly the airplane, the [aircraft], I just. I look back-- since I'm so far removed now, and I look back and I'm like, 'How in the heck did this little girl from [state] ever get to do that?'" She was not raised in a military family or around aviation. She stated, "You know, I mean, it just blows my mind. I'm not from a military family. And how I ended up in the Air Force is kind of a, not crazy story, but a little bit unique. I wasn't somebody that grew up saying, 'Oh, I want to be a pilot, I want to fly airplanes.'" Finally, she described feeling fortunate for her flying career in the Air Force, "You know, so to fly the [aircraft] is for one was just an amazing airplane. And then a great experience. I loved every second of that." Marina also felt fortunate to fly the [same aircraft], "I love flying the [aircraft]. I've been doing it for 22 years, and I need to retire. But I don't want to retire because I don't want to stop flying. I'm not excited about an airline career. And I love [aircraft]. I feel blessed that I could still be doing a job that I like."

The participants described their experiences in training and flying the jet as straight-forward. They all described loving their careers and feeling thankful for the opportunities they had. None of the participants described an inability to perform at the most elite level of aviation. Instead, the struggles they described indicate additional pressure due to being a minority, experiencing sexism, and the effort exuded to be "one of the guys".

Summary of Findings from Round One

First round interviews provided great insight into the experiences of female fighter pilots in the United Stated Air Force. The following four categories emerged from the first-round data: The Mission, Family, Fighter Culture, and the Internal Experience. The theme of Being the Only was present across all other categories, and all participants reported experiences unique to being the only or one of very few females within the fighter community. It was clear that leadership quality and the exposure to other female fighter pilots had the ability to positively impact participant experiences. First round data analysis left me with additional questions about the following topics:

1. How prevalent is military sexual trauma (MST), and how effectively did the institution respond to reported incidents?
2. How prevalent are morally injurious incidents? And if participants report moral injury, what were the circumstances surrounding the injury?
3. What are participants' experiences with likeability, and how did their ability to fit-in influence their careers?
4. What coping skills allowed participants to perform at an elite level despite additional barriers, and how did they learn these skills?

It was clear in the first-round interviews that participant outcomes and the overall quality of their experiences vary while also merging around common themes. Further inquiry to the experience of female fighter pilots through a second round of interviews further informed the developing

conceptualization and assisted in the continued dissection of the subtleties present in participant

experiences.

CHAPTER IV

SECOND ROUND ANALYSIS

Chapter IV continues to provide a framework for participant experiences of being a female fighter pilot in the United States Air Force. Some areas of first round data and analysis were confirmed in round-two, and some areas are reconceptualized. Last, I identify new data and clarify data collected in the first-round until the significance of the lived experience is sufficiently described and felt in a deeper manner.

Review of Procedures

 I emailed all six participants who were interviewed in round-one to participate in a second interview. Round-two interviews took place approximately eighteen months following round-one interviews. All interviews were conducted via Doxyme.com, a telehealth platform, and were between 50 minutes and two and a half hours in length.

I adhered to a semi-structured interview process for round-two interviews, asking the following questions to expand round-one findings and seek saturation about the participants' lived experiences as female fighter pilots.

1. One thing that people have talked about is the experience of being the only or one of a few women. Can we start with you sharing what you brought to the interview that represents some of this experience for you?
2. Another thing people talked about in pilot culture (like many cultures) is there is often an in-group and an out-group. Have you had experiences of feeling like you belong and are accepted? Like you don't?
3. Looking back on your career, are there times when you experienced internal conflict with your personal beliefs or felt inauthentic?
4. One of the most sensitive things participants have talked about is the prevalence of military sexual trauma and sexual harassment. Do you have any experiences you'd like to share about either topic?
5. Tell me more about how you learned to manage the criticism, pressure, and stress of performing at an elite level.

I employed follow-up questions depending on the participant's response.

I submitted the six interviews to an online transcription service called Transcribe.Me for transcription. This transcription service is Health Insurance Portability and Accountability ACT of 1966 (HIPPA) compliant. I reviewed all transcripts for accuracy and corrected military jargon prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

Like round-one data analysis, I conducted three rounds of coding with each participant's transcript. First, I horizonalized the data by identifying expressions relevant to each participant's experience as a female fighter pilot in the United States military. In the second round of analysis, I reviewed the identified expressions and eliminated those unnecessary to the understanding of the experience. I also eliminated the expressions that could not be abstracted. Last, I grouped the remaining expressions into larger groups to represent the core themes of the experience. In the second-round interviews, I highlighted expressions that were new and did not emerge during first-round analysis. I utilized direct quotes from several transcripts to vividly describe and ground each theme in the data.

The following section will contain a textural-structural description of the female fighter pilot experience. I will use thick rich description to explain the core themes found in six transcripts. Emerging contextual factors are also critical to understanding the female fighter pilot experience, and I will discuss and support these using direct quotes from the six second-round interviews. Finally, I will identify themes as being new, as existing but gaining additional context, or as changing.

I constructed a mental model of the relevant themes using the NVivo mind map tool. This mental model of the important themes includes broader subordinate themes, themes, and

sub-themes (see Figure 2). This mental model depicts the framework of how I came to understand the experience of being a female fighter pilot after analyzing the six second-round interviews and writing this chapter.

* "I JUST WANT TO DO MY JOB." *

* Deployment & TDY
* Flying the Jet

* Training
* Success

THE MISSION

* Motherhood
* Partnership
* Having it all

FAMILY

Systemic Sexism *
Ambivalent Sexism *
Institutional Betrayal *

Sexism

Manufacturing a Break: BURNOUT

Moral Injury

Fighter Pilot Culture

Internal Experience

Community Difference *
Camaraderie & Cohesion *
Hypermasculinity *

BEING   THE   ONLY

* Coping Skills
* Mind-Set

* Mentorship
* Tokenism
* Loneliness & Isolation
* Antidotes
* Failure to Follw the Rules

Figure 2: Conceptual Map After Round Two Interviews

Experiences of Female Fighter Pilots

After round-two analysis, one additional subordinate theme, Sexism, emerged. In the first-round analysis, Sexism was included under culture, but after the second-round analysis, Sexism emerged as its own subordinate theme. Several additional themes and sub-themes emerged. In-Group/Out-Group was added as a sub-theme under the larger theme of Camaraderie and Cohesion. Critical Mass and Diversity emerged as an Antidote for the Consequences of Being the Only and was subsequently moved from Culture. The themes of Utilized and Avoided Coping Strategies became one theme as more information about the individual nature of coping strategies emerged. The sub-theme of Likability was moved under the theme of Benevolent Sexism as it became clear that it is less of a coping skill and more a consequence of sexism. Finally, the first-round sub-theme of Manufacturing a Break morphed more into a socially acceptable response to burnout.

Overall Experience

The first-round finding that participants, overall, felt gratitude for their careers as fighter pilots were confirmed. Eileen stated that she feels, "…so lucky that I was given the opportunity to go through and be a pilot in the [airframe]." Beryl described the books she's read written by other female fighter pilots, "And I look at some of these and a couple other books that I've read by fighter pilots and they're way more on the negative [than her experience]." Participants confirmed that there are additional challenges and hurdles that females in the fighter community must confront, but they also confirmed feeling pride about their achievements.

Being the Only

The theme of Being the Only gained substance and continued to influence all other themes. The second round of participant interviews confirmed that the experience of Being the Only permeated most participant experiences.

During second-round interviews, the participants were asked to select a memento, artifact, poem, picture, etc. that represented their experience as "the only." Eileen described several items that seemed to represent her status as a minority in the fighter pilot field. She described one photo of herself and the only other female First Assignment Instructor Pilot (FAIP) taken at their first duty station. She also listed the Chick Fighter Pilot Association (CFPA) patch and t-shirt as an illustration of her experience. She stated, "It's a picture of a fighter pilot with a mask on, but she's got the pretty curly hair pony. And I think it says fly like a girl."

Beryl described how a Rosie the Riveter poster represents her status as the only. She stated, "It's a Rosie the Riveter poster…my grandmother on my mother's side moved from Oklahoma to California during World War II. And she had a part-time job…quasi welding job on a ship or…putting ships together quasi riveting." She also described how she acquired the poster and how it's been carried with her since the eighth grade.

> I think I was in eighth grade; my mom took me somewhere and they had a Rosie the Riveter poster that was an oversized poster. I kept it with me. When I made it through pilot training, and I was going through my stuff because I was going to [base] and I found it. I got it all framed, and then in my move to [base], which was my first operational unit in the [aircraft], I put it up at my house in [base]. I still have it…And I haven't really thought about it until you asked the question. It was just a poster that I had, but it was important enough for me to frame it and put it up. So, that's an interesting analysis. And it was constant because I put it right in my laundry room, so. Every Saturday I did laundry and there was that reminder.

Finally, she described how it represents being the only for her. She stated, "Because it was, well, she did it, so I can do it even if you're the only one. Even if you are going against social norms, even if you are facing attack all the time, so just roll up your sleeves and one day at a time."

Amelia chose to bring her women's flight cap to the interview. For her, it depicts her experience as the only. She stated,

> This is the women's flight cap. They're different from the men's flight caps. They have this curve in the back. And I'm sure it wasn't intentional, but what that does is you can't—they [male fighter pilots] put a crush in the back here. It kind of crushes down, and you can't do that with a women's flight cap. I never cared. But probably two and a half years into my first assignment, my DO, he says, "[Call sign], why do you wear that stupid cap?" And I'm like, "What do you mean?" He goes, "It just looks different from everybody else's." And I'm like, " Well, yeah, it's a woman's flight cap." And he's like, "But you can't do the crush." And I looked and went, "Sure. The Air Force made this cap for women, not me. I didn't have any choice in the matter." And he goes, "Well, you can wear the men's cap if you want to." And I go, "No, if they want to make me a stupid looking cap, I'm going to wear the stupid looking cap [laughter]. Talk to the Air Force uniform people, not me. I'm a Captain in the Air Force."

She further described her reasoning for continuing to wear the female flight cap after it had been approved for women to wear the male flight cap. She stated, "I know that some of the women later just chose to wear the men's, which is authorized. I didn't even know that it was authorized until he told me, I didn't really ever think about it, I just wore it." She elaborated with her view of the choice.

> **Amelia:** We are all walking along somewhere as a group and I'm the one that looks different. So, I never switched over after that. I went, 'No, screw you. I'm going to wear what the Air Force gave me to wear. And I'm not going to chose to wear something that is designed for the men. I'm going to choose to wear what they said was ours. And if that makes me look different and that bothers you, then so be it. That was kind of my one thing – I can be kind of stubborn, so that was my thing, 'No, I'm never going to change it. I'm just going to wear this the whole time.'
>
> **Interviewer:** Did that choice hold any meaning for you?
>
> **Amelia:** Well, yeah. And I guess it did. Just because I'm a fighter pilot doesn't mean I'm trying to be a man. You know what I mean? We're still women, we're still moms, we're still wives, we're still all those things, right? When you put me in the jet and I have my helmet on, you can't tell, right? And half of the time, with my voice on the radio, I get called Sir anyway. So, you can't tell when I'm in the jet, but I'm not in the jet all the time. There's still a part of me that's a woman and I didn't want to wear the men's cap.

Marina described how her tactic of buying everything in pink represents her status as the only. She provided some background, "You're gonna laugh, because I'm just gonna show you a peak. So, I started this a long – because do you know how in fighter squadrons, people steal

your stuff right? You put a really good lunch in the fridge, somebody's gonna steal it if it looks like it's good." Then she described her solution to the "theft" problem in the squadron,

> So, when I started losing things, earlier in my career, because I'm a girl and I have nice things. I started buying everything in pink. So, pink pens, pink skull caps, pink kneeboards, anything related to flying that I didn't want somebody else to steal. I don't even like pink, but I buy it in an obnoxious pink color because nobody's gonna steal it. It's obnoxious, but I'm sort of known for it at this point. Like, "Hey, what color kneeboard do you want us to order you?" I'm like, "Bright pink. Bright pink. As pink as – as pink as it gets [laughter]."

Mentorship

The lack of mentorship continued to be significant to participants. Jackie confirmed that being the only female in most situations was her norm until her 10-year point. She stated, "I mean, it was just-it was my way of life, really." She stated that being stationed with other females was more abnormal, "The one memory that really stands out for me, was when the other four girls who were stationed at Luke had our first lunch, you know?" She described the lunch, "And I remember, specifically, we went to Wildflower Bread Company, which is like a Panera. And we just had lunch. And we sat there for a couple hours, and just had the greatest time. She highlighted how this event impacted her, "And that's when we finally knew, 'Hey, this is important.' All of us had been doing fabulously in our previous assignments without other women. But now that we see what it's like to have other women, we need to keep this up." She further described her feelings,

> It was fun to just—we instantly bonded because we had all very similar backgrounds and experiences and attitudes. We laughed a lot. And then we had a serious conversation, like, 'Hey, this—there are a lot of us here. And who else is out there right now? Maybe we should make this bigger, and find out who else is out there, and connect with them, and see what we can do as far as mentorship.

Jackie added that it was challenging as the only woman in a squadron, but that it would be worse to be treated differently. Jackie described how women at the same base were often split into different squadrons. She stated, "I thought it was interesting because it was more of the

attitude, like, 'Well, you have to have one—or I have one, so now you get one.'" She reiterated, "I do feel like early on, it was, 'No, I have one, so you get one.' Despite the derogatory nature of that practice, she clarifies that she would have been more bothered if they'd kept female fighter pilots together simply because or gender. She stated,

> I would be off-put if they felt like, "Oh, we have to keep them together." That would have irritated me. Just because we – uh, at least I went into it like, "I'm a pilot, and I'm not defined by my gender. So, put me where you need me. Put me where you need my experience." Versus define me based off who's already here and what my gender is. I am a pilot. I'm either inexperienced or I'm experienced, or I am a flight lead, or I am a wingman. That's how they decide who's going where. For every pilot that shows up, they look at the experience level, they compare the squadrons, and they put them where they need them. So, I didn't want to be treated any differently. I want you to look at my experience and my abilities and put me where you need me.

Beryl described her process of deciding that she wanted to be a pilot while she was a student at the Academy. She confirmed that seeing another female Academy graduate become a pilot influenced her decision. She stated, "There were a few experiences when I was in college at the Academy. I kind of started to foster that idea of becoming a pilot. I didn't strongly desire it as a kid." She continued and described how knowing one other female who became a pilot gave her the confidence to go for it. She stated, "And so at the Academy it was like, 'Well, I guess I'm going to go be a pilot,' but nobody else –'what other women are becoming pilots?' And there was one other woman a year ahead of me who ended up making it to the T-38 track. And rumor had got back like, 'Well, [name] did it.' And I was like, 'Well if [name] could do it, then I could do it.'" She also described how watching one other person like her kept her going in the tough times. She stated, "And so, that got me through a lot of those, I would say challenges. And then [name] was in town visiting. And I hadn't seen her for two years. I was kind of like, 'Hey, well, you're the reason that I made it as a fighter pilot because I was like, well, if she can do it, I can do it." She elaborated that they were not close friends, but close enough to observe as

a role model. She stated, "I haven't seen her since. I have no idea what she's doing. She was a quasi-role model who was ahead of me, but I was never really close with."

Beryl gave another example of how one of the "firsts," Senator Martha McSally, played a similar role for her. She stated, "Another example of that would be Martha McSally. I've only met her a few times. So, not close or friends or connected, but her jump into politics. I've watched very closely because it's like, 'Well, she did it. I could do it.'" Then she discusses another aspect of watching women that go ahead of her. She briefly described watching how difficult it can get, which has the potential to dissuade some. She stated, "I can only imagine. I mean, I think she [Martha McSally] had it so much tougher than I could ever imagine. And to see her whole fight, especially through this last Senate race." Overall, either the lack of or existence of mentorship heavily influenced the participant career paths and choices.

Bessie described feeling an increased sense of responsibility for the younger female fighter pilots coming to her squadron. She stated,

> **Bessie:** So, [call sign] was in the squadron with me, but she's older than me. The only other females that have come through are now younger than me…so, now I'm in this position where I'll be in a pilot meeting sometimes, and one of these other girls would be there, and they're like, 'Gents,' and it just—bothers me more now. Before, it was kind of like, 'Well, I'm the only one here. Whatever.' It bothers me more now that they might think like, 'Oh, [call sign's] been dealing with this and she's been here for three years…and it doesn't get addressed."
>
> **Interviewer:** Oh. So, now it becomes a little bit harder to take because of that strong pull for you to be a strong mentor?
>
> **Bessie:** Yeah. Exactly.

She reported that her experience with being the only is what propels her to improve the fighter pilot community for future generations. She stated, "I lean a lot on thinking about the next generation. When I'm like, man, I need to defend myself here, I don't feel like I'm defending myself. I feel like I'm defending the culture that I want for the next generation."

Tokenism

Eileen described a more positive aspect of the experience of Being the Only that emerged during second-round interviews. She reported that the novelty of being a female fighter pilot made her feel worthy and special. She stated, "It does make me feel special in a way. You know, like I'm good at what I do and somebody saw something in me that made them think that I was like –I know it sounds crazy, but like, worthy of that, you know. I don't know if worthy is the right word, but I guess special is the best choice for that." She continued and reported that although being the only made her feel positive on one hand, she also wished that female fighter pilots weren't so rare. She stated, "I am proud that I am the only, but I wish I wasn't. Because so many other women could totally do this. It does take a certain kind of person. So, it's not for all women, but it's not for all men either."

When further probed about feeling "special," she attributed it to early memories of being told she couldn't be a fighter pilot due to her gender by her uncle and federal law. She stated, "I had an uncle who flew F'15's and told me that women can't fly in combat. And I was kinda like, 'Well, wanna bet?' And he was like, 'No, really, they can't.' Like, it wasn't allowed, you know?" She continued and described how she responded to her uncle, "Well, I took that as a challenge and anytime anybody's ever told me that I can't do something or I'm not good enough."

Amelia confirmed another aspect of being the only that was introduced in the first-round interviews. She stated, "It's a double-edged sword. There's a good and bad to it. Because guess what, when people always know what you're doing and you do good stuff, they know it and they know you did it. She reflects on how this may prove helpful in some circumstances. She reported, "So, for some of the women out there that are Wing Commanders and Generals and

doing those things, I think sometimes that scrutiny can work well for you when you are doing well, right?" Marina also added a couple positive to being the only. She stated, "I like having 30 brothers to back me up in bar fights when I get in trouble [laughter]." She added, "I also like not sharing a bathroom with everybody else in the squadron, and so there's some pluses too."

Marina confirmed her first-round description of feeling like she was operating under a microscope. She stated,

> It's kind of the microscope you have on you when you're the only one. Uh, you sort of like, you can't get away with some of the other shenanigans that guys—or mistakes that guys can get away with because they remember that it was the girl. I felt like I had a higher standard. I couldn't make as many mistakes because it would keep following me longer.

She provided an example, "Even on tower frequency, you know? Like you say something on tower frequency and then two weeks later, you're sitting in the tower, sitting SOF (Supervisor of Flying), and they're like – the tower controllers are making fun of you for whatever radio call. And you're like, 'Come on. If that was my husband, you would have never remembered it was him.'" Bessie discussed her process of shedding the feeling that she was constantly "under the microscope." She stated,

> You know, being the only one, like, feeling like you're not supposed to be there type of thing. Like, maybe the reason you are messing up is because you don't have the – the same skills or whatever as these guys do. You just kind of come to the realization at some point, and I don't know, maybe the guys feel the same way of, like, at some point, you're like, "Oh, everyone's making mistakes. It's not just—not just me."

Participants confirmed experiencing tokenism, and they described both positive and negative aspects of the phenomenon.

Loneliness and Isolation

Another sub-theme that was further defined is the loneliness and isolation of Being the Only. Jackie confirmed her first-round statements, "So, you show up to a new Squadron, and they are already cohesive, and they know each other, and I'm the odd one out. One, because I'm

new, but two, because I was a girl." She continued and described how new male pilots are ushered close and immediately made to feel part of the team. Whereas new women pilots are scrutinized from a distance until the group decides she can be trusted. She stated,

> I do think that there were some differences. For example, my very first squadron in [country], I showed up with a very, very good friend of mine who I had gone through [aircraft] training with. So, we'd already spent the previous year together, day-in and day-out. And we showed up to [country] on the same airplane, same day, did everything together, same experience level. And within about a month, our squadron was going TDY from [country] to Japan. So, temporary duty for a two-week exercise. And so, we showed up there, and already, he was named that he was going on the TDY and I wasn't. Before we even showed up, they said, "Oh, yeah, we'll take [name] but not Jackie." And so, he was automatically welcomed, open arms, you know, hugging him… But for me, I felt like it was a little harder to break into that, because they were—the verdict was still out with me.

Beryl described her experience with being lonely. She stated, "I've always been the type to have maybe one or two close friends. I'm not a social butterfly. I don't like lots of friends. I don't pride myself in having lots of friends, but I think I got so pigeonholed that I didn't have anybody at that point that I could relate with." She elaborated with how it was difficult for her friends to relate because they weren't pilots. She stated, "I had a college girlfriend, but she wasn't even a pilot. So, we would try to correspond, but there was no way to commiserate in the actual day-to-day struggles. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to teach me to pee in the plane, right?" Her male colleagues didn't know either. She reported, "And so the guys were like, 'Well, go ask another woman.' And I didn't know any other women to ask." She reported not needing a lot of female bonding in her life, "It's funny because I've always prided myself in not liking female bonding. I prefer hanging out with guys. I like the way guys think. So, that's why I really thought the fighter pilot world was for me." Surprisingly, the lack of women bothered her, "But being in complete isolation from women is when I realized that I needed it. And then at that point, how do you fill a void that you have no control of?"

Amelia addressed the concept of belonging that emerged in the second round of interviews. She stated, "If I'd focused on, you know, on all sorts of myriad of ways that I didn't belong there, then I would have never finished. So yes, it's—and it'd be nice if I didn't have to do all that and would be nice if women still didn't have to do that, but they do. It's not as much. It's not as hard, it's not as much scrutiny, but it's still there."

Jackie reported a memory where a couple invited her for dinner, "He was a pilot, and she was in the Air Force but not a pilot. They were not peers. He was actually a rank or two ahead of me. But out of the blue, just said, 'Would you like to come over for dinner?' She described her reaction, "I remember thinking, 'Yes.' I think it's easier for the guys to get invited because the wives don't feel awkward with it. I was thankful that this couple just invited me over for dinner one night." Both rounds of interviews found a notable level of loneliness and isolation among the participants.

Antidotes

Several antidotes to the consequences of being the only were identified in analysis of the second-round interviews. Critical Mass and Diversity emerged as an antidote and was moved from The Fighter Pilot Culture. The Power of The Majority also emerged as an antidote. Performance and Work Ethic were confirmed.

Critical Mass and Diversity

Marina spoke of the increased emphasis on diversity and inclusion with mixed feelings, confirming first-round results. She stated, "It's kinda strange, but from a leadership perspective, I'm finding that when they say, when they're talking diversity and inclusion, they are not talking about women in fighter squadrons." She added, "So, even the old experiences are similar. It

really hasn't changed." The downside is that people assume someone got the job due to their minority status. She stated, "There's always people that are gonna think you got a job [due to minority status] – especially right now with the – this whole diversity and inclusion thing, I feel the affirmative action things are sort of coming back into fashion and actually hurting more than helping. I think."

Marina discussed another consequence of Being the Only that emerged as she moved up the ladder into a senior leadership position. She described a covert disadvantage that slowly accumulates over the course of a career, "You are not a part of the good 'ol boys club, and there aren't enough women to form a good 'ol girls club. She stated, "When you're talking like, senior leader type things—it gets political, so a lot of it is who you know." She reported that the circles are built early in careers, "And who you know, those circles are built when you're younger, right? So no, there aren't girls. There aren't circles for girls who you know. If that—if that makes sense… Little did I know, that like 23 years later that would [be a deficit] because I didn't go and play golf and because I didn't go and drink scotch." Second-round interviews confirmed the corrective power of critical mass, and highlighted the question: How do we get there?

The Power of the Majority

One additional antidote to Being the Only that emerged during second round interviews is the powerful influence of the male fighter pilots in the squadron. First-round interviews established participants' beliefs that it's easier to speak-up for others than it is to speak-up for yourself. Bessie confirmed this finding and described how one male validated her feelings about the entire room being addressed as "Gents." She stated,

> And then I've had one guy who – he's about to be a DO. This guy said – and there's only three
> of us across the table, so he was briefing the three of us, it's a four-ship, and he's like, "Gents,
> welcome. Blah, blah, blah." And then again at the end, he's like, "Alright, gents. Let's go get

em' step in 15." And this guy just like, whacks me on the back and he's like, "Yeah, gents [laughter]." He made this real, like, thing about it. And he said to the guy briefing, he was like, "Are we all gents?" I forget what he said [the guy briefing], but he was not willing to change. He was just like, "That's what I say."

Amelia confirmed the importance of majority group members speaking up. She stated, "Everyone avoids asking people in the majority groups to step-up when they see something that's wrong. The minority, the person in the minority group shouldn't always be the one correcting everybody. What kind of environment is that? It's a pain in the neck." She described the majority and minority group responsibilities. She stated, "One of the majority group responsibilities is calling out the people who are not treating others with respect. It took me on my journey to become a fighter pilot two years or so before I felt comfortable speaking-up for myself, right?" She reiterated, "So, something else has to be done for the new people. Don't make it always be them." Bessie agreed that it is easier to stick up for someone else than it is to stick up for yourself. She stated, "I always feel like it's easier to defend someone else than defend yourself."

Bessie described a tactic she uses when she is unable to speak-up in the moment. She talks to her younger cohort in the hopes of changing the future culture. She stated, "In instances where I can't possibly say something directly to the person, I'll share the story with people I do feel close with." She described why she does this, "I'm telling this guy this story of something that wasn't right, but I couldn't in the moment speak-up about it, it's like hopefully, when he is a commander, he would recognize that something like that could happen."

Performance and Work Ethic

Amelia described how hard work and performance led to acceptance in her first squadron, but she also said she had to prove herself repeatedly; at every squadron she went to. She stated, "Once I got established…so, at least my squadron in Germany was accepting of me.

It was still hard because everywhere you go…it starts all over again, every single time." After being retired for 14 years, she's gained enough perspective to label her experience of needing to constantly re-earn her seat at the table. She stated, "I think what I've realized over time is those little - I don't know if this is the right term – micro-inequities or micro-aggressions or just the little picking at you all that time, right? And they're not doing it intentionally, it just happens over and over and over. And it just gets old." She assumes that it feels the same way for other people in a minority group. She stated, "It's something I imagine that – we have very few Black or any other color than White or almost as small a minority of women. So, I'm sure they get that initial look and that initial, they have to prove themselves." She reported personal conversations she had while flying for the airlines. She stated, "When I was a First Officer, I flew with a Black Captain and we had some very frank discussions about it. And they get the same kind of thing. And after awhile, it's just like, 'Man, can't you just let it go? Can't you just let people be themselves and not have to put labels on it and assumptions and those kinds of things?'"

Amelia reflected on the role performance and work ethic plays in the overall experience.

> **Interviewer:** So, in a flying squadron, there's people that are naturally good. There's people that just pick it up better. You've got your patches and you've got people that have to try harder. There's a continuum. How do you see that working if you were a minority and struggled in the jet? How do you see that fitting in?
>
> **Amelia:** Yeah, I think that would make it doubly hard, right? I mean, it's going to be doubly hard if you're performance is on the lower-end of the scale and you're a minority, now it's just going to suck more because--. Everybody in the majority group knows what you're doing. So, if your performance isn't good and everybody knows about it all the time, it's not going to be pretty.

Amelia reported struggling in training and realizing that the pressure of her minority status contributed to her lowered performance.

> **Amelia:** I struggled in [aircraft] initial training, I truly did. By the time I got to my squadron in [country], you arrive with your gradebook and they can see exactly how you did in training. So, there was some of that initially for me, but what they didn't realize and what I didn't realize at the time, which is one of the reasons I struggled so much was because I just had too much pressure. Just too much pressure, externally and internally. So, once I got there and I graduated, and I

knew I still had to prove myself, but I just relaxed a little. And it made a big difference, it really did. So, I was never going to go to weapons school, but I was average above average in the squadron everywhere I went. I was never that, "Oh, this is not for her," that wasn't me.

Interviewer: So, you recognized that the added pressure was affecting your performance?

Amelia: Yeah. Well, I was within one ride of washing out of training. One type of training I was having an issue with, and I failed it. I failed the next one, I had one more [chance], or I was done. And that's kind of when I just went, "Okay, I have got to let this crap go. I can't worry about what people are saying, thinking about me. I can't worry about the future of women fighter pilots being on my shoulders. I can't carry that." So that was a very important lesson to me about halfway through [aircraft] training. Your brain can't hold all that and what you're asking it to do.

Amelia elaborated on the sense of responsibility and immense pressure she felt as a member of the initial cohort of female fighter pilots. She was hyper-aware that her public performance was being closely watched and scrutinized. She stated, "It was, it was too much. Because I really felt like, Okay, if I screw this up, they're going to be able to say, 'We told you.' All those people who were negative about it are going to say, 'See, we told you.'"

Marina confirmed her first-round statements and discussed how struggling with the flying aspect substantially increases stress-level. "And I would imagine if you're struggling with the flying piece, that would be really stressful for a man or a woman. That's a lot of stress on top of everything." She continued and discussed the additional factor of being spotlighted if you are a minority. She stated, "And I think that if you have one woman that fits into that demographic, because there are fewer women, if one woman that fits there, it's gonna be a higher percentage overall because, you know, one of one is 100%." She offered a theory of how struggles with flying might lead to a more negative experience overall. She stated,

> We all compete with each other. We make fun of the mistakes that people make. And if you are making the mistakes and you don't have thick skin, and you're not gonna dish it back out, do you feel like you're getting picked on? And then you're not comfortable in these settings and you don't wanna say anything. Again, I've seen this happen to men, ironically, more than women.

Bessie reflected on a time when she was unable to perform and the impact that had on her. She stated, "I was DNIF for seven months when I was in the [squadron], um, and it was

awful because it just. It was kind of like another three weeks, and another three weeks, and another three weeks. It wasn't, like, you will have this surgery, and you'll be DNIF for seven months. It just kept dragging on." She described how the uncertainty felt and how she struggled without her identity as a pilot. Stated, "It became really overwhelming because, I put a lot of stock in who I was like, 'Well, who am I if I'm not flying?'"

Amelia reported an inability to speak-up even after graduating pilot training, "When you show-up [at your first squadron] even though you've done over a year of training to get there, you're still not qualified. You are qualified to fly an [aircraft] in instrument conditions, but then you need another mission checkride to get to combat-mission ready." She described finally feeling like she could speak-up after becoming combat-mission ready, "I wanted to get that done and I wanted to get a little bit of experience and prove myself and then I felt I could speak-up for myself. So, it's a good two years at least."

All participants repeatedly stated that strong performance and work ethic is an antidote to Being the Only. The interesting thing about their endorsement is that they do not account for the added stresses of being the only, the idiosyncratic rater effect, or that they must perform better than average to be considered average. So, working hard and flying the jet well can serve as an antidote, and it's important to also consider these added barriers to performance.

Failure to Follow the Rules

Eileen confirmed that there are "rules" and consequences for failing to follow them. She described how the "rules" of society at large and the fighter pilot community have dictated what it means to be a fighter pilot. She describes her experience as a fighter pilot who did not fit the mold. She stated, "You get the influence of society too – who does what in this world. And

your typical fighter pilot doesn't look like a mom with four kids." She described how even women who also served have a difficult time overcoming their bias around the roles of women. She stated, "I was at Costco in my uniform. I was just on my way home and this lady stops me and says, 'Thank you. Hey, I was in the Army too and then I was in the Air Force after that. I was a crew chief.' She was so shocked that I was a fighter pilot. Eileen described the woman's reaction and shock at her own bias. Eileen reported what the woman said, 'Why am I so shocked. I served. I was the crew chief. Why am I shocked?" Eileen continued, "She was, like, angry with herself that she didn't realize that I was a fighter pilot, or that I could be one. I think we all still kinda do that. Even I do that…you just have your own expectations of what a person who does a certain job looks like."

Amelia discussed another rule that only applies when you are the only. She relayed a story about a student pilot when she was an instructor. She stated, "I had a female student once and she was young and smart and very, very attractive. And she was flying a lot with this one instructor pilot. There was nothing going on between them. But then the Squadron Commander goes, 'Oh, no, we can't have that because he's married and she can't keep flying with the same instructor." Amelia described the hypocritical nature of his response,

> And I'm like, 'Wait. You know he flies with that same guy all the time.' And that was another one that bothered me, because they had a good instructor-student relationship. But they wind up in a briefing room together by themselves. And I'm like, 'Really? I mean, just because she was young and pretty and smart. There was another girl in that same class, she was a Captain instead of a Lieutenant, who was just not as cute, if you will, and nobody seemed to be concerned. So, I think it, to be honest, the younger and prettier you were when you started I think the harder it could have been."

The Fighter Pilot Culture

Bessie confirmed a first round finding and described the dichotomy of wanting to defend the fighter community while also recognizing that there's room for positive changes. She stated,

"I think everyone had a different fight. I definitely feel like it's – it's a fight. Like, that dichotomy of, like, I'll defend the community for sure, but I also want the community to be better." She elaborated, "I don't feel like I'm defending myself. I feel like I'm defending the culture that I want for that next generation, if that makes sense." She described change as being slow, "It's hard to convince people that they should change… it's tough to convince someone that they should make a change, because it's like, to them, 'It's not impacting me.'" Despite change being slow, Bessie acknowledged that she has seen positive movement, "And a lot of the comm has improved. When I first got here people said, 'Don't be a pussy' all the time. I haven't heard that in my squadron for over a year."

Bessie described one tactic she employs to encourage change. "If it's someone who's willing to listen, I'll be like, 'These are considerations I have.' And then hopefully, when they are a commander, and they're talking to the next person, they can be like, 'Wow, this is something that someone talked to me about, and I didn't even think of all the stuff that you're thinking about." Overall, participants expressed pride and commitment to the fighter culture, while also noting aspects that are antiquated and unnecessary.

Camaraderie and Cohesion

Jackie confirmed first-round findings that one of the most enjoyable aspects of the fighter pilot community was the camaraderie. She stated, "And I enjoyed the camaraderie, and I enjoyed being with my friends and my buddies in the squadron." The second-round interviews identified another aspect of camaraderie and cohesion: the in-group and the out-group. Participants discussed the characteristics leading to placement in both groups.

In-Group and Out-Group

One new theme that emerged during second-round interviews was the topic of in-group and out-group. Bessie reported feeling like a member of the in-group when having individual conversations with colleagues, but a member of the out-group when in a group environment with colleagues. She stated, "I think, individually, I get along really well with everybody in the squadron. I would say I have a very positive relationship with, you know, 95% of the squadron. She countered that with how she feels in group environments. She stated, "It's when we're in a group environment like a Roll Call, Friday Academics, a pilot meeting, an IP meeting, whatever… I just think there gets to be a lot of groupthink. I don't feel like they would be talking about that if it was, you know, just me and them."

Bessie discussed her complicated feelings about Roll Calls. On one hand, she finds them exhausting and is often the only female present, but on the other hand, attendance is important for retaining her in-group status. She described her reasons for attending, "I don't want people being disrespectful or saying things behind my back, but I wanna make my presence known and I want there to be more than one female at the Roll Call, you know? And that doesn't happen a lot of times, but like, I want to be there to witness it, to know what the pulse of the community is." She reiterated that she would feel more in the out-group if things were said behind her back instead of to her face. She stated, "I'd rather them say something disrespectful in front of me— then go behind my back."

Bessie described a Roll Call that got out of control, and the response she received from the squadron commander. He called her to make sure she wasn't offended afterward. "I'm the only one that got called, and that's disappointing too. If he really thought – well, that's the thing. I don't think he thought it was inappropriate was the bottom line." She elaborated further, "And "the thing is, I, I've never thought, like, this guy's a bad guy. I just think that he hasn't maybe

been to a Roll Call that's had the substance that I've been to, and I've seen that it can be really fun

a-and really bring everyone together, and that's kind of the whole point." She rationalized the

commander's perspective, "If he's never been offended at a Roll Call or felt like he was in the

out-group; how could he possibly understand, like, how I feel at Roll Call on occasion?" She

continued,

> It's hard, I think, for him to put himself in my shoes and really understand why it's important to
> create an inclusive environment. To me, it's frustrating when guys will kind of say off-color
> things at a Roll Call and then the next weekend, we have First Friday, and they have their daughter
> there and they're like, "You could be a fighter pilot too. Like, she flies the same plane I fly." And
> it's like, I hope when your daughter is in the squadron in 20 years that it's not how it is now.

Overall, Bessie felt that age determined a lot when it came to in and out group

membership. She described how the idea of what's "cool" changed with generations. "I almost

feel like the in-group is, like, Captains that I'm in with. If I had to think of all the guys that I'm

like, 'Man, that was an off-color comment,' Like 90 percent—the overwhelming majority was

old guys. They're just…" She described how the younger generation attempts to make changes

to the culture, "It's just a fucking uphill climb against—some of these old guys. They've just

thought the same stuff is funny for so long, and they consider it tradition." She provided an

example of the older generation being out-of-touch with the younger generation. She described a

tradition where they let the oldest pilot at Roll Call tell a war story. She described one older

Lieutenant Colonel at a Roll Call, "He basically just starts attacking what he calls PC culture,

and he's just like, 'We used to be able to say 'faggot' and we used to be able to say 'pussy'…

he's just going on and on and on." She described what the younger attendees expected and

wanted to hear, "Basically, the gist was like, 'Tell us some old fighter pilot stories' you know,

'Tell us about back in Nam…back in Dessert Storm, or when you flew the F-4.' But that was

not the case, he decided to be like, 'There used to be strippers…' She described her reaction, "I

am just appalled… and this is just what happens." She also described her confusion, "When asked about his favorite pastime as a fighter pilot, it's being able to say 'pussy' and 'faggot?' And it's like, why is that what guys are, like, hanging their hat on?"

Bessie also described how the culture of a squadron determined whether someone is in-group or out-group. She described the progress of her current squadron. "I think a lot has improved, and I'm happy about that." She shared her feelings about new person in the squadron, "He is bad for culture, um, and he's just, like, nasty, basically." She described a conversation she had about him with her DO, flight commanders, and scheduler. She stated, "So, there was more people than, I like, usually speak-up in front of."

> **DO:** Oh, you're not looking forward to him [laughter]?
> **Bessie:** I don't like what he's up to.
> **DO:** What are you talking about?
> **Bessie:** I just feel like we have a really good culture here, and he is, the opposite of what we have going in the squadron.
> **DO:** Oh, interesting. What's the drama?
> **Bessie:** The drama is that he's disrespectful. [laughter] I don't think you need me to list the things that I've heard him say.
> **DO:** Oh, I guess I can see what you're saying.

Due to the positive culture in her squadron, the disrespectful new addition probably won't feel like he is in the in-group, and he'll have to adapt to the new squadron culture.

Amelia linked performance to being a part of the squadron in-group. She stated, "The thing is to let your performance speak for you because it's the only way. I mean, if I couldn't fly the jet, I never would have been accepted in the squadron no matter what I did." She emphasized this point, "It's the performance. You're going to convince people whether you belong or not, you're going to convince them one way or the other through your performance." One delineating aspect of Amelia's statement is that the need to "convince people" of your

belonging appears unique to women. Men belong until they do something to jeopardize their

assumed in-group status. She ranks the other aspects of fitting in well-below performance in

flying the jet, "And the rest after that is all just the fitting in more psychologically or

emotionally. If you don't fly the jet, you're never going to fit in."

Eileen described a new concept of whether someone is a fighter pilot (in-group) or

someone who flies fighters (out-group). She stated, "There's people who are like, 'Well, there's

fighter pilots and there are people who fly fighters or pilots who fly fighters.' You hear people

say that all the time about some people. So, having my husband as a fighter pilot too, I'm asking

like, 'Does it seem like that?' She stated that she is still unsure after asking his opinion, "But

he's always been—he was always in the other squadron for a long time. So, it wasn't like direct

information. Plus, I don't think people would say that stuff around him intentionally." She

elaborated,

> **Eileen:** The good news is I always felt—even if I was one of the pilots who flies fighters that I still belonged. I felt I was a confident pilot.
> **Interviewer:** Oh, so the belonging is somehow tied to feeling confident in your ability as a pilot?
> **Eileen:** Uh, yes, because generally, the people who are pilots who fly fighters are, like, just, I guess—I don't even know how to describe it. They don't fit the normal fighter mold, you know?
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
> **Eileen:** Like, don't wanna hear curse words. Don't wanna hear fighter pilot stories. Don't wanna hang out in the bar. Don't wanna—you know, I'm at the point where I don't do any of that anymore anyways, but [laughter] I'm just in the Reserves. And that's fine, so I'm happy.

Eileen identified her non-traditional route to having a family and career as the biggest reason she

struggles to know if she is considered a fighter pilot or a pilot who flies fighters. She stated,

"Not that I'm a mom or a girl, but the fact that my husband and I, uh, we had kids going into the

CAF. Most fighter pilots I know don't have kids. Or if they have kids, then their wife doesn't

usually work." She described why their family dynamic affected the ability to join the in-group,

"When you don't have kids, it's a lot easier for both of you to go to work. Even compared to the

other women fighter pilots that I've met, most of them, the one's I've met are all single when they go through the B-course. Most of the time, people are not married when they go through training." She described what the fighter pilot life is typically like for a young single Lieutenant, "You just have your responsibilities of being a fighter pilot, hanging out with the unit, and things like that. So, it was just harder or different for us because of our family circumstances."

Eileen reported that being married to another fighter pilot probably helped her with the in-group.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think being married to another fighter pilot versus not—do you see that affecting the in-group, out-group membership in any way?
>
> **Eileen:** Uh, yes. I would say probably more in the in-group 'cause I could see how, especially as a woman, having a husband who is not a fighter pilot, it could be difficult. The cultural pressures. It is harder for guys, especially, to follow women around overseas and while they deploy and especially because the community is male dominated. I think that's probably more intimidating for most men.
>
> **Interviewer:** It sounds like sharing that fighter pilot culture, helped you?
>
> **Eileen:** Well, 'cause we are able to relate. We know the same group of people. So, then we go do squadron events. We hang out together. We both feel involved and included.

Jackie agreed that being married to another fighter pilot made it easier to be in the in-group.

> **Interviewer:** How do you think being married to another fighter pilot influenced the in-group/out-group piece. Did it have any influence on which group you were in?
>
> **Jackie:** Yes. I think that would probably drive more to the in-group.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
>
> **Jackie:** Because he—and it was awesome. I think it would be strange to have a civilian husband. I think that would be a tough time. I mean, it would take a very special husband.
>
> **Interviewer:** You do? Okay.
>
> **Jackie:** Because it's really—they call it the spouse's club, but really, it's the wives that do everything. They're awesome. But they are the social backbone, and they're the support structure, and to get a man to jump into that group—would be really challenging thing to do. But there are plenty that do it. My husband was a pilot in the other squadron for every assignment. And so, he's a married fighter pilot dude. So, he's in the club.
>
> **Interviewer:** Ahh, okay.
>
> **Jackie:** And then I have the luxury of being both the wife and a pilot in the other squadron. And so, it just doubled our network and our friendship groups. Because then we had both squadrons,

and we hung out with both squadrons. We both knew all the pilots. Whereas sometimes, you don't really get to know the pilots from the other squadrons.

Marina supported Jackie's view that being married to another fighter pilot made things easier, although she was a bit more hesitant. She reported feeling like her husband sticks up for her as she's moved into a senior leader position. "I think it helped. I think specifically, it helped with his—with his group of people. Because he knows that I'm not getting – he knows how hard I'm working, and he knows that I'm not receiving things just because I'm a woman. And he's able to communicate that."

Jackie confirmed first-round results that being a female automatically put her in the "out-group" at times. She stated, "And here I was, this awkward single girl, but not really single, married but my husband wasn't there. And the single people are like, 'Well, she's married, so she doesn't want to stay in a cabin with us. But I didn't necessarily fit with the married people." Marina confirmed Jackie's experience and shared her own,

> So, you're walking the line. All along, it kind of felt that way as a woman in a fighter squadron to some degree. Especially once everybody got married—once everybody got married because there are always spouses that are not gonna want their husbands to be friends with the girl in the squadron—because for whatever reason, it—they have these crazy notions. So, there's always the—when you're walking that line, at least for me, like, you don't 100% always fit in with the dudes because you're not a dude. You're not going to. You don't 100% fit in with the spouses because, even though I was a spouse too, you're not treated the same necessarily. And so, you're kind of like, you have one foot in both and you try to play both roles at different times. And it gets tiring sometimes

Beryl reported that some cultural aspects didn't align with her morals which left her feeling like she was in the out-group, "The mandatory drinking would probably be the biggest, because of my personal values, I'm not into drunkenness or carousing or swearing and those things were part of daily discussions. Every Friday night was that thing I dreaded. I'd rather be

at home in a bubble bath." She reported her experience and how she did not feel able to speak-up, "But instead, you're hiding in the corner of the bar trying not to be noticed so they don't force you to drink more and more and more."

Amelia reported that the out-group members were often religious. She stated, "Yeah, in my squadrons, I think there were the in-groups and the out-groups… So, my first squadron there was definitely in and out groups. And in this particular case, the out-group tended to be, it's sad to say, but they tended to be very religious." She describes why the religious people tended to be in the out-group, "They didn't appreciate a lot of the standard fighter pilot culture. So, they kind got pushed out." She also described "super in-groups" that, "I didn't worry about them." She reported, "In general, most of the squadron was pretty solid." Amelia elaborated further on the struggles that religious pilots encountered in the squadron, "They didn't appreciate the frat house feel. There was a lot of swearing. A lot of derogatory terms. A lot of them, it's important for them to standup for their convictions. And I don't take issue with that, but then it's like, 'Oh, you're not part of the team.' Or 'Oh, you think you're better than us,' kind of thing." She provided an example of the combat split that's a typical way to split a bill on TDY. She stated, "We're deployed, and we all go out for dinner. And there's 10 of us. We would do a combat split which is when we're done, we'd split the bill 10 ways. Well, if you don't drink alcohol, you're paying a lot more than your share." And again, she describes a culture allowing little room for compromise, "So there were guys who wouldn't want to split, and guys who would always order dessert or the most expensive meal they could find. You know, it's 10 bucks. It's not worth the fuss. They made themselves stand out, which I would probably just pay the extra money and call it good."

Participants also described how growing in rank and position will naturally remove someone from being in either group. She stated, "Then by the time I got to [base], I'm in a leadership position, so I'm not part of either group, right? [laughter] I'm the DO or the ADO, I'm the-- you know whatever I am, you're not going to be in the in-group or the out-group; either one." Marina reported, "Overall, I think that I have felt included," but she reported a change after she moved into a leadership position. She stated, "It's kind of weird because there's also a feeling where especially now on the leadership train. I realize now, more than I did then, that it is still that good ol' boys club." She added, "Once you become a commander, now you're walking a line where you have one foot in the group—and one foot out of the group, where you're not like, a bro anymore. And now for me, as a commander, I definitely have no feet in the bro circle [laughter]."

She noted an additional consequence of being a minority that slowly accumulates over the course of a career. You are not a part of the good 'ol boys club, and there aren't enough women to form a good 'ol girls club. She stated, "When you're talking like, senior leader type things—it gets political, so a lot of it is who you know. And who you know, those circles are built when you're younger, right? So no, there aren't girls. There aren't circles for girls who you know. If that—if that makes sense."

> **Interviewer:** Is that more of a result of, what you said earlier, "I don't golf, so I'm not gonna go golfing with the guys," or is it sheer numbers? Where there isn't an opportunity to build a female circle?
>
> **Marina:** It's probably a little bit of both. Even now with the push to get diversity in the higher ranks, it's super interesting how, um—and I still think qualified people should be put in jobs. I definitely do not want someone to give me a job that I'm not qualified for just because I am a woman. But it's a lot about who you know in those circles too.
>
> **Interviewer:** Oh, okay.
>
> **Marina:** When I spent my time trying to get to know pilots and spouses, trying to walk the line between both, never fully being in either, little did I know that like 23 years later that would

[hinder my career], because I didn't go play golf and because I didn't go drink scotch. And there are just some things that, as a woman, you're not gonna wanna do.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Yeah. It's a really interesting dynamic. And you said it gets tiring. It must get exhausting trying to tiptoe that line.

Marina: Yeah. And there's always people that are gonna think you got a job—especially right now with this whole diversity inclusion thing, I feel, um, the affirmative action things that are sort of coming back into fashion are actually hurting more than helping.

Interviewer: Okay, what do you see?

Marina: Well, I just – if I get a position, people are gonna automatically think I got it because I'm a girl, not because I earned it. So, I mean, it's the tale as old as time, I think in a community. In a competitive community where there aren't very many people that look like you, whatever it be. Gender or race or something like that. I mean, it happens in every career.

Reputation. Reputation emerged as an important requirement for in-group membership. Jackie discussed how reputations follow you within the fighter community. She stated that a pilot's reputation is important for males and females but has more ramifications for a female pilot's career. She stated, "I think their [male fighter pilots] reputations follow them as well. But probably not as strongly. And it's like with any minority. You screw up, and people remember that forever. If the white male makes the same mistake, it's not gonna be memorable for people." She reported that a female fighter pilot's reputation is unrelenting. "So, people will remember it, but you [male fighter pilots] don't stand out as much. So, I do think our reputations probably are stronger and carry through longer than with the guys. No doubt, anyone can definitely still screw it up."

Jackie also described how her reputation made things easier later in her career. She reported, "And that's why I say early on in my career before I had an established reputation. So, assignment, you start running across the same people. And then you're more experienced and so it's the more junior people [trying to earn a reputation]." Bessie confirmed Jackie's statements, and described how her reputation and confidence from past performance helped her make it through a demanding course. She stated,

> I knew they [the schoolhouse] messed up. Like, I just knew that if you don't – if I'm on a waiver for this syllabus, then this syllabus isn't meant for me. That combined with I'm, you know, I excelled in the [first airframe] I deployed, and I came there with, like, a reputation of, you know… I had established myself and I wasn't in this vulnerable squad of "I'm a wingman, and I don't know anything."

During second-round interviews, participants listed multiple factors contributing to in-group and out-group membership. Factors determining in or out-group membership included: performance, age, reputation, religiosity, degree to which a person fits the fighter pilot mold, leadership status, group versus individual interactions, family planning, gender, and marital status.

Community Differences

One participant confirmed first-round findings that there are communities that are more or less accepting of women. She stated, "The F-15 community is the least receptive of any fighter community to women."

Hypermasculinity

First round findings depicting the hypermasculine nature of the fighter pilot community were confirmed, and Beryl added an additional opinion. She stated,

> I feel like there was a time I thought that it's [fighter pilot career field] the most male dominated. But now that I've been more in the civilian world and I've had a chance to interact with so many people from different areas in the civilian sector, I don't know if I agree [with that]. I've had women come up to me and say they were fire fighters—smokejumpers.

The fighter pilot career field encourages more masculine characteristics and action, but participants did not feel that it was the *most* masculine.

Sexism

Second-round interviews confirmed sexism as an aspect of participant experiences. The topic of sexism grew so large that it was broken into a separate theme. Bessie confirmed the difficulty of dating as a female fighter pilot, "I felt for, single, female fighter pilots. You know,

they're also trying to date and find a significant other… It's really tough to navigate, especially if it ends up being someone in your squadron that you interact with a lot." Amelia confirmed that the dating situation as a single female fighter pilot is challenging. She stated, "I think it helps if you're married, first of all. Because it reduces the likelihood that the guys are hitting on you all the time. Which for some of the young very pretty women that are pilots, that's an issue."

Systemic Sexism

Systemic sexism consists of patterns in social groups that evolved over decades and centuries. Systemic sexism has nothing to do with the values we individually choose and consciously live by. Rather, systemic sexism is a problem of cultural norms and rules supporting 'baked in' power structures.

Institutional Betrayal

The institutional betrayal identified in the first-round interviews was confirmed and expanded in second-round interviews. Institutional betrayal describes wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals committed within the context of the institution. Second-round interviews identified the following areas of institutional betrayal within participant experiences: Idiosyncratic Rater Effect, Military Sexual Trauma, Workplace Environment, Anthropometric Measurements, Flight Equipment, Heterosexism, Guard and Reserve Hiring, Roll Calls; Naming Ceremonies; and Squadron Shenanigans, Language and Humor, and Leadership.

Idiosyncratic Rater Effect. Participants identified the evaluative nature of being a fighter pilot. The steady stream of debriefs, tape reviews, trainings, upgrades, and formal

evaluations never end. It is a necessary part of the job, and a part of the job that is inherently flawed. A 2019 Harvard Business Review article states, "Our evaluations are deeply colored by our own understanding of what we're rating others on, our own sense of what good looks like for a particular competency, or harshness or leniency as raters, and our own inherent and unconscious biases." This phenomenon is referred to as the idiosyncratic rater effect. Participants in first and second round interviews repeatedly highlighted the impact of performance on their overall experiences, and detailed steep consequences for poor performance. As a result of the heavy reliance on evaluation, minority fighter pilots are subject to a fundamentally flawed system where they are held to a prefabricated model of excellence. It appears that 27 years after the combat ban was lifted, female fighter pilots are still being held to a standard of excellence that's based on the majority population, which in this instance is overwhelmingly "male." The failure of the institution to address the inequity is referred to as institutional betrayal.

Amelia described her experience of subjective grading in pilot training. She stated, "There was a lot that happened in that training environment that I wasn't—that frustrated me that I would have loved to have done something about, but the training environment is so subjective, right?" She reported how she aced the objective academic portion but was helpless when it came to the subjective nature of the flying evaluations. She stated, "Flying training is, I mean, I'm acing the academics everywhere I go, but the actual flying training, you're graded by another person, right? And it's very subjective."

In addition to the subjective nature of the flight portion of training, there's the "teachability" of a student that makes it difficult for any student to speak up. Amelia described how being the first female [airframe] pilot exacerbated this concern and made it almost

impossible. She described facing the additional bias of being the "first" that must have

permeated some of her evaluations. "I didn't feel like I could speak up about a lot of the things

that I didn't think were fair because I don't want to—you know, I don't want them to think I'm a

complainer; I'm going to ruin squadrons wherever I go and whatever." She reported being in

survival mode, "I just wanted to try to make it through training. Like most people do. But there

was more scrutiny and that subjective could go either way. You have people that inarguably

made it through because they knew they couldn't washout, but people also go, 'I'm going to do

everything I can to make sure she doesn't pass this checkride.' So, it's subjective either way."

She emphasized the helpless nature of the situation, "And there's not a lot of appeal or things

you could do to—you know, 'I don't think that's right. I don't think I should have failed that.'

First and second round interviews confirmed the idiosyncratic rater effect within the Air Force

training programs, and participants listed several ways it affected them.

Military Sexual Trauma. When specifically asked to share experiences with sexual

assault or harassment, first-round findings were confirmed and additional information was

disclosed. Jackie reported an incident that happened when she was a young Captain. Years

later, she remembered what she was wearing and relayed the story as if her choice of attire and

breast size were contributing factors. She stated,

> Yeah. The one [incident of sexual assault] that stands out is when I was at [base], so my second assignment. And we went TDY to Guam. And I was walking around – it's Guam, so I had a sundress on—that was knee-length. You know, but spaghetti strap. And I have nothing up here that would be of interest of anybody, so it's not like cleavage going on. But, you know, just a, a cheapo dress.

She continued by describing the assault. She stated, "And walking through the hotel after we'd

been out drinking. But I was with at least one other guy in the squadron. And our DO – and

walking through the lobby, going home to bed, and lifted up my – the back of my dress and

spanked me on the butt." She described her reaction, "And like, that, that, to me, was so over the line inappropriate. And I don't exactly remember how I reacted, other than I came about this close to slapping him across the face. Yelled at him, for sure. And then went on my way." She elaborated on the power differential created by rank and his in-group status and how it affected her response. "I was a very young Captain, he was a Lieutenant Colonel in the squadron – and, you know, it – um, so yeah, it happened. I don't remember ever speaking to the guy again, and he PCS'd I don't know how long after that. But it was uncomfortable being around him." She expanded and described her experience as a female fighter pilot from a more macro lens. She stated, "But as far as other things – you know, being the only girl, like, I would describe it as being hit on fairly regularly." Jackie offered a guess at what he was thinking, "He probably blew if off as, 'Oh, I was drunk. I don't remember.' But we never discussed it. I just avoided him, uh, after that. I thought he was dirt – a total dirtbag." Despite being a dirtbag, the perpetrator had a reputation of being well-liked. She stated, "I remember it was awkward, because he was loved by the squadron. Everybody thought he was the greatest guy; he had the nicest wife. And he really did. A nice, beautiful wife. I don't even know why he did it." She described her confusion and disappointment about the incident. She stated, "I don't know what was going through his mind. It was just totally inappropriate, and I would expect, expect more out of my DO. The second-highest ranking guy in my squadron. To a young, fairly new girl in the squadron."

> **Interviewer:** Did anyone else see it?
> **Jackie:** Yeah, the other guy who I was with, who I don't even remember who it was.
> **Interviewer:** What was his reaction? Did he say anything?
> **Jackie:** No.
> **Interviewer:** No?

Jackie: It just happened, and nobody talked about it at all, and we went on with life.

Interviewer: If you felt like it needed to go anywhere else, would you have known where to go?

Jackie: Oh, back then? I don't know. Um, I don't know what I would've done. I guess I would have gone to the squadron commander.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jackie: But honestly, I don't think anything would've been done with that. It wouldn't, um – I, I didn't think anything needed to be done because of the earful I gave him. I felt like – this has been addressed. I know it's not gonna happen again. It's, it's over and done with. But looking back on that experience, if I had gone – you know, the only person to go to was the squadron commander. We didn't have SARC. We didn't have any of that stuff back then. So, I would've gone to the squadron commander, and he probably would've said, "Okay, I'll talk to him." It would've been swept under the rug.

She rationalized the incident, "And it was partly due to the fact that we had been out drinking. It probably wouldn't have happened had he been sober." She minimized the incident and felt lucky that it hadn't been worse, "It happened to me. That was the grossest violation I'd ever experienced during my entire career, which in the big scheme of things, is not terrible, you know? It was awful, but I know much worse things happen to plenty other people."

Eileen elaborated on her sexual assault that she shared in the first-round interviews. She shared how the assault has impacted her over the years, "If I do think about it because of whatever reason, but I don't get that, like, stomach-churning feeling, – I don't get that anymore, luckily. I think my husband and I, over the years, have dealt with it, you know? And been able to handle it." She describes her current feelings about the perpetrator, "It's good riddance 'cause the guy was a creep and he ended up being really stupid and getting kicked out of the Air Force, or at least his wings taken from him, but it wasn't good."

Interviewer: You're looking back with a lot more experience, and you're in a different place in life. How do you feel about how it was handled? Do you feel like you had support?

Eileen: Yes. The SARC was very supportive. My DO was very supportive. The squadron commander was not, um—I didn't realize it. But at the time, he was trying to get me in trouble for an alcohol-related incident.

Interviewer. Wow.

Eileen: I told my flight commander that something happened. And then he was like, "You don't have to say anything else. Here's the number for the SARC." And that's all that happened with what I told him. And so, that's when I was seeing the SARC and getting help and had support that way. But then, um, the – my flight commander, of course, I think must have said something to the commander. And then the commander started to, like, do an investigation and asked—was asking people from my pilot training class what happened, and apparently, was trying to get me in trouble for something. I don't even remember exactly what the charges were. I think it was inappropriate relationship – IP to student is maybe what it was. Thankfully, nothing came out of that.

Interviewer: Given your experience, if you had someone come to you and tell you that they've gone through something like that, what kind of advice would you give them?

Eileen: I actually went through the Victim Advocate training after that.

Interviewer: Oh, you did? Wow.

Eileen: Luckily, I never ended up having to be a Victim Advocate for anybody. I guess that's lucky in a sense. The big thing is just being there to support them, you know? Being there to support them and not even asking what happened.

Interviewer: Yup. Okay.

Eileen: Does it matter? At least in my opinion, if they wanna talk about it, then they can talk about it. But for some people they just don't want to talk about it. But if they did want to talk to me specifically about that scenario, um, being there and being supportive. And even if they did tell me what was going on, um, still just providing support. And having them understand that it's not their fault.

Interestingly, despite Eileen realizing that what happened wasn't her fault, she still places some responsibility on herself. Not only was her experience sexual assault, but it was an abuse of the instructor – student relationship. The instructor is in a position of power and is always responsible for maintaining a professional relationship. She stated, "Though, I mean, I realize that my behavior was inappropriate but that doesn't make what happened my fault. I shouldn't have had any drinks. And dancing the way I was dancing was inappropriate for being a married woman. But it still doesn't mean that I asked for it or that I deserved it. You know what I mean?" She continued and described how she still struggles with this, but imagines what she would tell her daughters, "So, that was a really hard thing for me to understand, but it's hard 'cause I have three daughters. How do you teach them that, like, it's never your fault? But there are ways that you can help protect yourself. But it's still not your fault. I don't know, it's

weird." Finally, she reported that the assault did affect her marriage, "It did affect my marriage and my life."

Bessie confirmed that it would be difficult to speak up about sexual assault or harassment. She added that it might be even more difficult when it's a "borderline" event. She stated,

> I think sometimes too, if you are just in a situation that's kind of borderline, it's making you uncomfortable, I think those are actually—I'm sure that all the trauma that goes with, uh, sexual abuse, like, that is there. But as far as speaking up and telling someone—like, I don't know. I think the, like, you come to work every day and you're uncomfortable. I think that's where it's more difficult.

She reported one incident she was involved in, "We had a civilian employee that was always, like, borderline inappropriate with comments. I was always just like, 'I don't need to be around this guy.' And then we got five contractors working in scheduling, the majority of them were women. And they started having a big problem with the comments he was making." At the time, Bessie was the Chief of Scheduling, and described what happened, "My civilian scheduler, who had been in the military and retired, went to the commander and was like, 'Hey, this has to stop.' And then she told me what happened, and I was like, 'I'm feeling guilty for not dealing with this stuff earlier.'" She continued, "And he's not making a comment every day, so it's like a couple comments a month. She went back to the commander [later] and was like, 'Did you talk to [name]?' And he was like, 'Oh, I've been meaning to.'" Bessie described her reaction, "It blew my mind that he was aware of harassment that was happening and did nothing about it. It blew my mind."

Bessie followed this story with a more egregious incident, that also, was not reported. She described an incident that occurred at Red Flag-Alaska. She stated, "This guy came along with my squadron. We didn't have enough people. He was in the squadron I trained in, and he

was someone that I'd had a really negative experience with there." It was the same person

who'd suggested the inappropriate call signs at the naming ceremony Bessie described in her

first interview. She stated, "Um, I think I may have told you my naming story before. And he

was the one that, like, suggested those names." She continued with the current incident,

> So, we go to the opening party, and I recognize that one of my friends- she flies a Strike Eagle –
> she was here… She came up to me, and she's like, "Who the hell is that guy?" And I was just
> like, "Oh my God. Like, he is awful. I'm sorry for whatever happened. What happened?" And
> basically, she was standing at the bar. And mind you, this was on base, at an O Club. And he's
> in his flight suit zipped down to his stomach, right at the belly button, and it was just gross—I
> mean, Lieutenant Colonel. And she was wearing a hat, like all the Strike Eagle squadron had…
> She was wearing the hat, and he stole it from her… and then she went to the bathroom… and then
> she came back and stole it from him and put   it on her head backwards. And he came up to
> her and was like, "You know what they say about girls that wear their hats backwards?" And
> she's like, "I don't know, that they are lesbians?" And he was like, "That they like to get fucked
> in the ass."

Bessie continued and described her friend's shocked reaction, "And she's like, 'Holy shit.' Her

Strike Eagle bros were around, and she was like, 'We're out of here' and that's when she came

and found me and was just like, 'Who is this guy?' and I was like, 'He's creepy as hell, like, just

stay away from him.'"

Bessie described her lack of personal experience with sexual assault as "lucky." She

listed the fact that she's been married her entire military career as a protective factor. She stated,

"I feel like I've been—um, I don't know if lucky is the right word in that regard. Like, I, um—

yeah. I don't know. I've been married the entire time that I've been in the Air Force. I got

married, like, 3 days before I entered the Air Force." She reflected on her friend's experience and

stated, "I would think that someone that's single, people seem to think they have an invitation to

see how far they can get or something." Amelia also listed her married status as a protective

factor. She stated, "I got married at 19, and I was 29 when I got to Germany for my first

assignment. So, we'd already been married 10 years, you know. So, I never felt as much. But I

was older, highly trained, I was a Captain, and we'd been married for a while."

Amelia also shared her experience with MST and sexual harassment. Like other participants, she described taking precautions and remaining hypervigilant due to the prevalence of sexual assault. "There's a couple times where I would find myself in a situation, usually when deployed, because otherwise, my husband would be there and he'd go, 'Hey, it's time to go.' But I would look around and go, 'Yeah, I need to leave now.' There's a few times where I just get that… something was making me feel uncomfortable." She confirmed that she had a plan and safety precautions that she took when returning to her room, "And I would go back to my room. A lot of times I would find one of my squadron members I trusted and go, 'Hey, I'm heading back to my room.' And they would just watch me go for a little bit and make sure that nobody was walking right after me."

She told another story that occurred on a TDY. "The only time there was anything more than that, was more than just a weird feeling, we were in Italy. And it's this restaurant on the beach. So, we got the whole squadron out there. Had a couple hours on the beach and then dinner and lots of Italian wine and food and everybody's having a good time." She reported what happened after they got in the car to leave, "We're all getting in the cars, and I ended up sitting in the middle in the back between these two guys. So, I'm in the middle between this guy that's sleeping with his – drooling on the window on his side. And the other guy keeps talking to me and he's just saying stuff that's not cool, and he just keeps going and I'm like, 'Dude, you need to shut-up.' She described saying it loud enough for the guys in the front to hear and intervene, "And I said it very loudly so the guys in the front heard, 'I don't like what you are saying, and you need to shut up now.' And one of the guys up front turned around and said something to him, so. Because they could tell that I was not happy with what was going on. Because I spoke-up very loudly." She described the power of a bystander intervention, "And so

that kind of got through, 'Hey, what's going on back there man? Just chill out.' And that's all it takes sometimes is to know that this is not going to be tolerated by everybody else." She reported that this was the worst thing that happened. She also minimizes this incident and implies that it was at the "normal" level of harassment that females in the military can expect to endure. She stated, "That's really the worst that I had. There were other kinds of harassment, you know. Nothing where I truly felt threatened, you know, just the standard kind of BS."

> **Interviewer:** It sounds like our previous conversation in that it takes somebody from the majority group to speak up, to nip it in the bud.

> **Amelia:** Yeah. So simple; such a simple thing to do, right? But it's hard for that person to speak-up, because now they are putting themselves, it takes some risk, it takes some courage on their part to speak-up.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think if anything had gone further, or anything been more egregious, do you think you would have known what to do or known who to tell?

> **Amelia:** Yeah. I was very fortunate at that particular timeframe; both of my squadron commanders were really good. My DOs were knobs, for lack of a better word [laughter]. And I know I could have gone to one of them and said, "Hey, this is getting out of hand. Somebody needs to do something about this guy who's annoying me," you know? And I think all of them knew me well enough that it wouldn't have been an issue.

> **Interviewer:** Do you think your age and experience affected your ability to speak-up?

> **Amelia:** Oh, I know it did. I had a hard enough time going in as a Captain with some years in the Air Force behind me. If I try to put my 22-year-old-self there instead of my 28-year-old-self, it would have been a lot harder. I wouldn't have felt as free to speak-up and even though I didn't feel like I could speak-up for a long time about a lot of things, I would have spoken up about that.

Marina shared her experience with sexual assault. Like previous participants, she started by minimizing her experience, "I will say that for the most part, the stuff that I've experienced wasn't really bad. It was, like, a Colonel when I was a Major and he was, like, inappropriately touching…advances." She continued and emphasized her ability to speak-up, "I have no problem—I have no problem telling people, like, WTF. That's not okay." Then she rationalizes, "So, again, bad people. There are bad people everywhere." She described how this individual had a known history, "And this individual I knew had problems—had done inappropriate things to other friends of mine. So, it really didn't surprise me." She continued and described how she

had to change her behavior to avoid a similar situation, "I confided in a few people after I addressed it, and it was never an issue again. He was a group commander at the time, and sometimes we're flying nights. I'm sitting there with a female airman next to me, and there's nobody else around. I had to make sure that I wasn't in a situation where that could happen again." She elaborated on the way she handled the assault, "Looking back, I felt like I handled it well, and it never happened again. I scared him, and I told my reserve commander that it had happened." She reported that her husband had a different opinion, "I told my husband – he thought I should've filed a formal complaint against that guy. But I thought I had it handled on my own."

Interviewer: When you went to your commander, were you supported?

Marina: Yeah. I just went to my squadron reserve commander because I, as a Major, I really laid into him. So, I wanted to make sure that if it came back around, that somebody in my chain of command knew my side of the story.

Interviewer: Interesting. So, you were worried about getting in trouble?

Marina: Exactly. And I wouldn't say it was me getting in trouble for reporting it, I would think it's more of the bad person trying to spin it. Trying to go offensive early. I've learned this as a commander. People that go offensive first have the upper-hand in the situation—whether it's the truth or not. So, I didn't want to be the Major that was in trouble for yelling at a Colonel.

Interviewer: Did you tell his squadron that they shouldn't have women alone with him?

Marina: I told the squadron that women shouldn't be alone in the squadron at night. I was recommending they just have a guy on the team. And that was more like my mom instinct. That was more worrying about other people.

Interviewer: How did that go over?

Marina: They didn't do that at night anymore. Everybody asked if I wanted more help, they asked if I wanted to file a complaint.

Interviewer: They did? Okay.

Marina: I was like, "No, I think I handled it."

Interviewer: So, you're saying, "I think I handled it pretty well and I'm okay with how it went?"

Marina: Yea. Especially for what—I mean, he just inappropriately grabbed my butt. So, it wasn't anything super bad. But I was definitely uncomfortable with him doing that.

Interviewer: If you'd felt it needed to go further, could you have done that?

Marina: Yeah. I mean, I think it happens-- I think it happens in every career field.

Like other participants, Marina has rehearsed the reality of MST in the military, and she has a set of actions that she feels protects her. She reported, "The people that I get the creeps around—I try to tell them initially, like, I don't really wanna be in situations with you and then I avoid them. And I'll tell one of my trusted people even if nothing's happened. There's some people that you just get the creeps around." She described how she learned to listen to her gut and the other tactics she's used, "My dad taught me that when I was very young, thankfully. Just don't be in situations with people like that. Trust your gut. I've always had people that I trust with my life, and I'll tell a few people like, 'Hey if I get cornered by this person, I do not wanna be alone with this person ever." Finally, she shared her stance on MST from a leadership perspective, "It won't happen around me. I can tell you that for sure."

Beryl discussed her experiences with MST and sexual harassment. Like other participants, she minimized the importance of her experiences. She stated, "I can give you a couple examples, but I don't have anything significant." Like other participants, she also seemed to assume a certain amount of responsibility for avoiding sexual assault and felt the need to monitor her behaviors while in the military environment. She stated, "I totally avoided everything sexual. I didn't get drunk on purpose because I didn't want it to lead to anything sexual. I have very strict boundaries for myself. I, personally, was not going to be involved sexually until marriage." She continued and discussed what she observed, "I could see a lot of other women who didn't have those boundaries. I see how that could turn messy really quickly, especially when you are in such a hierarchical atmosphere, you have mandatory drinking events, and you're the only woman." She also highlighted the sexual innuendo, "And I even had one female instructor pilot in training. She was my flight commander and when it came to a specific

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radio call when you were on final [approach] at eight miles. It was, 'Taurus 39, eight out.'" She described her reaction to this call, "And I was like, 'I don't get it.' And then she was like, 'You've never been ate out before?' And I'm like, 'Oh, um.'" Beryl reported feeling trapped, "And you're in a bus full of people when your flight commander says, 'What? You've never been ate out?' What do you say? I mean, there's no right thing to say."

She described a second incident where she also felt trapped and like there wasn't a correct response, "There was a wooden tail that we would gift away when people left. And our job as the students was to cut out all the grossest poses from the pornography magazines that we could possibly get on the back of it. So, you would say like, 'Farewell, with the tail,' and you would hold it up so everybody would see the tail. But on the back of it would be all pornography. Your parting gift. And so, it was our job to create these beautiful masterpieces.'" She reported what transpired when she declined to participate, "And they were like, 'Come on, [Call Sign]. What are you doing?' and I was like, 'I'm not into porn.' And they're like, 'What? You've never opened a porn magazine?' And I was like, 'No, I haven't.'" Then she realized that there was no appropriate response. The truth would fan the flames and a lie would compromise her values. She stated, "And it was at that moment because if it was almost like a little bit of a when I said, 'Well, no I haven't,' it was this instantly now they have this new piece of information that they can hold over my head, right?"

Beryl provided another incident, "He was my sponsor in Germany to help with the transition. You figure a 23-year-old moving to Germany. So, he and his wife caught me at the airport and got me settled and whatnot." She described a slow escalation of behaviors,

> It started before when he was playing guitar at Chapel and they were Christians from Texas. Anyhow, he kind of just slowly was escalating—I'd be working in scheduling and there'd be nobody in there and it'd late, 6 o'clock at night. And he would come in and, 'Well, we're the

only ones in the squadron.' 'Oh, I was just seeing what you're up to. You know my wife's pregnant and all, so.' There were just multiple times that it was paired with sexual innuendo. The worst time was in the vault. I was in the vault studying and he came in and there was a couch and he was like, 'The door is closed. We've got the couch to ourselves in the vault and the wife's not interested.' It was all done through a joking manner and probing questions to see if I was going to go along with it.

She never told anyone about the incidents. She described her reasoning, "I don't know that anybody would have believed me, because he was happy husband, new father, in the band at church, well-liked, easy going to everybody." She also listed that fact that it was a different time without resources in place. She stated, "At the time, there really wasn't much in place either. There was, I think I remember there being a sexual assault hotline that you could call." She also described a lack of confidence that anything would have been done if she reported. She places these incidents into the realm of normal expectations and stated that anything less than rape was to be expected. "But I don't know that it would have—I guess I want to believe that if it had escalated to that, that something would have been done. But there's so much between that and…there's a pretty large continuum. And so, I think anything short of actual rape was just fair game."

Beryl described how she found a way to remove herself after seeing that there were no good options for her situation. She stated, "And ultimately, I think that's what I did for myself. I guess there probably are ways – they could send you to another squadron, but you'd have to PCS and that takes time. And then you show up at a squadron unannounced… what the heck just happened, right?" She elaborated on the impossible situation a person would be in, even if they PCS'd to a different squadron. "And everybody knows everybody else. And so, the word is out—I mean you're doomed to fail at that point. And where all of your upgrades and all of your performance is 100% political."

Bessie agreed with Beryl and stated, "There's a price to pay to speak-up for sure. There's a lot of barriers, that's what they talked about in Green Dot training. What are the barriers that people must [overcome] if they're a bystander and intervening in something? There could be a lot of consequences." She reflected on those consequences, "There's a price to pay, you know, figuring out what price you are willing to pay, and the results will impact you and if it's worth it or not." Bessie critiqued the system, "If something happened with somebody that you're kind of close to, it just doesn't seem like the process would work very fast. Man, that's such a tough situation to, like, go forward. And then they have to notify someone to get you moved or get someone else moved. And the pressure of, 'I have this job. How are they gonna? I'm the only one that can do this job.'" Beryl also described the harsh reality of making a report. She stated, "And what is your option? You've worked your way to the top of this pyramid if you will. And now if you—so there's no other place for you to work because you were in the one spot where you're allowed to work." She continues by describing the risk that comes with reporting, "I mean, would they separate you? It would be impossible to separate you. And if they did try to separate you, how do you fly? How do you keep your currency? You'd have to quit almost, or that other person has to be removed."

All participants verified first-round reports of MST and added additional detail during second-round interviews.

Workplace Environment. During second round interviews, participants confirmed that they struggled to navigate the fine line between trying to gain acceptance and improving the environment. Marina discussed her firm feelings about peer pressure. She stated, "It's also not okay for them to push people to do things that they don't – I mean, we're adults. There's—there should not be peer pressure. We're talking people aged 25 to, you know, 45, and people should

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not be peer pressuring other people to do things they don't want to do." She continued, "I have

worked with other people who were uncomfortable with the culture, and you just find the ways

that they can fit in."

Backsliding. One aspect of the work environment that emerged during second round

interviews was the concept of backsliding. Amelia, who has started a speaking career,

conceptualized backsliding while reflecting on her career, and writing a speech. She stated,

> As I have been going through and writing some of my speeches, I used a lot of my
> experiences right, from that time. And the thing that's come to me in the last probably six months
> that I didn't realize before was, one of the things that really bothers me is what I call backsliding.
> There are so few women fighter pilots that when I left the [numbered name] squadron, they didn't
> have another woman in their squadron for 10 years.

She described the impact of having so few women that squadrons have gaps in time where there

are no women.

> So, all that work, if you will, to make it a more friendly place for me, right, where
> everything wasn't a locker room. When I left, basically, that's not how it was. And now, when
> the next woman shows up, she's – I think things change quicker, that she doesn't face quite as
> much, it's not as bad. But now there's that little bit of resentment from the guys because now we
> have to change what we are doing and what we've been doing, because we have a woman in our
> squadron. And I just think that's sad that the current generation of women fighter pilots, they
> don't face as much of it, but they do face more than I would like. Because in the places where
> they haven't had a woman in a long time, they just go back to being like they're high school kids
> in a locker room, or college guys in a frat house, or whatever you want to equate it to.

Amelia also identified the power that men or the majority group members have in altering this

phenomenon. She stated,

> And there's more men fighter pilots who stick up for the women. So, if it's that way, it'll change
> quicker. And they have a greater sense of belonging than maybe I had when I first got there,
> right? And speaking-up for themselves earlier. So, it all gets turned around pretty quickly, but
> it's like, why do we have to do that? Why do they have to, you know? Why do we have to
> backslide? Why can't we just keep an environment that's welcoming for everybody?

She also discusses the importance of always maintaining a professional and welcoming

workplace environment. She stated, "This is why you have to keep that professional

environment all the time. Because when someone does show up…we shouldn't have to change.

You should just have a professional work environment all the time." She continued and discussed why this topic remains important despite being retired. She stated, "I think we still have some credibility; you know? We've been there and been through it all and we earned some respect and did those things and now we want you to keep it that way."

Bessie also described the concept of backsliding. She reported that one commander made changes to his communication style after she talked to him, but he was replaced by a new commander who went back to using the old divisive language. She stated, "After that [she talked to him], he changed, and then, we got a new commander recently, and he's just—he's back to the same old 'bros, gents, dudes.' 'It's like, oh my god [laughter].'"

Anthropometric Measurements. Bessie confirmed a first round finding that the anthropometric requirements are more limiting for women than men. As the newest generation of fighter jets continue to be designed according to the same antiquated size standards, it falls under that category of institutional betrayal. She stated, "When I go to an airshow or people see me in my flight suit, they're like, 'Yeah, I considered –or even like, enlisted, being a pilot, but I'm too short.' Like, I've heard that entirely too many times." The height standards have recently changed for several aircraft, and these aircraft no-longer require a height waiver. Fighter aircraft remain unattainable for anyone under the 5'4" minimum height. Despite the positive changes, flight opportunities for women continue to be limited, "I love that now, it's not, 'Oh, you need a waiver,' but instead, it's like, 'Hey, you are qualified to fly these 5 of 25 planes.' Versus like, 'You're not qualified for anything' and you have to fight to find out you're qualified for five of them."

Flight Equipment. Bessie, who has been involved in some of the recent advances in women's uniforms, confirmed round-one statements about the difference between the first

generation of female fighter pilots and the more recent generations. She stated, "They were blazing a trail. And now, it seems like we're in this moment of, 'Yeah, we can do it too. We've proved that. But we're not really set-up for success and our equipment doesn't fit." She indicates that her confidence to speak-up is hard-earned by the first generations of female fighter pilots. She described their contributions with admiration and appreciation, "Like, I don't expect, you know, Martha McSally and Sharon Preszler, those first ladies. I don't expect them to be like, 'How could I get through the training? My G-suit doesn't fit.' Their path was, 'I just need to get through this, and be as similar as possible.' And we are in a situation now where it's like, 'Okay. We've shown that we can do this. Let's make it better.'"

Bessie described her experience obtaining cold weather gear when she arrived at an arctic location where proper gear is essential. She stated, "[The email] just has-- you know, this is available in small to extra-large. And it didn't say men's; it didn't say women's." She responded to the email with a request for more detail. She stated, "Are there women's sizes in this?" And the AFE troop unknowingly sent a telling response, "He gave an incredible quote that, which I believe is of importance. He said that he's never seen a woman's size. Like, that was his answer." Instead of accepting that response, Bessie thought of younger pilots and future generations of female pilots. She replied, "Hey, thanks for your quick response. You know, just because you've never seen it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Could we dig into this a little further? I appreciate your help in making sure I have gear that fits." Bessie also acknowledged that her experience and rank allowed her to push back. She stated, "If you are a Lieutenant or something, you just don't really have the audacity to respond to a Master Sergeant, you know?" After further research was done, it was in fact determined that there's no female sizes in any of the cold weather gear she was supposed to order. She described the overall incident as another

example where minorities experience inequity, "It was just kind of, you know, the classic. Like, people aren't realizing that you don't fit the standard mold."

Despite the creation and roll-out of the female flight suit, there continue to be additional hurdles for women. Bessie described her interaction with a female physical therapist who needed a flight suit when she flew on missions. She stated, "I told her what the process was to get a female flight suit. And I told her, and she's like, 'I don't have time for that' and I was like, 'Yeah, I don't blame you.' Bessie pointed out another inadequacy of the new female flight suit. She stated, "I cannot believe our flight suits don't cost the same. That's one of my biggest pet peeves. So, the Ops Group will be like, 'Hey, we've got extra flight suits. Come pick two up. They're all this sizes. Go trade them at base supply.' Bessie reported that the female flight suit costs more than the male flight suit, making it impossible to trade sizes at base supply like the male pilots. She stated, "I try to do that, and like, I can't because they're, you know, a ten-dollar difference." Despite several recent advances in female flight gear, the second-round interviews confirmed several inequities that still exist.

Heterosexism. Second-round interviews confirmed the sense of betrayal that sexual minorities continue to experience in the military. Bessie described how the fighter pilot culture can be unwelcoming to sexual minority groups. She reported a popular joke about the F-15E community. She stated, "They say the Strike Eagle is gay because there's two guys in the cockpit. It's really hard to get over that joke, you know?"

Guard and Reserve Hiring Practices. Second-round interviews confirmed the potential for bias in the Guard and Reserve hiring practices. Interestingly, Marina discussed a more positive consequence to these objective hiring practices. She described her experience in the Reserves and gives credit to the hiring protocol for their low rates of sexual assault. She stated,

"We hand-select and hire everybody. I think that the problems you'll probably find are more in the active-duty where they just—you're stuck with the people you're stuck with. So, fortunately, no. There have not been any issues in the unit I'm in since [year]." She described the hiring process in the Reserves, "We don't hire any random people. That's the way that most Guard and Reserve hiring works…anybody has a bad experience with somebody, they're automatically taken off the list. Because we just don't want that culture in a squadron for 10 years…it helps to keep it feeling like a family.

Roll Calls, Naming Ceremonies, and Squadron Shenanigans. Participants discussed the benefits and costs of Roll Calls and other traditions in the fighter pilot culture. Bessie confirmed first-round findings that aspects of Roll Calls result in institutional betrayal when missteps happen and go uncorrected. She added that the way a culture discusses missteps is important to the creation of an inclusive culture. She stated,

> It's interesting how people talk about it [the Roll Call] afterwards. If I had to guess, some people are saying, "Oh, you remember what so-and-so said? That was—that was insane." You know, it's important how we talk about that afterwards. And, like, I'm fortunate that I wasn't there for those conversations, but I hope that some people were like, "Dude, don't let him talk next time." or, you know, tell him ahead of time, and tell him we want a war story. We don't want criticism of a PC culture that you don't approve of.

Marina discussed her view of the heritage room and some of the fighter pilot traditions. She admitted that, like all situations, they can get out of hand, but overall, she feels they are beneficial. She stated, "[Fighter pilots] have to make decisions that could be life or death situations, and sometimes you need that type of outlet to help you deal with the stress. I mean, you're not gonna get the whole squadron to go to the gym together to workout. Although, that would probably be just as fun." She elaborated, "I think a lot of it…I mean, things can get out of hand anywhere you go. They can get out of hand at a party at your house. They can get out of hand at a 10-year-old's birthday party. She explained how many of the traditions serve a

purpose, "I think the important thing that happens at those [Roll Calls]—whether alcohol is involved or not—is the sharing of stories. I think a lot of that ends up being, even if it's 10% truth, a lot of it ends up being therapy for people."

Jackie described how many of the squadron activities fit with her personality. She had some sneaky ways to lessen the impact, but she described mostly having a good time. She stated, "If I didn't wanna do something, like, I learned for shots. But I never wanted to leave, 'cause I always enjoyed it." She described a couple tricks, "But if I didn't wanna do a shot, there were ways around that. Like, if we had a toast where you would go, 'Samurai!' You know, and take your drink and slam it down, and then shoot it. And I learned if you do this, and everything spills out, and then you drink this much." Despite having tricks of the trade, she reiterated, that she mostly enjoyed it, "But I didn't ever—I can't think of a single time that I wanted to leave. It was fun." She also described one fighter pilot tradition of eating a raw egg. She stated, "We had to eat the egg—a raw egg whole. And that was totally the most repulsive thing I've ever done. I would rather do 10,000 shots of the grossest whatever—than eat that egg again." She reported her little trick, and verified that it was fun, despite being disgusting. She stated, "But you know, you learn, it's dark, you kinda let it slide down your chin and whatever. But I didn't wanna walk out because of it because I knew that moment, or that particular thing that we were doing, that rite of passage, was temporary. And then at the end, we would all just be together hanging out."

First and second round interviews highlighted a camaraderie building aspect of fighter pilot traditions, while also acknowledging the presence of institutional betrayal if squadron leadership doesn't set clear and educated boundaries. Participants described how the style of a squadron's Roll Call provides an overall representation of the squadron culture.

Language and Humor. Bessie confirmed her feelings about language that she shared in the first round and elaborated. She stated, "I have a hard time with knowing what to do with how people address groups of people. So, like when they say 'gents' to the entire room and I'm the only girl there." She described how the word choice leaves her feeling outside the group. She continued with ideas of more inclusive language, "But then I don't really want them to say, 'Gents and [Call sign].' I do think I want to hear, '[mascot], IP's or everyone welcome' – there's just so many other options…every time I hear that, I'm like, a little bummed out." Bessie describes mixed feelings about how this should be addressed. She stated, "I don't want to be the person speaking for the entire squadron, you know, or for every female fighter pilot that might ever come through that squadron about what's appropriate to say and what's not."

She also expressed skepticism about the cost of speaking-up. She stated, "I don't want to pay the price for trying to control that [language]." She described an interesting dynamic where she felt confident that speaking-up would produce change, but at the cost of her in-group status. She stated, "I know for sure, if I send an email or said it in a pilot meeting or told the commander that this isn't a progressive thing we're doing here. I know it would change. I know 90% of people would change and be like, 'We don't say that anymore.' But the –I don't want to say controversy, but they would be like, 'Oh, shit, I thought [call sign] was cool."

Leadership. Amelia confirmed the first-round findings that leaders have a responsibility to set the tone for an inclusive and professional culture within an organization. A failure to cultivate a professional culture results in institutional betrayal among the members failed by those leaders. "And we talk about responsibilities of leaders. If you make a policy but you don't believe the policy, or you don't live up to the policy, then everybody that works for you knows it's okay to not live up to the policy, right? It's relatively simple leadership basics, but it's

surprising how little that's actually done." She provided the following example, "So, it goes back to General McPeak at the very beginning. He was the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. When there were rumors that they might be changing this [women being allowed to fly in combat] he says, 'I'd rather fly with a less qualified man than a woman.'" When the policy changed, he'd already set the tone as a leader, "Then six months later, he's at the press conference introducing us. Now, what does that tell the fighter pilot community? 'Yeah, I still don't believe in this and I'm being forced to do it and you guys know, I'm not buying this policy." She listed the consequences of his contradictory leadership, "So, that just makes it harder, right, on everybody else. And you're failing as a leader. If you can't stand-up and do what you're supposed to do, then give that job to someone who can."

Jackie confirmed first round findings about how impactful leadership can be, and described how she expected fairness from leadership, but instead, she was discriminated against. She stated, "That was the most uncomfortable time in my career. I had a boss who didn't wanna give me a chance or even evaluate me for me." After that assignment, she ended up at a new location with better leadership. She reported, "And we had a fantastic squadron commander, and it just—it was great. It was really good."

Bessie described an experience where leadership became aware of toxic and hostile behaviors within the squadron but allowed them to persist. Consequently, leadership and the institution betrayed her expectation of a safe work environment. "I've been a flight commander for a little bit, and I—we've had someone in the squadron. It had nothing to do with, like, sexual-type stuff, but, like, brutal. Like, he is demeaning and just really condescending and just nasty. And it's tearing apart the squadron this guy." She described the behaviors and how it is affecting the squadron: "He has this high standard—he'll interrupt you in briefs, so airborne,

he'll take the lead. It's been really gnarly, and when I go to the commander and say that stuff –

unless you have a concrete example of, 'He did this,' and it created a safety issue or something,

it's hard to show how upsetting or disruptive and inappropriate some of the stuff is." In

summary, she stated,

> What I'm saying, it's like the borderline stuff that's like, this person is creating a divide in the squadron or is polarizing. It's the borderline stuff, so maybe someone coming to work every day feeling uncomfortable…that's the stuff that I don't think people are going to the IG with…you know it's gonna be investigated, and it's like, is it worth investigating? The same thing of, like, me speaking up and saying I don't like 'gents,' it's like, is it worth that?

She highlights the cost of being uncomfortable every day in the work environment and identifies

that the cost of speaking-up is greater.

Bessie also confirmed the first-round finding that leadership can make a major impact on

an experience. She stated, "And luckily, I had, you know, an awesome flight commander and

stuff that looked out for me." She also stated, "I'm really grateful for people that, like, looked

out for me and that I talked to at that point [going through a difficult upgrade]." She countered

this positive experience with a negative experience with leadership at a Roll Call. She reported,

"And oh, by the way, the wing commander showed up with the OG commander and they [the

Roll Call participants] were singing this song that was completely—it was about raping women.

It was, like, appalling. And so, they don't want to be uncool or whatever and be like, 'We're not

going to do this right now; or ever [laughter]." Amelia confirmed Bessie's experience, "At some

point, things start degrading… and that's when the DO and the squadron commander and the

other leadership need to go, 'No, this isn't a frat house. This is a fighter squadron. And yeah,

we can sing songs, but we don't have to go over the top.' It's their responsibility." The betrayal

comes when leadership fails to maintain a safe and respectful culture.

Hostile Sexism

Amelia confirmed first-round reports of hostile sexism. She reported being constantly questioned about her qualifications while working for the airlines after she retired from the military.

> I didn't feel it as much with the airlines when I was a First Officer. I mean, you got a lot of it. I got passengers asking me what my qualifications are. I got, you know, all sorts of stuff that the guys never hear. But then when I upgraded to Captain, I saw it even more. Like you are walking down the jetway with your First Officer and the mechanics assume he's the Captain and operating agents assume he's the Captain, just because he's a guy, even though we have our uniforms on with our numbers of stripes, you know? And I'm like, "Man, this is just annoying."

Benevolent Sexism

Participants confirmed experiencing benevolent sexism in the second round of interviews.

Likeability

Second-round interviews confirmed first-round findings that likeability is required for a woman to be successful, but is also, a very fine and difficult line to navigate. Marina described needing to taper her personality style as a leader to remain likeable. She reported, "I'm just a pretty principled—right. The bad part is that I'm very black and white. I have to work on that because—especially being a commander because not everybody—there is a grey area. And I'm very black and white. But integrity has always been super important to me, even growing up." She reported how she needs to taper this quality to avoid hurting feelings, "I try to be honest, but I try not to hurt people's feelings at the same time. I try to have a bit of empathy, but honesty is super important to me."

Bessie described a double-bind when it comes to her leadership and instructional style. She is very relational, but the traditional military leadership style is very goal-directed often at the expense of emotion. She stated, "I also can't slow down someone's trajectory, and we have a

timeline, and we try to find a compromise [between the human and the mission]. She continued,

"So, like the debrief, I'm not necessarily speaking up with emotional things…and because I'm

his [the student's] flight commander, I know the last three rides he's had, and they've all been

rough. I don't think most IPs are really looking back and being like, 'Oh, who'd they fly with,

how have they been doing, and are they on a high or a low." She reported that she tries to look at

what they need to be successful in their training and personal life, "What do they need...let's

make him realize that it'll all be worth it in two months, when he's done with the program. And

so, I do think it's helpful to still have an emotional reaction to things that are being said. And

maybe you're not fixing it in the moment, but you're creating a better environment in the

squadron."

Eileen described how she learned the fighter pilot attitude and confidence in the first

round of interviews. In the second round, she described how she's also had to taper these

learned traits, because they don't align with traditional female traits. She stated,

> A couple times, I had people kind of be taken aback when I give direct feedback… when it comes down to being critical, I have to make the extra effort to sound nice or else I sound like a bitch. I've had to say, "I don't know how to say this without sounding like a straight-up bitch or mean or whatever." That's the difference, because with women, most people are used to a softer or sweeter approach.

She described how she must monitor her personality and demeanor in a vain attempt to produce

the perfect amount of confidence and nurture. Failure to mix the correct personality traits, and

she risks being labeled as a "bitch" and becoming unlikable.

> It probably depends on the area of the world you are from, but generally, women from Southern areas, you're nice even if you are being mean, right? Like, "Oh, bless your heart." You're like, "Wait, are you being mean? Are you being serious?" But either way, the general demeanor of women is usually nicer…I think because people grow-up with mostly female teachers and more patient mothers, and that's just how mothers are nurturing, and of course, I think I'm nurturing to my kids and my students. But it's just different than the way the guys approach it. I have to make sure that for me, my personality, I am not so straightforward.

Internal Experience

Coping Skills

Participants described multiple skills that they employed to meet the challenges of the interpersonal and sociological aspects of their fighter pilot experience. They also identified characteristics of their mind-sets that contribute to their success. After second-round interviews, the categories of utilized and avoided coping skills were combined as it became clear that utilized and avoided coping skills varied by participant.

Diminishing of the Self

Second round interviews confirmed the coping skill; diminishing of the self. Amelia described it like this,

> When you are in a position in the minority, you just need to pick your battles. You can't fix everything right off the bat. You can't just walk in and go, 'All right. I'm here, this how it's going to be.' You're going to get, 'Oh no it's not.' So, for me, everybody approaches it differently, but for me, I said, 'Okay, I'm just going to not complain about anything. I'm going to lay low, as low as I can lay, and just try to establish myself as a respected member of the squadron.' And then once I'm a respected member of the squadron, I can tackle some of these things that I think need to change. But I'm going to tackle it in my way, and do it from the inside, not from the outside.

Beryl confirmed her first-round statements that she was able to fit in by blending in. She stated, "I kept my mouth shut. I'm naturally kind of a shy person." Bessie's statement was similar, "It's interesting to talk to those that are retiring now or Lieutenant Colonels…all they were trying to do was not make a wave."

Beryl also reported using a form of diminishing the self in an effort to fit-in, "We were in the bar and somebody was making a dirty joke, and somebody said, 'Oh, well now we cannot make dirty jokes because [call sign] is in here.' And one of the guys in my class, he said, 'Oh, don't worry about [call sign]. She's one of the dudes.' She described how that felt inauthentic,

"And I remember being like, 'Yeah, one of the dudes.' And then I remember being like, 'That doesn't make it okay.'" Participants described various tactics used to navigate and environment where they were the only.

Internal Self-Assurance

During the second-round interviews, the use of internal self-assurance was confirmed. The concept of imposter syndrome also emerged in the participants' experiences. Amelia described how she utilized internal self-assurance. She stated, "Just go find those things that you've done well and instead of thinking about the things that you haven't, think about the things you have." She continued and discussed her experience with imposter syndrome. She stated,

> I was in a course where a guy was talking about imposter syndrome. And there's a couple other women fighter pilots in this course and all of us suffer from imposter syndrome. We kind of fake it 'til you make it. You just keep going, right? But sometimes you almost feel like, "Well, should I really be here?" And I'm pretty sure I don't know a single guy fighter pilot who suffers from imposter syndrome. So, I think it's a little harder for us. And I'm not sure if part of that is the minority, part of that is just maybe our nature. But it was just a matter of figuring out how to focus on the positive things that I can do and to focus on the things I've already done, right?

Amelia described her method of developing courage and countering the self-doubt with logical thought. She stated, "When I'm doubtful or worried about a choice or a decision, I sit back and I think about it and, you know, what are the risks if I do it? What are the risks if I don't, right? Because not making a decision is still a decision. And I just kind of talk myself through it. She states that it's important to give yourself credit for what you've already done in this process, "And the important part of talking yourself through it is giving yourself credit for what you've already done. And the courage you've had in different circumstances and everybody has them, they just don't always know where to find it."

Marina also described the tendency for fighter pilots to focus on areas where they can improve as opposed to areas where they did well. She stated, "I think that's why a lot of women don't choose the career field. We don't really celebrate—we celebrate a little bit of the good things, but mostly we concentrate on where we can get better. Where'd we make mistakes? How do we do this better next time?" She stated that you can't be perfect at flying, "You can't be perfect at flying. You can't. Nobody is." She immediately followed that with a difference between men and women, "I think the guys fake it better."

Eileen described a lesson that she was taught in flight school. She stated, "Even if you have a negative doubt that you know the answer 'cause you've been reading and you've been studying but it—just if you have that doubt, don't let it show, you know. Just answer. And if you are wrong, they'll tell you, you know?" She continued and described imposter syndrome without using the formal term. She stated, "The longer I've been in and the more I've been around, um, very smart women, we're all very confident in what we do, but oftentimes, we'll have that negative doubt because we wanna be exactly right. We don't ever wanna be confidently wrong."

Marina also reported her experience with imposter syndrome. She linked it to her struggle with perfectionism. She stated, "To be honest. With the whole thing we talked about, perfectionism and wanting to do good, and wanting to be good at everything I do. As a woman, as a mom, and as an officer, and as a fighter pilot, I always struggled. There's always something that has to give. I want to be good at all of them." She described her internal process, "So, probably coming to grips with the fact that I don't have to be perfect and that my best is acceptable. It took me a long time to get there. That's what I really struggled with the most." Despite a successful career of over 20 years, she still struggles with self-doubt. She reported,

"And it's all in my own head. So, even a little bit of imposter syndrome. Even now, I fly around and I'm like, 'I can't believe that I'm flying a [aircraft] right now. It seems really crazy, like who let me do this? What crazy person?'"

> **Marina:** It doesn't feel—I don't know. I mean, you're familiar with imposter syndrome?
> **Interviewer:** Yes.
> **Marina:** I kinda have that feeling occasionally.
> **Interviewer:** Even with all your experience and where you're at, it still comes up?
> **Marina:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.
> **Interviewer:** You said, "It took me a long time to realize I can't be perfect at everything." How did you eventually realize that?
> **Marina:** You know, to be honest, it was probably my kids that taught me that. If anything teaches you that you don't have—well, and prayer. Because I always think I have control over my life and then God throws you a curveball and you're like, oh, you really don't have control over anything. I think that's what helped me to calm, calm down a little bit.

She continued and described the role of her family, "There are still days when my kids are like, 'Stop working and spend time with me, pay attention to me.' And I'm like, 'You're right. I'm home from work now, I need to set that aside and pay attention to you.' She reported that her family holds her accountable, "But my family will actually call me out on it. Now that dad is retired, he knows—he knows what's required, and he knows what's extra. It's okay to go above and beyond, but it's not okay to do it at—to sacrifice my own wellness for it."

Amelia also described identifying with imposter syndrome, "I think that what was important for me was I have the – I call it, everyone has that little voice of self-doubt, at least I assume everybody has one. I know I did. And it was the one talking to you because something's going wrong or because something's not going right." She described how she learned to counter the voice of self-doubt, "What I learned to do was- I would go talk to the people who support me." Jackie discussed how her internal self-assurance protected her from moral injury. She stated, "I didn't encounter anything where I felt totally awkward, but if I did, I would have no

problem going, 'I'm gonna go home tonight,' you know? 'I don't like this. I'm leaving.' But nothing beyond my tolerance, I guess."

Bessie described her perspective change now that she is an instructor/evaluator. She stated, "Once you get up-grades now, you're in charge and you can…see what other people are messing up. When you are wingman or a flight lead, an instructor can easily cover up the mistakes they made and just focus on the mistakes you made. And so, you really feel like you're the only one making mistakes." She elaborated,

> Maybe that's some of just, like, thinking, being the only one, like, you're not supposed to be there type of thing. Maybe the reason you're messing up is because you don't have the same skills as these guys do. And then you just come to the realization at some point. And I don't know. Maybe the guys feel the same way, at some point you're like, 'Oh, everyone's making mistakes. It's not just – not just me.'"

Amelia shared how internalized self-assurance helped her continue flying after her brakes failed on landing and she ejected from her jet. She stated, "First I had to admit that I was afraid, and then I had to figure out what I was going to do about it. And I tell you, every time I landed for probably nine months after that because it was an electrical failure in my brakes." She emphasized how she used internal self-assurance when she recognized her fear. "Every time I landed for a while after that, I wouldn't think about it the whole flight. And then I'd land, and I'd go to step on the brakes and I'm like, 'Oh, wonder if they are going to work' in my little brain, you know. 'Oh yeah, they work and that's nice.'"

During her second-round interview, Amelia realized that her entire career has been courageous. She stated, "I mean, I never really thought about it before but everything I'd done up to that point, I was demonstrating courage. Just accepting this opportunity that I wasn't expecting at all. And then putting up with all the crap and working hard and all that stuff. Overcoming all those obstacles." She described how courage snowballs and gains momentum.

She reported, "So, you kind of get to the point of, 'Well, if I could do that then I could do this, if it's important enough for me.' 'Is it important enough to you to risk it? Yes, it is. Okay, here we go again then.' Finally, she differentiates, and states that minorities and "firsts" and "onlys" have to summon the courage more often, "So, it takes more sitting around and thinking about things than most other pilots like to do [laughter]."

Counseling/Chaplain

In the second-round interviews, counseling became a coping skill for one participant. Bessie reported that she'd gone to counseling since the first-round interviews. During that time, she was working as a flight commander. She described her experience, "It blew my mind that this was going on. And I tried talking to him, I tried talking to the commander, and again, just powerless. Basically, even though you're a flight commander, and they say you can make a change." She described the way she coped with the powerlessness, "I started going to therapy. I've done it before, but I went to therapy during the time I was a flight commander. I just was, like, so upset with my powerlessness, basically. I know that the flight commander has a lot of power, and I've seen that in a previous life, and then here, I don't. She obtained counseling through Military One Source, "I just called Military One Source, and they give you, twelve free appointments. And the counselor I talked to was awesome. She had me write down my life goal…I never thought about what is important to me, a life goal that I have. But once I did that, I was able to prioritize…it really helped me organize what I want to spend time on. But she was awesome." She is still attending counseling with another Military One Source counselor. She stated, "I just called Military One Source, and honestly, I don't like this counselor as much. I probably, after the first or second one, I should have just called and asked for somebody else." She also focused on what is beneficial although she doesn't enjoy this counselor as much, "I'm

looking at how I'm feeling about this stuff and going and talking to her. It's kind of like a release of, you know, stuff—I don't talk to other people about."

Identifying and Utilizing Supports

Second-round interviews confirmed that identifying and utilizing your support system is a crucial component for success. Amelia described her realization that taking responsibility for the success of every female fighter pilot going forward was adding an immense amount of stress onto an already challenging endeavor. She also realized that the public nature of her flight school performance wasn't something she could control or focus on while in training. She described her internal dialogue and how she identified and built her support system, "I can't do anything about it, right? I just have to focus on this little bit. I'm going to put my blinders on to everything and focus on what I can control and not worry about what other people are saying about me. I only paid attention to people who support me, you know?" She continued and described how she identified and focused on the people who believed in her and gave her equal opportunity. She stated, "Look, I have these people over here who think I'm doing all right," "who think I could do this and I'm going to focus on these people and I'm going to ignore these other ones." Because you just can't, or you'll never get through it."

Amelia reported feeling nervous to return to [base] as an instructor, because the first time being stationed there had been such a difficult time in her life. She stated, "When I got my assignment to come back to Luke as an instructor, I was not very happy about it. I had struggled so much there. I didn't want to go back." She reported talking to people who know her and her flying capabilities to counter the self-doubt, "But this is three years later, I'm not the same pilot and I'm not the same person. I talked to a buddy of mine who had just finished the instructor course at Luke and I was asking him about it and he flew with me in Germany and he knew what

I could do and he was like, 'Oh, I'll bet you're going to do great…it's going to be fine." She described how seeking out those who support her bolstered her confidence, "I talked to mentors or friends who know me. It's always good to talk to your family, but then that's always tainted a little bit by, 'Well, of course they think you're awesome.' So, it's always good to talk to some people who had an experience with what you do in the airplane or at work or whatever is the case."

Bessie reported asking to leave her current duty station due to a lack of support from her weapons officer. She has hopes of attending weapons school, which requires support, and she didn't have that. She hopes to find a more supportive and encouraging weapons officer at her new assignment. She stated, "The weapons officer that was in my squadron, he was a huge reason I asked to leave as quickly as I did. He was a toxic person, and if I want any chance [of being selected for weapons school] … you need someone in your corner that's like, 'You should do it. I'll help you get there. Let's get you some spin-ups.'"

Approaching People Directly

Second-round interviews confirmed the strategy of approaching people directly when something needs addressed. Bessie stated, "I had tried to talk to this guy a number of times about, uh, how I felt like he was mistreating students, and he was just so, like, just kind of manipulative." She also described a tactic that she uses to provide positive reinforcement for desirable behaviors, "I emailed [call sign]—and I've been doing that recently. If I see something good, I try and do some positive reinforcement."

Ignoring and Avoiding

Second-round interviews confirmed the use of ignoring and avoiding as a coping skill. Jackie listed this as a primary coping skill when being "hit on" and dealing with anything that made her uncomfortable. She stated, "But I had low tolerance for that. If it was just words, then I would laugh it off. I think you understand my personality. It's similar to something that's uncomfortable in the bar. I'd laugh it off and redirect. If somebody did something inappropriate, I would have no problem pushing them away or yelling at them."

Beryl reported that the way she was raised taught her the coping skill of ignoring and avoiding. She reported,

> And then you throw in your nurture and the way my parents raised me. I was kind of raised as an only child. I had four half siblings and a couple brothers who are older who would tease me and ridicule me, nothing bad. But that kind of instilled in me a will from a young age, but my mom always said, "Well, just ignore him and he'll stop." And I just, I didn't understand that, like, "No, I need to yell at him and tell him to stop." But okay, fine. I'll just ignore him, and he would stop. It's interesting now that we mention that, because in dealing with all the crap, I just kept my mouth shut. I just ignored.

Amelia stated that after being retired for 14 years, she's finally able to deal with some things that she'd previously ignored. She stated, "Hopefully, though some of them [female fighter pilots] haven't had as much to deal with. So, it hasn't been quite as taxing emotionally." She reported that she now realizes that she couldn't really deal with some of it in the moment. "You just don't want to—sometimes it's just not healthy in the moment to think about all the things that have happened in the past. You can't deal with them all and still continue doing what you're doing." She described how ignoring and avoiding is helpful. "So, you just keep moving forward and you make it the best you can. And you focus on the positive experiences. And there are lots of them as well."

Marina also confirmed using this coping skill in her career. She stated, "You meet bad people—and you deal with those situations and you either move on or you let it define you. And

so, I have tried to take the experiences I've had with people who were negative about me being

where I am and dealing with it because I can't change the way they feel and I just—and I just

move on."

Learned Apathy

Second-round interviews confirmed participants' use of apathy when encountering

disapproval, negativity, and bias. Amelia provided the following advice that she learned early in

her career when the pressure of being the only began to affect her performance,

> You know, at some point, you're going to have to be good with the fact that people are always going to be watching you. People are always going to know how you perform. And if you let that eat at you, then it's going to affect your performance. So, at some point you just have to – it's really hard to say don't care what other people think because you do, right? You can't not ever care what other people think, but you can put it away.

She described the apathetic response that she was forced to develop to combat the pressures of

being one of the "firsts."

> You go, "Okay, you're right. You think I don't belong here. You think that I'm not good enough for this, but you don't matter to me." So, I'm not going to internalize your opinion of me. I'm going to take it and put it over here, go, "Yep, you exist. I acknowledge you exist. I acknowledge you don't think I belong here. I'm not going to worry about it."

Marina also confirmed Amelia's experience. She stated matter-of-factly that this is a coping

skill that the first generations had to develop, "I think a lot of the people in the first generations,

a lot of older people that had good experiences, that's what we have had to do."

Jackie also confirmed her use of learned apathy in the second round of interviews. She

used this mind-set when she had a boss who wasn't treating her fair due to her familial status.

She described how she thought about this situation,

> I think other people would say, 'He was in my way, and I proved him wrong, and I—' But I don't worry about people like that. I don't—I cannot focus my energy on people that are trying to deter me or block me or just jerks in general. I don't focus my energy on them. It's my technique or

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tactic or whatever – you're the therapist, you can label me. But I just take them out of my world, and move on, and focus on the things I can control.

She continued to elaborate on ways she employs this learned apathy across her life. She stated,

I don't get wrapped up in – I hate to say drama because that sounds cliché. But I just—I try not to get wrapped up in the drama. I control what I can control. And of course, it bothers everybody if somebody doesn't like them, or is talking about them, or not treating them fairly—it bothers me. But at the same time, I'm not going to change my behavior, or I'm not going to change my whole life and crawl in a hole because of it.

Participants described an adaptive learned apathy that assisted them in disconnecting from others' opinions.

Having a Solid Belief System

Bessie described a different type of belief system during the second-round interviews. She discussed the humanistic approach she takes in her career, as a mentor, and as a leader. For her, this represents a belief system that she tries to uphold. She stated, "And they'll [the other instructors and flight commanders] be like, 'Well, he just needs to get through this course, blah, blah, blah,' and then I'm the one that's like, 'Well, his wife's having a baby and I know that's an impactful event.'" She reported that she tends to put herself in others' shoes when making leadership decisions, "I'm the one that's thinking about, 'Man, if I were in his shoes, I wouldn't want to be in the worst part of the IPUG when she has the baby or be hanging on a pre-check when she [delivers the baby].' She reflected on how she appreciates her personality and how it benefits herself and others. She stated, "I actually do think it's [her personality] a benefit, because a lot of times, I'll bring stuff up and I would be like, 'Is that the best plan? Like, what about this?' And it's always about how someone is gonna feel."

Exercise

Marina added to her first-round information about using exercise as a coping skill. She described an initiative at her base, "At our base, we have an incredible human performance team.

They've got physical therapists, trainers, strength coaches, nutritionists, massage therapists, and a sports psychologist that are working with people." She described the services that she's been using, "So, I've been working with a mobility specialist. It's mobility training to help me find ways to keep doing my stress relief, but without hurting myself more," She described how the program came about, "They're starting to realize that if they can keep pilots healthy both physically and mentally, that it's better for everyone in the long run." She described two types of pilots, "They have two cases with us here. They've got the old people that are already broken—that are trying to find ways to get healthy. And then we've got the young kids where we're like, 'Let's start them off right. With, like, good habits and outlets."

Manufacturing a Break: Burnout

In the second round of interviews, the category of "manufacturing a break" morphed into a socially acceptable response to burnout. Jackie described ending up in a state of burnout while at an assignment with a high ops-tempo, toxic leadership, and two young children.

> **Interviewer:** Once you're in full-fledged burnout, it's hard to backpedal and get yourself back out of it. How did you do that?
>
> **Jackie:** The change of assignment.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
>
> **Jackie:** Going to [base]. That really re-motivated me, just—one, the leadership was better there. [Different base] was just drama. There was drama. It was bad leadership. It was just a high ops-tempo. The kids were babies. We were working our buts off. It was overseas. Granted, it was the best location I've ever lived in my whole life, so that part was fantastic. But it was a very difficult assignment for us. And then going to [new base]—which I didn't even want to fly again after Aviano.
>
> **Interviewer:** Oh, wow.
>
> **Jackie:** I wanted – our first few choices were to go to a staff job. Just put me out to pasture at staff. And I wanted to go to Germany or somewhere like that. But I didn't want to fly anymore. I was done. But then we got to [base], and it was such a breath of fresh air. One, it is AETC (Air Education and Training Command), so the OPSTEMPO was less, the flying, the days. We had told everyone that we were retiring, so we didn't need to impress—we got out of that rat race, really, is what it was.

She admitted to being a better pilot at the beginning of her career before the burnout took

hold. As additional stress, duties, and family responsibilities were added she began going

through the motions. She stated,

> **Jackie:** I know I said I was probably average to slightly above average. That would be at the end of my career. At the beginning, you know, I feel like I was much better. I know I was an above average wingman and initial flight lead and I tried really hard. And then, at the end, I feel like I was like, "Ah, just go through the motions."
> **Interviewer:** Ah, the burnout. It's a real thing.
> **Jackie:** Yeah. It is. And it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks too.

Bessie described her thought process regarding Weapons School. She described the

expectations of a weapons officer and the possibility of burnout if she chooses the Weapons

School path. She stated, "If I'm gonna get beat-up in the spin-up like I've seen happen to my

friends, and then you pile on top of that six months of weapons school, and then after that, you

can't get a break either because you're—it's a new community and you are such a hot

commodity." Eileen discussed how she manufactured a break to avoid burnout by moving to the

Reserves. She stated, "I was always on overdrive all of my life. And so, I think that's another

reason why I'm in the Reserves [laughter] now. I didn't want to give it all up, but especially

with the kids, it was too much."

Beryl described her experience with burnout. She accepted an opportunity to gracefully

bow-out of the fighter world when it presented itself. "I got myself into the mindset that the only

way I can get off this island is to get off the island. So, when that opening came up for an

[aircraft] pilot in Afghanistan for six months, it was like, 'I should get off this island.'"

Jackie described how her, and her husband are embracing opportunities to take a break

due to COVID-19. She stated, "I've taken a few months off. And then other months, I'm

bidding reserve, which is on-call. And, I just don't ever get called, 'cause they don't need us."

She also described her husband's situation, "It's been a strange year, but we're making the best of it. My husband's not working. [Airline name] offered, a deal for—62% pay to go away for six months, one year, all the way up to five years. And he took five years."

Marina described a different type of burnout coming from age and physical limitations. In general, military careers are physically demanding, which over time, takes a toll on your body. She stated, "I'm an A-type, motivated, competitive person, it's like, 'If I'm not going all out, then it's not even worth my time." She described how this becomes unsustainable, "As I get older, I realize I have to redefine those things. That's what I'm struggling with now, is redefining my new normal as a 45-year-old woman still in this young kids game. Like, how do I stay healthy to keep going?"

Amelia, who is completing an online coaching degree and starting to speak professionally, described her reaction to the offer she received from her airline company, "We had this offer from our company to retire early. I think for me, the opportunity to step away from that scrutiny, the always being the minority, the always being the only one. I think that played a role in my decision." She continued and described the impact on her life, "One of the things I enjoy is just, you know, hanging out in the online school thing, doing my speaking. And that's part of why it seemed like a healthy choice for me. Plus, I'm not getting up at 3:00 in the morning anymore, which is nice."

Personality Characteristics

Second-round interviews produced a different aspect of personality characteristics. Marina described feeling like her apathy is more of a personality characteristic than a learned skill. She stated, "Yeah. I just didn't-- I just didn't-- I mean, I just don't care. I don't care. People,

people are gonna not-- people are gonna hate me and people are gonna like me, and there's nothing I can do about it. I can just be myself and I don't have to be friends with everyone. I think a lot of it is just my personality." Beryl also reported a combination of personality and the way she was raised contributed to her coping skills. She stated, "I think for me, personally, one, it has to be a little bit of personality. But two, it's I think just the way my parents raised me."

Moral Injury

Participants confirmed experiencing morally injurious events over the course of their careers. Beryl described how watching some people be ostracized was difficult and went against her morals. She stated, "I'm not really an abrasive person. I mean, I brought cookies in, all that. I just wanted everybody to be happy and get along. So, it was more troubling for me when I would see this squadron ostracize some of the other guys." She reported that it was the guys who didn't comply with the typical fighter pilot culture, "They ostracized one of the guys that was LDS. And while I don't follow the LDS faith, it was hard for me to see them really ostracize him. And I was just like, 'Oh, that's just wrong." She continued with what she observed, "And it's very subtle, but they do it. I mean, it's just human nature. And I saw them ostracize another guy who had a wife and a brand-new baby. I went to the hospital when he had the baby and I babysat for them a couple times so they could have a date night. And they ostracized him big time. Also, not a big drinker." She described her feelings about these things, "And so that tore me apart. I think that was the worst part. And they were doing those things toward me, but it didn't bother me as much because it was, 'Oh well, it's expected.' But when I saw them doing it to each other, that just really—that kind of is what ate away at me. If you can't treat people with respect, I don't even want to talk to you."

When Jackie was asked about moral injury over the course of her career, she cracked a joke, "I have no morals, so… [laughter]." She continued, "I mean, there was some raunchy songs… But I wouldn't say that it was totally against my morals or that I was hurt or damaged because of it." She compared it to watching a graphic movie, "I looked at it like watching movies. You know when you're a kid, you watch G-rated movies. And then when, oh my goodness, you jump to R, and you hear bad language, then you are like, 'Whoa, okay, I don't understand that.' Or you have nudity and, 'Whoa, I saw boobs.'" She continued and described how she conceptualized some aspects of the fighter culture, "It was like one of those moments, 'Oh, they're singing bad songs in the bar. Okay, well, this is new and different. I haven't seen this before.' It was more like that, but I wouldn't say that it was completely morally objectionable to me."

Amelia described an incident that didn't sit well with her. It involved complacent leadership. "In my last assignment at Shaw. There was this guy in the squadron, and he was a great guy, but somehow, he got to be the guy that was always picked on. And eventually, he would end up getting duct taped to the bar rail. Which is ridiculous, right?" She described how she felt about the situation, "I found myself conflicted, because the squadron commander's standing there watching. And I'm thinking, 'Okay, we should not be doing this. Somebody could get seriously hurt.'" She described her response, "And so I let it go a couple times and then eventually, I went and talked to him [squadron commander]. And he said, 'Yeah, actually the OG just talked to me and we've got to stop it.'" She elaborated on why it bothered her, "There was nothing to build comradery about it, there was nothing good for culture. I don't know. It just seemed wrong. It's degrading to do that to someone."

Marina described moral injury around recent experiences as an OG that have impacted her view of the Air Force, an organization to which she's dedicated her entire adult life. She described the feeling, "It's a disenfranchising type of, of, feeling because--There are a lot of people in leadership positions that don't live by the same value code, or at least the Air Force core values that you're supposed to." She continued, "It's been disappointing. Within the last year when I'm told something like, 'Oh, you're naïve if you think there's integrity in the Air Force. And yes, we're gonna falsify these reports because that's what our bosses expect us to do.' She describes the eye-opening let-down, "I've dedicated 25 years of my life-- thinking we had core values, and we don't.'" She continued, "So, somehow the bad ones don't get weeded out. I don't know why that is." She reported her feelings, "There are a lot of those. There are a lot of people who love brown-nosing. There are a lot of people who can't see through the BS. There are a lot of people who fool their bosses, and they get promoted."

Eileen described feeling inauthentic while trying to fit in with the guys.

Interviewer: Looking back on your career, are there any times when you experienced internal conflict with your personal beliefs or felt inauthentic?

Eileen: Yes. Sometimes, and my husband would point it our too. He would say I would try to act too much like one of the guys. I would, like, drinking too much. That was kind of the big thing is trying to hang out, as drinking too much and that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: At the time, were you aware of trying to be one of the guys, was it fun, or was it part of the culture?

Eileen: A little more like, trying to keep up, and not realizing, like, it would be just fine for me to say no. Luckily, I haven't had to really compromise my morals. I mean, you go TDY and sometimes have to go to strip clubs or whatever. But I never felt like I had to go.

Bessie listed the Roll Calls as the aspect that feels the most inauthentic for her. She reported choosing to attend, but also described an emotional exhaustion after. She stated, "Yeah, I think just the Roll Calls that I've talked about. Like, I come home from those, and I enjoy

seeing people. But the day after, I'm just—I think it would be interesting to talk to my husband, because I'm just kind wiped out."

Beryl also discussed the pervasive and exhausting nature of moral injury, "I'm pretty hard-headed and strong in my principles… when it came to compromising my personal values in the flying world, I just was going to hold the line no matter what." She described getting tired, "And when it got to the point where I was like, 'Man, it's not worth it anymore' and that's where I was like, 'Get the ticket out of here.' She reported feeling conflicted over her decision, "That was tough too. I guess the conflicting pilot versus wife and mother. It really felt like you had to pick."

Fighter Pilot Mindset

Indoctrination

Beryl confirmed the "indoctrination," which she described as a type of grooming. She stated, "I mean, just the little things that—so kind of indoctrination started early, one with just the sexual innuendos constantly."

Post-Traumatic Growth

Second round interviews resulted in an almost nostalgic view of adversity. Participants tended to look back at their experiences and focus on what they learned through adversity, and several participants discussed how adversity made them better at certain aspects of their job. Bessie described her process of switching airframes after being well-established as an [aircraft] pilot as her most memorable experience with adversity. An additional aspect of the switch was that she was the only female pilot in the program and was feeling the pressure to positively represent female fighter pilots. She stated, "It was tough too because, you know, I was the only

girl there and I'm struggling through this program…They were reporting on my progress to the wing commander every week at wing stand-up. Everybody in the wing—which I didn't know until afterwards, but like, everyone in the wing knew where I was at." She described how coming from the [fighter platform] into a [different fighter platform] posed a steep learning curve. She said, "I just had, like, a huge hill to climb, and the guy before me that came from the [community], he was an instructor in the [her first airframe], and he washed out of the [new airframe] instructor program. I saw him wash out."

Bessie described how she handled the stress of learning the [new airframe] differently as a result of the adversity she experienced in [original airframe] initial flight training. She described her pilot training experience. She stated, "I spent a lot of time at pilot training, just going for a drive and being like, "Why did I choose this [laughter] for my life?" She reported having better coping skills now. She stated, "I have a lot better coping mechanisms than I did, and it's been cool in some respects, transitioning to the [new airframe], because I put myself through a really stressful program." She added that she feels satisfied for choosing to avoid complacency, and instead, choose to put herself through a challenging transition. She stated, "The first three years, you're in a program and you could washout at any point and it's stressful, blah, blah, blah. But I hadn't been in that for a long time. But then I deployed in the Hog and I had gotten to a point where I was, like, good at that [flying her original airframe], and now I'm back to being not good at something." She continued and described how "not being good at something" is a sign of progress. She stated, "And I see that like an evaluator upgrade. I just did that recently. So, it's been cool, like, stressing myself again and seeing how I handle it." She described the difference between feeling comfortable and being challenged,

> I'm not listening to my podcast and thinking about other stuff [on the way to work]. I'm thinking about… "Well, I'm stressed," for lack of a better word, but I use this adrenaline, because when you are in that mode, time is slowing down and you're able to process information better because you're highly alert of what's going on. And so, it's been cool putting myself back through stuff and not just getting complacent.

Amelia revealed that she'd ejected from her jet, and how this adversity forced her to "develop her courage." She stated, "I just call it developing my courage. And did I tell you about the time I ejected from an [aircraft]?" She described how she made the decision to continue flying despite being involved in one of the most traumatic experiences a pilot can imagine. She stated,

> Yeah, it was 11 days later when I was cleared to fly again. And I'm like, "Oh, great. I don't know about that." So, that's the place where I had to really sit down, where I developed this concept for myself. I just sat down and thought about it. You know, "What are your choices?" "You go fly again or you give up everything you've worked for." "What are you going to do?" "What happens if you go for it; what happens if you don't?" "What happens if you listen to your voice of fear?" "Then what, am I going to quit? After so many years getting to this point?" And then, the thing that people who've been afraid before knows, courage doesn't come from not being afraid. Courage comes from what you do when you're afraid. So, that's sometimes hard for fighter pilots, because we're never supposed to be afraid of anything, right? We're never afraid.

Amelia described how she gathered the courage to fly again, "When it's some kind of decision that you're trying to make that you truly have time to think about, then that's why I say you have to give yourself credit for what you've already done." She reported that, over the course of her career, she learned to turn adversity into a positive. She reported, "When I came back to [base] and worked my ass off in the instructor course, and I'm a good instructor, not just because I can fly the jet, but because I almost washed out, so I have compassion." She described how this was useful, "I can talk to people and know how it feels to be facing that [washing out]. So, these experiences that I had that were not necessarily positive at the time, have given me the ability to be a better instructor when I'm teaching people." She continued to reflect on the emotional aspect of her career and what she accomplished as one of the "firsts." She stated,

I was talking with a friend of mine as I was writing this speech and I'm going back and forth digging up all these stories and I'm going through all that, and she joked with me that, "I think you might have a little PTSD just from being the first woman [aircraft] pilot." Those stories, I'm better with them now, but initially they're just kind of like, "That really sucked. And that really sucked. Why did that have to be like that?" You know, "Why?"

She reflected on the experience of pilot training, "Some really good things came out of that training and some really soul-searching things. Writing the speeches has been a really good thing for me to go back…because there's some good direction and really good lessons."

Jackie shared her experience with a commander who wouldn't promote her because she was married to another fighter pilot and had children in the first round of interviews. In the second round of interviews she listed this experience as one of her biggest adversities. She stated, "I feel like he was my biggest obstacle I ever ran across. And maybe he wasn't my biggest obstacle, but he was surely the most open about it. He had already made up his mind about me."

Interviewer: How did you deal with that situation?
Jackie: I just waited him out. I don't have any words of wisdom, or anything insightful that I really did. I continued to just put my head down and do the best I could. I wouldn't say that I necessarily tried to impress him anymore, because I hated him with a passion, and I didn't even want to look at him. So, I didn't care what he thought of me at that point…I had nothing to prove to him. I knew his mind was already made up. And I just did my job, like I always do my job, and waited him out.

Beryl discussed one of the last times she flew, "I had a really bad high-crosswind landing. One of my last flights from four years ago when I was like, 'Okay, I'm done.' I was in a small 182 and the crosswinds were so bad that I ended up flattening three tires. And that felt like super failure." She's taken four years off from flying, but she recently started flying again at a local FBO.

Beryl discussed overcoming adversity in terms of grit and willpower. She stated, "I don't think it's anything special per se. I think anyone with enough grit, if there's a will, I think anybody can get through it. Once you get into flying, I think it's the same. If you have a will to

do it, except for a few instances or cases, you can get through it. Anyone can learn to fly an airplane given enough time and the right teacher." She describes fighter training as a test of will, "They're on your team and helping you to be a better person and to be a better soldier and a fighter and a warrior. And so, really it comes down to your will." She tied a person's will to their sense of calling, "I think it gets back to personality, your calling, because if you have a strong calling, that increases your strength of will. For me, it's more of a religious calling, I know Martha McSally talked a lot about it being a calling versus a career." She summarized, "So, all of those things together, I don't want to say that it's anything special about me. It's just the measure of my willpower."

Amelia shared her view that everyone has situations in their life where they've displayed courage. She tied this idea into the current pandemic, "They just don't know where to find it. I mean, everybody who's still alive after nine months of the pandemic has situations where they've been courageous and where they've overcome things."

Growing Thick-Skin

Marina verified first round results that it's important to have thick-skin. She stated, "I just kind of march to my own beat. Again, I grew up with all brothers, so I have thick-skin. So, if I don't wanna drink and you wanna make fun of me for it, it's not gonna bother me." Marina described how someone who struggles with the flying aspect can still fit in if they have thick-skin.

> **Interviewer:** Have you ever seen a female pilot who struggled with flying, and assuming they're putting in the work. Have you seen a female who struggled, but was still able to fit-in?
> **Marina:** Yes. And it depends on their personality.
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
> **Marina:** And again, it depends on how much they can let roll off—roll off their back. A lot of it comes down to—I mean everybody makes mistakes. Are you gonna let those mistakes or your bad

experiences define you? And the ones that move on—right? You take your punches, "You know what, make fun of me. Yeah. I know I screwed that up. Make fun of me." And then you toss it back at them and then you move on.

Confidence: Finding Voice and Speaking Up

Amelia described the importance of confidence when performing a life-or-death job, "Mistakes can cost your life or someone else's. So how do you—I mean, you have to have developed that confidence." Beryl described how her youth inhibited her confidence, which was established as a crucial personality trait in the first round of interviews. She stated, "I was the youngest—I was also the youngest in the squadron. And there were only two women in our whole class. I was young and just the lack of confidence and a lack of experience with sexuality. I mean, as a 21-year-old girl, I really didn't know anything about anything sexual. So yeah, I kept my mouth shut about everything."

Bessie confirmed first-round findings that confidence is an important characteristic when combating the peer pressure to consume large amounts of alcohol at certain squadron events. She stated, "I think you need to be a strong person and stand-up. I think a lot if it is as long as you have confidence, people don't question it." She provided an example, "Like when you have a Lieutenant or something that doesn't feel like they can say, 'Oh, I'm gonna take,' we call it 'unleaded shots.' It's just usually, like, jalapeno juice and, like, Sprite. A mix of something gross, and that's like, the unleaded choice." She described how one squadron where she had a positive experience addressed the alcohol consumption aspect of Roll Call. She reported, "It was always announced. These are the two types of shots. They'll both be available. Like, no drinking and driving. These people are DD's." She countered that experience with her current squadron. She stated, "Here – it just feels like that's not really mentioned. Or if you're like, 'Hey, where's the unleaded shot?' it's like, 'Oh, yeah. We need to do something.' And if

someone drinks, but is like, 'Well, I'm not drinking tonight,' and people will give you a hard time about that." Overall, Bessie confirmed that aspects of the culture seem to be changing for the better. She stated, "I do think things are getting better – like, that peer pressure to do stuff. But I think if you have a weak reason or you're not willing to be like, 'I'm not—I'm not doing that,' people would easily abuse that."

Bessie added how confidence enabled her to speak-up and successfully complete a challenging training. She was placed in a program where it was assumed she had certain skills, but those skills were not taught in her previous airframe's mission. She reported, "I forced instructors to instruct… and I was like, 'I've never done SEAD before.' They'll be like, 'Oh, you just do this.' [laughter] and I'm like, 'That doesn't make sense to me. Can you explain more?' I just kind of had the audacity [laughter] to just be like, 'Instruct me… I can do this.' I just had the confidence to be like, 'I'm not a stupid person. I can learn this, so teach me.'"

Bessie described another type of confidence that she's developed. She described a type of confidence in how she is as a person, and how she interacts with students. She's figured out a way to be herself within a culture that's often asking for something different. She stated,

> As far as the debrief and stuff, everyone's always like, that's such a no-emotion type of thing, and I agree with that, but I do still think, like if someone's debriefing someone in a disrespectful way or a condescending way. The fact that I'm picking up on that stuff and then can later—you know, I can talk to that student and say, 'Hey, thanks for putting all the effort you did into that ride. Like, that was—that was a lot, and I know you hoped— that was some tough feedback.' There should always be some good, and some stuff they can get better at.

Beryl reported a lack of confidence due to her young age. She stated, "And I really didn't have confidence. And it plagues me to this day." She wonders how her experience might be different if she'd been older and more confident, "I think of, okay, if I were just five years older and now get thrown back in there, I think I could have—I think I would have been a lot happier and able to keep up." Marina also discussed how age and rank can affect confidence and

someone's ability to speak-up for themselves. She stated, "I think there are situations sometimes where you're a junior and you're like, 'I don't like this, but I don't know how to get out of it.' So, I think that could be a player for people. But as I've gotten older, I try to watch out for those. You can tell when people are uncomfortable in situations." She described how she's learned to intervene in those situations as she's aged, "From where I am now or even in the last few years, you can walk up to people and say like, 'Hey are you comfortable with this? Okay, let's go. Let's get out of here.'" Amelia agreed that being older at pilot training helped her, "If I try to put my 22-year-old self-there instead of my 28-year-old self, it would have been a lot harder. I wouldn't have felt as free to speak-up and even though I didn't feel like I could speak-up for a long time about a lot of things, I definitely would have spoken-up less.

Marina described a different type of confidence in the ability to be authentic. She stated, "You just choose not to play the game. That's what I did early on. I just stuck with who I was and what I liked to do, and there are some people in the squadron that I hung out with and I— there was other people I didn't. Some people you get along with, some people you don't. And it is what it is."

As the oldest participant and as one of the first female fighter pilots, Amelia speaks with a hard-earned and wise confidence. When asked about her goal for her new coaching and speaking career, she expressed a desire to help the younger generations develop their confidence by sharing the lessons she's learned on her fighter pilot journey. She stated, "My 'Debriefing Life' speech is targeted to young adults. And that's where I want to work with in coaching is helping people with that transition to adulthood." She described an observation, "Not all of the generation, but a lot of the current generation seems to struggle with it.. that failure to launch. I

just want to help with that, and I think a lot of the lessons I have learned will help with the coaching."

Early Engagement in Sports

Participants verified how participation in sports helped them better handle the fighter pilot career. Eileen confirmed that she learned how to manage criticism, pressure, and stress from her engagement in sports starting at a young age. She stated, "I was a gymnast for 18 years. So, it [being a fighter pilot] felt like home. [laughter]. It's like my whole life I was critiqued on every tiny, little thing every time I do anything wrong." Bessie also reported playing three sports, "I think a lot of it [learning to perform at an elite level] is from growing-up. I played three sports. I was in a zillion clubs. I was the president of a bunch of clubs."

Beryl, who was a competitive power lifter, stated, "I learned a lot of lessons about that [willpower] from weightlifting that I try to parallel with my success." Marina also described the importance of sports, "I think at a young age, sports, well, for all kids, it teaches you resilience. How to work with others. How to win, how to lose. How to deal with stress. How to make decisions." She also described how sports and physical activity have been a crucial coping skill, "I'm sure we all have different coping mechanisms, and probably a lot of it revolves around sport… In college, I was a competitive powerlifter, so I've always kind of found my—like, like lifting heavy weights and putting on my headphones and listening to whatever raging music is my outlet."

Jackie compared the feeling of an intense mission with what she learned in competitive swimming. She stated, "It is that peak performance. You are at the top of your game. This is the pinnacle. This is where it counts. And yeah, it's the exact same feeling [of competing in

sports]. She also attributed her ability to function well under pressure to sports, "For the pressure aspect, I think being a competitive athlete." She continued,

> I was just telling my kids the other day how swimming prepared me for my first night of combat, because I had the exact same feelings of, "Okay, I'm about to go fly into Bagdad. We haven't been there. It's heavily defended. I'm going to be threat reacting. I'm going to be shot at." And you have all of these nerves, and the adrenaline, and the butterflies. And that same feeling is exactly what I had every time I competed in a swim meet, every big meet. So, when it's an important race, it's the same feeling. A little bit of shortness of breath, and the heart rate, and just nerves.

She described what she learned in swimming, "And in swimming, we did a lot of visualization and mental practice before your meet. And so, you had raced your race already. You already raced the perfect race. And so, you learn to focus and control your nerves, and to just dive in and do what you have been training to do." She learned to apply those same skills to flying, "And it is the same thing in flying in combat. You have those nerves, and the adrenaline, and the heart rate, and shortness of breath and your breathing heavy. Now the difference is that combat is very fluid and things can change."

The Relationship with Anxiety

Second-round interviews identified that the participants have a relationship with their anxiety, and they discussed how they built that relationship. Jackie described her relationship with anxiety, "I feel like I thrive on that [anxiety]. But it's not a negative feeling at all. It's like, Okay, I have these feelings. And I guess, if I would describe it, it's all here, the anxiety, and I channel—I've never said this before in my life. I'm just thinking out loud. But it is. It's your heart rate, and it's your breathing, it's sweaty palms, it's sweaty armpits, it's all of these feelings. And I somehow channel it. It – that sounds bizarro, but that is what I do." She described how she learned to "practice" in pilot training. "In flying in general, in pilot training, I chair-flew, which is just mental practice. Just rehearsing, so it's exactly what I did." She compared the

competitive swimming she did growing up to her first combat flight, "With swimming and then combat, the same feelings, but you learn, 'Okay, I've done this. I've been here before. I know what to do. I just need to be flexible and ensure that I'm sharp mentally to be able to adapt to whatever they throw at me. But it, it's exactly—for me, the exact same feeling."

Marina described her preparations for important missions, "All the things you do to prep, mental preparation, visualization." She described how she manages anxiety, "For me, when I get nervous if I'm flying, like, I'll say a little prayer, and I'll just ask God to help me do the things that I know how to do because I know that I'm ready to do the things that I have to go do. I just need to get over the nerves." She reported that the nerves usually subside once she starts her mission, "Luckily, as soon as I start, it usually goes away. So, it's the anticipation—anxiety a little bit. But I've never had a problem with it kind of paralyzing me." She linked learning to manage anxiety with her early involvement in sports. She stated, "I did get nervous with sports initially, like, until you touch the ball our until your first event, I was always pretty nervous. But I always thought of it as a healthy nervous." She described how her anxiety has evolved, "I don't get nervous flying anymore. When I was younger, when I was doing new things or my first combat sorties, or things like that, I had the same type of nerve. It's very familiar."

Marina discussed how Air Force training teaches people to manage the stress and anxiety. She stated, "Don't you think the Air Force trains us to be that way, though? I think a lot of it is because the training is horrible at the beginning, right? Like, it's horrible for everyone even if you have experience in what you're doing. I think the Air Force does that on purpose." She described how she evolved in pilot training,

> My husband and I were talking about this yesterday. But the start of pilot training, so the first airplane we flew, that was the most stressful. When we got to the second airplane and knew we

got fighters—for me, that wasn't stressful. I had already learned how to deal with the stress…
Then the same with [aircraft] – we were nervous, but we already knew what we needed to do."

She also described how the Air Force Academy taught her to manage stress and anxiety, "I think

the Air Force Academy helps a little bit with that." She described why, "…the academy

graduates were prepared for pilot training more." She detailed why she believes this, "It really

sucked, but we were also put in high-stress situations where we had memorized things and

people were screaming in your face, and you had to do memory recall."

Giving the Benefit of the Doubt

Another aspect that emerged during the second-round interviews is the idea of giving the

benefit of the doubt. Amelia reported feeling that it is the responsibility of the minority group

member to give the benefit of the doubt to the majority group member. She stated,

> And then the minority group, the very important things for that part is to give people the benefit
> of the doubt. And by that, I mean, you know, I flew with a guy who was just stoic at best. And I
> thought, "Oh, he just hates flying with women." And by the third day, I was sick of it and was
> about to go, "Dude, I don't know what your problem is, but get over it." And I went home and
> called one of my buddies who was a First Officer at [airline name] and he goes, "Oh, no, he's just
> so tired of being an airline pilot. He doesn't talk to anybody and that's just how it is."

Amelia summarized the lesson, "Don't always assume that because you are being treated poorly,

you're being treated poorly because of your minority status. You might just be being treated

poorly because they treat everyone poorly [laughter]."

The Way I was Raised

Several participants in the second-round interviews discussed how their childhoods

influenced their mindset. Jackie attributed some of her coping skills to the way she was raised.

She stated, "And maybe that goes back to my dad just going, "Don't worry about her. What

does she have to do with your world? You control your world. You control what you can

control." She described the attitude she learned in her family. She stated, "And not that I think

he ever said those words specifically. But that was kinda the attitude that my family had. Just control what you can, and don't worry about them, and don't, don't gossip about them, don't talk about them. Just move on and do your thing." She listed other lessons that she learned from her dad and the way she was raised, "The criticism piece. Growing up, my dad was the biggest—I don't want to call him a prankster, but he ribbed me a lot. So, I learned at a young age not to take myself too seriously." She continued, "I attribute that mostly to my parents. They didn't coddle me too much. If I was mad at something or had been treated unfairly, my dad would always bring me down. Like, 'Get over it… move on and stop acting like a princess."

Bessie also discussed how the way she was raised affected her internal experience. She stated, "My family was always like, 'Why aren't you happy?' They both had rough childhoods, so they're kind of like, 'We've done everything right. Like, why aren't you in the perfect mood?'" She described not having permission to have negative moods or her own space when needed. She said, "I wasn't allowed to close my door…there's always people at our house and it's like, 'Why aren't you saying hello and having a pleasant conversation?' or when you get in the car after school and you weren't happy, you know. She described a sort of emotional invalidation, "I think a lot of it was like- I should be happy 100% of the time, and that's a choice." She also reported that her parents were hard on her, "And my parents were, uh. [laughter] very hard on me. They put so much pressure on themselves to create a different situation where their kids were the priority, and I'm the oldest, so. I think that I got just a lot of pressure." She described what she saw when she recently watched the video of her second Christmas,

> We watched my second   Christmas, but I could do stuff and unwrap presents and stuff. And my
> dad just had one zillion questions for me. Like, "[Nickname], what's this? What do you call this?
> What color is this? Just like constant talking to me. Then if I'm looking at something else, he's

like, "Get back here." [laughter] Every time I would try to play with something, it's like,
"[Nickname], we're on a schedule. We have a routine."

She summarized, "I honestly attribute a lot to, just them having such high expectations."

Marina described how she is different from her mother, "I have a 'nice' mom. I have a mom that suffers from that [being too nice]. So, maybe in rebellion to her, I ended up the opposite way." She also reported being affected by her brothers, "My brothers made my life a living hell growing up. We're all a year apart. So, I spent my whole life getting beat up by my brothers."

Beryl also confirmed that the way she was raised impacted her. She stated, "And then you throw in your nurture and the way my parents raised me." She also described a childhood with high expectations,

> My mom is a bit of a perfectionist and very, I'd say, very controlling with her words, not in a bad way… but very much-- they expected a lot and you knew it if you weren't keeping up to their standard. I think for me, I'm more self-critical because of that childhood mantra of, "That's out of place. And that's not-- cleanliness and everything, it's just constantly, "Oh, you haven't finished yet? Well, why haven't you-- you got an A, right?" It's the expectation in their communication, and still to this day, my mom is that way.

Family

Participants confirmed the themes of Motherhood, Partnership, and Having It All in the second-round interviews. Several participants' family roles changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided additional insight into participant's family experiences.

Motherhood

Within the subordinate theme of Family, the theme of Motherhood remained prevalent. Motherhood was broken into the additional layers of: Career Consequences, It's All About the Timing, and Discrimination.

Career Consequences

Bessie confirmed first-round findings that pregnancy results in career consequences, "Maybe after family and some school stuff, then I would – who knows if you come back to the [current airframe]? I'd hate to call this the end of flying the [current airframe], because once you get pregnant, then you're out for a whole year. If you wanna have more than one kid, then you're out for another year." She described the gravity of this choice and how it has affected her career choices, "It's a big decision. It's just such a different experience for guys. Like weapons school, I wanted to go when I was in the [first airframe], and I don't know if I wanna go anymore and my main reason is the family aspect of it." Because she took a non-traditional path, the delicate timeline described in the first-round interviews was disrupted. She stated, "Because I switched planes, it delayed my timeline."

She also confirmed that she feels responsible for representing all female fighter pilots, a phenomenon also reported in the first-round interviews. She described how it would set a bad example for future women that want to compete for a weapons school slot, and ultimately, affect their career opportunity. Earning a Weapons School slot is highly competitive, and attending, communicates an advanced level of commitment. Wing Weapons Officers, or "patches," are considered the tactical experts within a squadron, and play a critical role in daily operations, exercises, and deployments. She stated, "There's part of me that's like, that's setting an example for the future of, like, I go to weapons school and then I'm a patch for a year, and then get pregnant? So, now I'm the Wing Weapons Officer and I can't deploy with the squadron?" She stated that it would be a "first," and described searching for someone "like you" who's done something and finding that you are alone. She stated, "That's an image I want to be okay. I'm not saying it's not right now—but it's literally, never been done before. It's been so few and far

between, the female patches we've had. The one I can think of, she got out when she had a family." She continued, almost thinking out loud, "If you're a patch, you need to be putting in these long hours. It'd be nice to break down that stereotype, but at the same time, I don't feel the need to jump on every grenade."

It's All About the Timing

Bessie, the youngest participant, was the only one who didn't talk about family planning in the first-round interviews. During second round interviews, eighteen months later, she confirmed first round findings that timing is crucial for family planning. She described why she recently requested an assignment change back to the CAF from the FTU. The CAF had a higher ops-tempo, while the FTU offers more stability for families. "A lot of it has to do with having a family at some point. I'd rather bank up my time to be in an FTU, later come back and do another assignment here…come back to [base] when we have a family." She further detailed her family planning process, which is heavily dependent on her career milestones. "I just don't feel ready to have a family quite yet. Not that I feel that the FTU's irrelevant, but I just don't feel like you can say you flew the [aircraft]. I would hate to only ever be an FTU IP." Overall, she confirmed that women often feel like they can't have children, and their dream career; it's one or the other.

Partnership

The theme of partnership continued to be prevalent for all participants.

Dual-Mil

Participants continued to discuss dual-mil relationships in the second-round interviews, but additional details emerged. Bessie reported that, for women in dual-mil fighter pilot

relationships, it's difficult to establish yourself separately from your partner. She described an incident where she was the flight commander for a couple in the FTU, "And I'm just like, 'Yup. They're married.' And then the other flight commander was like, 'Why don't they have the same last name?' [laughter] And I lost it. I was like, 'Because it's the fucking 21st century!'"

Marina verified Bessie's statement that it is difficult to be your own person when married to another fighter pilot. Marina highlighted the competition within her relationship. She stated, "I was never competing with him, but apparently, when we were younger, he was competing with me. To beat me in upgrades. And it caused trouble until we figured out what was happening." She stated, "Once we were stationed at different bases…and he came into his own. He always thought he was riding on my coattails. At separate bases, he's like, 'Oh, you don't even know my wife—I must be better than I thought." She described where the competition and insecurity came from, "It totally came from the squadrons. Like, 'Oh, she's in flight-lead upgrade, we better get you in that upgrade. Oh, you better not fail when your wife's succeeding.' They were making fun of him because of me."

Eileen confirmed her first-round description of the challenging and chaotic nature of a dual-mil relationship with children. She reported getting some empathy from a coworker recently, "He said to my husband, 'cause his wife went out of town and he had to take care of two kids, little kids for a day. And he's like, 'I don't know how you guys do it.' [laughter] It's always one of us, at least while we were in Japan." She described the life of a dual-mil fighter pilot couple, "We were always TDY, deployed, stuff like that – and that was when we only had two [children]." She reported how she felt when hearing that, "I appreciated him saying that. And I realize more and more, as more people have kids, they realize how crazy or hard it was to do what we did with kids in the CAF."

Bessie described the struggle of managing a couple in the squadron. There doesn't appear to be a set standard, and squadrons handle if differently. "What I've seen a lot in my previous [aircraft] squadron was that they would, like, separate married people. And it kinda worked because one squadron was training, and one was a CAF squadron." She also described how it is difficult to establish your own reputation in the same squadron, "And I, I just saw in the [aircraft], like, how they would be separated, and they're just very much, like, their own people and establish themselves in the squadron." She continued with a more difficult aspect of separating dual-mil couples, "I've heard complaints about that if it's two operational squadrons, they can be on opposite deployment schedules and then you're never home and never see each other."

Bessie continued and described a situation with no right answer, "Sometimes communities are like, "Put them in the same squadron. So, here we have two couples and they're both in the same squadron. I don't know, when I went TDY with the other squadron that has married IP's in it, like, it takes some getting used to being around them, because they have some sort of allegiance to each other." She recounted a conversation she had with a friend who prefers being in the same squadron as her husband, "And I asked her if she wished they were in different squadrons, and she's like, 'No. There's just too much going on. I like that we can just be like, what's going on with this?' And he knows." Beryl confirmed that it might be helpful to be married to another fighter pilot and be in the same squadron. She described how it might feel less lonely being married to someone who can relate. She stated "It's twofold. You're in a squadron with 40 guys and they are all smart and good looking. And you spend 12 hours a day every day there, you're going to find a guy that you're compatible with. I think the second thing

is having somebody who can relate that you can talk with more intimately than just the business side of things."

Civilian Spouses

Second round interviews confirmed the challenges experienced by female fighter pilots married to civilian male spouses and added details about spousal social roles. Amelia described the dynamic, "We're the opposite couple. My husband is a civilian, I'm active duty, I'm a fighter pilot and he's traveling around, you know following me." She described reactions for others, "We'd get all these weird questions, 'Well, is your husband going to move with you?' And I'm like, 'Do you ask the guys if their wife's going to move with them? No.' You just assume, right? Marriages work better if you live in the same place [laughter]."

Eileen confirmed first-round findings that detail the challenges encountered by civilian male spouses, "It's becoming more common that there are stay-at-home dads, especially, in the medical community." She talked about her brother-in-law, who is married to a female intel officer, "He had his own spouse group. But it was a mix of enlisted and officer because there weren't a ton [of male spouses]." She stated, "It is important to have a good group of friends. And it's harder when you don't really identify with them. When you're the only guy [in the spouse group] and they're all females, it's hard for a male spouse."

Jackie reported that spouses play an important role in the success of the military member's career. She stated, "I do think that spouses play a big role in military careers, and the social dynamics, because social dynamics are a big part of the military. Bessie confirmed that social dynamics are important and described how her civilian spouse helped her socially. She stated, "I actually get along pretty well with people because they'll ask me what [spouse's name]

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is up to, or they'll ride motorcycles with [spouse]. I'm pretty close with a lot of guys just because, they'll come over… and we'll all just sort of hang out." Amelia agreed that her civilian husband helped her socially. She stated, "We were lucky in that my husband is a very social guy. And he's also very handy and can fix just about anything. So, [name] jumped into doing social groups like Bunco or the spouse's coffees because he likes all the good food, and he likes to chat. So, he was accepted pretty well after they kind of got used to the idea [of a male being in the spouse group]." She described how he also found a traditionally masculine social niche, "And then when we're all gone, he gets a phone call, "Hey, my car won't start." He was the go-to-guy for everybody that was left at home when we went somewhere." Finally, she compared their similar situations of trying to fit in with the opposite sex, "And the women didn't feel threatened by him like the guys felt threatened by me, so I think it was a little easier to fit in."

Having it all

The difficulty of balancing a demanding military career and family described in first-round interviews was confirmed. In the second round of interviews, an additional aspect emerged. Multiple participants discussed the personal process of learning to let some things go. Marina described needing to let go of her perfectionistic drive. She reported that having children freed her of the drive to be perfect. She stated, "It's so cathartic when you can realize that it doesn't matter. When you finally let go and you're like, 'I don't care if my children look homeless.' 'And we eat cereal for dinner. And my house is a disaster. I don't care.' And that's—it's so amazing."

Eileen identified that the drive to network and politic to make rank was a burden in the active duty Air Force. She reported that going to the Reserves freed her from several obligations. She stated, "The nice thing is, like, there is no pressure. I don't have the

expectations of, like, having to network. I don't have those pressures anymore of showing my face in front of the boss or climbing the ladder. All I want to do now is teach [student pilots] and be with my kids, you know."

Out-Sourcing Labor

Eileen confirmed first round findings that out-sourcing labor is a crucial aspect for fighter pilots trying to also balance a family. She stated, "You end up getting a nanny, because it's outside daycare hours 'cause we're flying nights. When we were both deployed, we flew our kids back to Nebraska [to stay with grandparents]." Beryl agreed and discussed a recent conversation with a friend whose husband is a pilot and deploying for a year. She stated, "They just had twins and he's going to deploy for a year. And she's like, 'I will throw money at whatever I can possibly throw money at. I hire the yard work, I hire the cleaning.' She's going to do the au pair thing. She's like, 'I'll hire that out.'" She also reported that, shortly after our last interview, she hired an au pair to help with her children. She stated, "I had a friend who recommended doing an au pair program. So, it's a live-in nanny. So, we had a live-in nanny from Brazil helping us for a year now, which has been great."

Going to the Guard and Reserves

Eileen confirmed first round findings that transitioning to the National Guard or the Reserves was one option for women trying to have it all. She stated that both she and her husband moved to the Reserves for their family, "It really was our family. It was putting too much of a strain on our family. Ultimately, I got to the point where I was like, the priorities, you know? So, this was a better choice, the better option for us. There was more of a quality of life for our priorities."

The Decision to Get Out

Eileen described how the decision to get out isn't always a choice. She reported that her husband hasn't flown a fighter since her first interview, because he had a heart attack. She commented that it's been nice having him at home. She stated, "He had a [major medical event]. I had just gotten off maternity leave then he had [major medical event] within weeks of us talking last. And he hasn't flown fighters since. But he got back with [airline] but is now on extended time off—to help the airlines avoid furloughs [due to COVID-19]. So, he gets half his pay to stay home. So, it's been really nice. It's amazing."

Beryl elaborated on her first-round discussion about quitting flying to have a family. She confirmed that she didn't see how she could do both. She stated, "I was like, 'You know what? I love being a fighter pilot. That's pretty cool, but I feel called to be a mother too. And I don't see a way for me to do both. Right now, it's not really possible."

> **Beryl:** So, I think the family was more of a priority in my belief system. And so, with those two being in conflict, it was another reason why I didn't want to stay in that career field.
>
> **Interviewer:** So, now that you are a mom, looking back, what do you see now? I do you still think it wouldn't have been a good idea to do both? Or have your views changed now that you know what it's like to be a mom?
>
> **Beryl:** There's those times when the [aircraft] fly overhead where I think about it. But now that I've started back into flying, oh my gosh. I'm really glad I did it the way I did. There will always be the what if feelings. Being a fighter pilot takes a lot of energy and effort, and I'd rather have that energy and effort for my kids.

Second round interviews confirmed that female fighter pilots use multiple tactics to have both a career and a family. All participants reported that the importance of family impacted their career.

The Mission

The second-round interviews confirmed that the mission portion of the female fighter pilot experience is more straight-forward. This is the aspect of their experiences that was the easiest to manage.

Flying the Jet

Amelia described another emergency that she considered worse than her ejection from the aircraft. She described how she handled the emergency safely, competently, and in accordance with her training.

> I actually had a little worse emergency about a year before that [the ejection]. And what I've found—you know how we train, it's all muscle memory, right? And you just go into that mode where you're not—at that point, I'm really not scared, I'm not. I'm just trying to do—you're just doing all the things you're supposed to do, right? It's afterwards that you are scared. If I can land an [aircraft] from the backseat, in the weather, with 200 pounds of usable fuel. It was a fuel malfunction. We typically don't even taxi with less than 600 pounds of usable fuel. So, I landed on the runway. I got the airplane stopped.

She continued and described how she felt after safely landing, "I took a deep breath and my feet just started chattering on the brakes. I'm holding the breaks on the runway." Again, she discussed the fear and how she was successful despite the fear. "Because that's when the fear kicks in, right? For me anyway, it doesn't kick in, it doesn't—I mean, I'm sure it is kicking, but it's not really—you're not thinking about it. You're focused on what you're trying to do. And then when it's done, you're like, 'Holy crap.'" Despite her own fear, she continued to instruct and reassure the student pilot in the front seat. She reported, "I told this student of mine, "Would you hold the brakes for me for a minute? I have to grab something out of my helmet bag [laughter]. 'Yes, Ma'am.' And I take my feet off. I'm shaking. After digging around like I'm getting something out of my helmet bag and taking a few deep breaths and settling back down." She described how her training kicked in, "You just do it. And when it's all done, you're like, "This could have been a lot worse."

Bessie described wanting to get back to the CAF and that mission after several years in a training squadron. She reported a desire to return to a real-world mission-set. "My biggest frustration is we spend a lot of time arguing over what the basics are because the jet is still, like, forming. And then that leads into a tactical discussion that is irrelevant because none of us are deploying anytime soon. Beryl also reported missing flying and starting flight training again after a four-year break. "It's been four years. So, I decided to use my GI Bill benefits and I started a flying program… I'm learning to fly a small Cessna 172 and becoming a certified flight instructor."

Eileen described why she is still flying the jet. She stated, "I think it's still challenging. That's why I still love it, because of how complex it is. 'Cause if I was truly there, then I don't know if I'd still wanna do it. If there was no more difficulty in it. If there was no more challenge. It would be like going through the motions, and I don't know if I ever would want that.

Deployments and TDY

In the second-round interviews, several participants discussed the differences between being in the CAF and being in an FTU. Going to a training squadron is a tactic often used to increase quality of life. They have a low ops-tempo, a more traditional schedule, and fewer deployments and PCS's. Bessie stated, "It's been really interesting for me. In this assignment I'm in, I'm in a training squadron, so I don't go TDY all the time like I did when I was in the CAF." She described how this had opened up different opportunities, "So, I have the opportunity to—they're like, 'Hey we need help with female gear fit… do you want to go on this TDY?' 'Yeah, sure.' So, I've been going to a lot more things where I'm interacting with more female fighter pilots than I ever have before."

Training

Bessie discussed how her career has progressed since the first-round interviews and confirmed that the training and upgrades never stop. She reported that she's completed the IPUG, the evaluator upgrade, and the mission commander upgrade since our last interview. After all the training, she felt frustrated about not getting to perform the mission while in a training squadron. She stated, "It's frustrating being so focused on that [tactics], but then not actually doing the job. I want to be back in the CAF. I want to know that we are training for a reason."

Second-round interviews also confirmed the difficulty of fighter pilot training. Beryl explained why the training is so difficult, "It takes some people longer [to learn to fly], so we try to find those that are a little bit smarter and better hand-eye coordination to learn faster so it's cheaper for the Air Force. Then you get into fighter training and they really do want you to succeed even though they're trying to mess with you and—all the harassment and extra attention, they truly believe it is to make you stronger."

Success

Second-round interviews highlighted what's considered a successful career by these high-achieving participants. Their responses fell into two categories: Safety and Legacy.

Safety

The first definition of success, mentioned by every participant, centered around being able to perform the mission safely and effectively. Those in training squadrons extended that definition to students and described the importance of training future fighter pilots to perform the mission safely and effectively. Jackie stated, "And then flying the [aircraft] was awesome. But

you know, I wasn't god's gift to aviation by any stretch. I think I was an average to slightly

above average pilot, and I worked hard, and I, you know, did what I could in the [aircraft]."

Eileen described success as, "Always knowing my jet and that I'm flying it safely and doing it

mostly right. Everybody makes small mistakes, and you learn from them. But, generally

speaking, you drop your bombs accurately, that kind of thing."

> **Interviewer:** Do you feel like you're there?
> **Eileen:** Most of the time. But I still have off-days where I haven't flown in a while. We
> were quarantined over Christmas for COVID. Then we went on a ski trip. And then we
> came back and flew. And tomorrow, we're doing BSA, basic surface attack, and I
> haven't done that in a year. So, I had to sit there and think, it felt like I was preparing
> for an upgrade. So, most of the time I feel like I'm there. Yeah, that's what I consider success.

Beryl started by stating, "That's a tough one. Not dying is good." [laughter] She

described doing the job she was trained for as her definition of success, "Really just becoming a

pilot is your success. Now that I think about it, then you take it to the next level, and you serve

your country, and you blow up bad guys. So that's your success. It's safely performing the job.

And I think as you get into more elite flying, it's safely performing, but also accomplishing a

more dangerous mission." Amelia defined success simply, "When the other pilots in your

squadron respect your abilities."

Marina listed her definition of success, "I try to do my best every time that I fly, knowing

that I'm always gonna fall short. I try to be honest with areas where I can improve, anytime I

can improve in an area that I think I needed to improve in, I think that's a success. So, I'm more

of a small victory person." Bessie agreed, "Just getting better every day. You're not going to

have a perfect sortie. For me, the day that I go out and fly and come back and don't feel the need

to ask the other person, 'You have anything for me [feedback]?' If you're not at least thinking, 'I

could've done that better or this better.' I think that's when I'm not being successful at this."

Legacy

The second definition of success revolved around positively impacting the lives of others. Jackie reported that was amazing to fly the [aircraft], but she lists her impact on others and the fighter community as her definition of success. "I feel like I did impact people. And it was cool that I was one of the first wave of women to fly it. And hopefully, I left a good impression on the other pilots about women flying fighters, versus a bad. So, that would be success." Marina also discussed success from a leadership perspective, "As a leader, your success is the success of the people that work for you. As a leader, if I take care of my people in the way that I need to take care of them." She acknowledges a responsibility to "do no harm" as a leader, "Where they're not going to lose faith with me or the Air Force because of something that I've done."

Conclusion

Chapter IV described round-two analysis, including an updated conceptualization of participant experiences as female fighter pilots. The sub-ordinate themes of: Being the Only, Fighter Pilot Culture, Internal Experience, Sexism, Family, and The Mission emerged in second-round analysis. Those sub-ordinate themes were further delineated into deeper layers of meaning referred to as themes and sub-themes. Chapter V will integrate round-two and round-three interviews to fully understand the shared experiences of the phenomenon of being a female fighter pilot.

CHAPTER V

SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

Six participants shared their experiences as female fighter pilots. After second round analysis and writing, results were presented to participants in a member check. After incorporating participant feedback, the final phenomenology is presented in this chapter. Central to the phenomenology was the experience of *Being the Only*. The women described an experience of often being the only female in a room, class, or squadron; this theme permeated all other themes. Remaining themes included: *Fighter Pilot Culture, The "S" Word, Internal Experience,* and *Moral Injury,* ultimately contributing to the theme of *Manufacturing a Break: Burnout.* An aspect of burnout that seemed salient for most participants was reaching a place where they needed to choose between career and family. All participants found various ways to prioritize their *Family,* while continuing to do *The Mission*. Participants described the mission as the most simplistic and easy-to-navigate aspect of their experience. In the end, participants described the essence of their experience as, *"I Just Want to Do My Job."* See Figure 3 for a conceptual map of the study's subordinate themes, themes, and sub-themes.
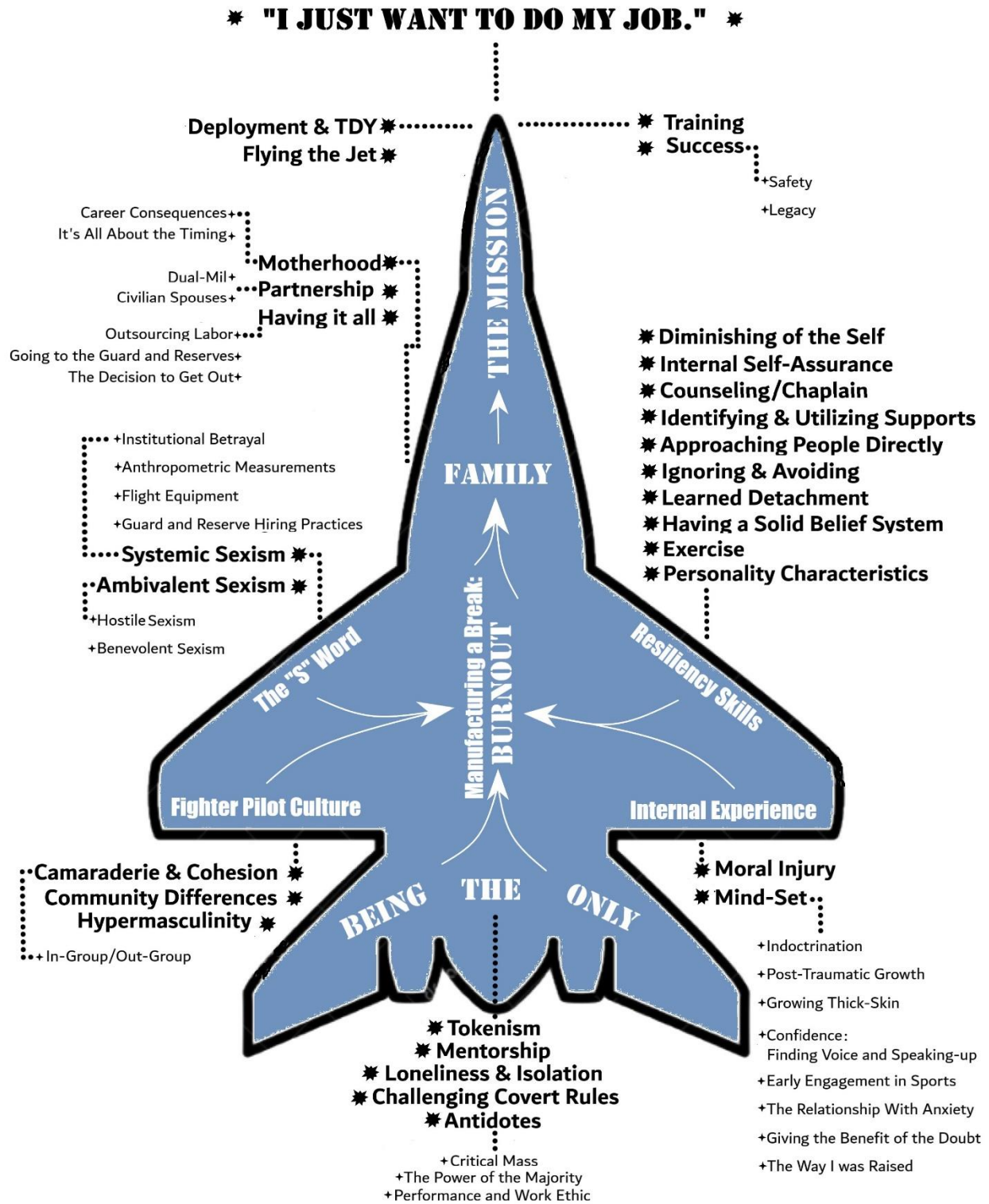
✳ **"I JUST WANT TO DO MY JOB."** ✳

Deployment & TDY ✳
Flying the Jet ✳

✳ **Training**
✳ **Success**

+Safety

+Legacy

Career Consequences+
It's All About the Timing+

Motherhood ✳
Dual-Mil+
Civilian Spouses+
Partnership ✳
Having it all ✳
Outsourcing Labor+
Going to the Guard and Reserves+
The Decision to Get Out+

THE MISSION

✳ **Diminishing of the Self**
✳ **Internal Self-Assurance**
✳ **Counseling/Chaplain**
✳ **Identifying & Utilizing Supports**
✳ **Approaching People Directly**
✳ **Ignoring & Avoiding**
✳ **Learned Detachment**
✳ **Having a Solid Belief System**
✳ **Exercise**
✳ **Personality Characteristics**

+Institutional Betrayal
+Anthropometric Measurements
+Flight Equipment
+Guard and Reserve Hiring Practices
Systemic Sexism ✳
Ambivalent Sexism ✳
+Hostile Sexism
+Benevolent Sexism

FAMILY

Manufacturing a Break:
BURNOUT

The "S" Word

Resiliency Skills

Fighter Pilot Culture

Internal Experience

BEING   THE   ONLY

Camaraderie & Cohesion ✳
Community Differences ✳
Hypermasculinity ✳
+In-Group/Out-Group

✳ **Moral Injury**
✳ **Mind-Set**

+Indoctrination
+Post-Traumatic Growth
+Growing Thick-Skin
+Confidence:
  Finding Voice and Speaking-up
+Early Engagement in Sports
+The Relationship With Anxiety
+Giving the Benefit of the Doubt
+The Way I was Raised

✳ **Tokenism**
✳ **Mentorship**
✳ **Loneliness & Isolation**
✳ **Challenging Covert Rules**
✳ **Antidotes**
+Critical Mass
+The Power of the Majority
+Performance and Work Ethic

Figure 3: Conceptual Map of Experiences After Member-Checks

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Being the Only

The theme Being the Only permeated throughout the phenomenology and influenced all aspects of participant experiences. Bessie stated, "So I just felt very aware of being the only." Marina described a covert disadvantage that slowly accumulates over the course of a career, "You are not a part of the good 'ol boys club, and there aren't enough women to form a good 'ol girls club." She continued, "When you're talking like, senior leader type things—it gets political, so a lot of it is who you know." She reported that the circles are built early in careers, "And who you know, those circles are built when you're younger, right? Little did I know, that like twenty-something years later that would [be a deficit] because I didn't go and play golf and because I didn't go and drink scotch." Being the Only persisted through more specific domains: Tokenism, Mentorship, Loneliness and Isolation, Challenging Covert Rules, and Antidotes for Being the Only.

Tokenism

Tokenism is the practice of making only a symbolic effort or doing something to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly. Tokenism occurs when a minority operates within a majority group, and the minority draws more attention than the majority group members. Participants described experiences with tokenism. Marina stated,

> It's kind of the microscope you have on you when you're the only one. Uh, you sort of like, you can't get away with some of the other shenanigans that guys—or mistakes that guys can get away with because they remember that it was the girl. I felt like I had a higher standard. I couldn't make as many mistakes because it would keep following me longer.

It is largely accepted among the discipline that tokenism contributes to a variety of issues resulting in competitive disadvantage, decreased performance, and the assertion of dominant group solidarity. The presence of bias and the additional pressure placed on a few token women will continue to make successful performance more difficult for minorities in nontraditional

employment environments. Multiple participants described feeling an additional pressure, which majority group members don't experience, to adequately represent all future women. Amelia stated,

> … what I felt like was—I mean, if I was the first woman to go through [aircraft] training and another woman didn't go through for over a year, what if I would have failed out? Would they have scrapped it? Would they have said, maybe this isn't such a good idea? Or see, we told you this wasn't a good idea? Because it was the civilian leadership that pushed it, not the military.

Another aspect of *Being the Only* is the participants' lack of Mentorship, and their efforts to mentor future generations.

Mentorship

All participants described a gross lack of female mentors, leaders, and colleagues, which exacerbated the effects of tokenism. Multiple participants described aspirations ranging from motherhood to weapons school, but when they look for others' who've achieved it, they come up empty. Jackie discussed how she wanted to have a family in addition to her career but wasn't sure how to accomplish both.

> I was a little bit on that front edge of women who flew fighters, and I didn't want to ruin it for the rest of the girls behind me, I guess. I felt a little bit of an obligation not to, you know, get, be the first chick knocked-up in a fighter squadron and be DNIF.

Bessie reported aspirations to attend the prestigious weapons school, but she wants to also have a family. She looks ahead and sees a handful of female patches [weapons school graduates], and none who've also had a family. She worries that she's setting a poor example and limiting opportunities for future generations of female fighter pilots if she earns her patch then becomes pregnant,

> … that's setting an example for the future of, like, I go to weapons school, and then I'm a patch for a year, and then get pregnant? Okay, I'm the wing weapons officer, and I can't deploy with the squadron… it's literally, never been done before… it's been so few and far between female patches we've had… the one I can think of, she got out when she had a family. And so…

The bigger issue with the severe lack of mentorship is that it's hard to be what you can't see. When you look ahead and don't see anyone like yourself, it introduces additional doubt, pressure, and scrutiny, but seeing even one person like you when you look ahead makes a difference. Beryl stated,

> And so, at the Academy it was like, "Well, I guess I'm going to go be a pilot," but nobody else—what other women are becoming pilots? And there was one other woman who was a year ahead of me who made it to the T-38 track. And rumor had got back like, "Well, [name] did it." And I was like, "Well, if [name] could do it, then I could do it."

Ultimately, the participants took it upon themselves to create a group for mentorship and support called the Chick Fighter Pilot Association. During member-checks, Marina described additional mentorship efforts,

> If you met a girl, you tried to get her email but if you didn't get her email, you'd never see her again… Whenever there were other girls, if they were in my squadron or not, I always found them. I'm like, "This is what you need to pee in the jet, this is how you do it, let's go drink some wine and have a pee and do it together." And I *hope* that was sort of a pay-it-forward.

Bessie described advocating for future generations as a form of mentorship, "I lean a lot on thinking about the next generation. When I'm like, man, I need to defend myself here, I don't feel like I'm defending myself. I feel like I'm defending the culture that I want for the next generation." On the surface, a lack of female mentors, leaders, and colleagues appears insignificant. But when we dig deeper, it resulted in several consequences.

Loneliness and Isolation

One consequence of being underrepresented and lacking in female mentors, leaders, and role-models is an increased sense of loneliness and isolation. Jackie stated, "So, you show up to a new squadron, and they are already cohesive, and they know each other, and I'm the odd one out. One, because I'm new, but two, because I was a girl."

Marina also indicated that the loneliness and isolation increased as she moved up the ladder. The number of high-ranking women is much smaller than the number of high-ranking

men. While all leaders' social circles become smaller as they promote, this is especially limiting

for female leaders. She stated, "When you become the boss, you kind of move yourself to the

outside of the circle a little bit." Beryl described being surprised at how lonely it was, and at

how much she missed female companionship.

> It's funny because I've always prided myself in not liking female bonding. I prefer hanging out
> with guys. I like the way guys think. So, that's why I really thought the fighter pilot world was
> for me. But being in complete isolation from women is when I realized that I needed it [female
> companionship].

Participants reported that tokenism and a lack of female mentors, leaders, and colleagues resulted

in feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Challenging Covert Rules

Participants described a set of arbitrary rules dictated by society and the fighter culture

(attractive and young female students can't repeatedly fly with the same instructor; fighter pilots

fit "the mold": drinking, cussing, philandering, cocky, etc; be confident and strong, but always

remain nice). They also reported experiencing consequences for challenging them. Eileen

stated, "You get the influence of society too – who does what in this world. And your typical

fighter pilot doesn't look like a mom with children." During member-checks, Jackie described

an incident where she applied lip gloss off-duty, and was asked, "Do you want to be a girl and

wear makeup, or do you want to be a fighter pilot?" Increased observation and attention magnify

any challenge to the covert rules.

Antidotes

The study identified several antidotes to *Being the Only* including critical mass, the

power of the majority, and work ethic and performance.

Critical Mass

Critical Mass was a sub-theme of Sexism after round one interviews, but it emerged as an antidote to the consequences of being the only after second round interviews were analyzed. Ultimately, working toward critical mass appears to be the best solution to Being the Only. Unfortunately, attempts to effectively reach critical mass have been unsuccessful, and participants tended to relate critical mass to past affirmative action policies. Marina stated,

> There're always people that are gonna think you got a job – especially right now with the—the whole diversity inclusion thing, the affirmative action thing that is coming back into fashion are actually hurting instead of helping, I think. Just—if I get a position, people are gonna automatically think I got it because I'm a girl, not because I earned it.

Participants had negative reactions to any implication that unqualified people of any race, gender, or sexual orientation be "passed" or given a job for any reason other than ability, performance, and capability. In general, participants had neutral to negative reactions to the concept of affirmative action. On the other hand, the consequences of being the only were well documented in the current study.

> **Bessie:** …in retrospect, I realized that, at pilot training, females are so few and far between. And, honestly, washing out at a higher rate and just the talked about—I feel like everybody knew there was only two girls in T-38. So, I just felt very aware of being the only.

> **Marina:** It's such a small group that if you are a female who struggles with the flying part, you have to work really hard at it—you're going to get spotlighted more than a man who has to work really hard too.

Establishing critical mass appears to offer a promising solution for the struggles that all participants encountered. Yet, the misinterpretation of affirmative action initiatives as hiring less qualified women to reach larger critical mass have received harsh criticism and negative reactions from participants. They were proud of the fact that they'd earned their right to be where they are and felt that some initiatives invalidated their hard-earned achievements.

The Power of the Majority

Another antidote to the consequences of being the only, is for the majority group to utilize their power positively. Male fighter pilots and male leaders have the ability to reduce the impacts of being the only. Amelia stated,

> Everyone avoids asking people in the majority groups to step-up when they see something that's wrong. The minority, the person in the minority group shouldn't always be the one correcting everybody. What kind of environment is that? It's a pain in the neck.

Bessie confirmed this antidote, "I always feel like it's easier to defend someone else than defend yourself." When the majority group uses their power and influence to affect change, the consequences of being the only are lessened. Amelia stated,

> I think one of the reasons women fighter pilots are more accepted and respected now is because of the people who support them… The General Officer whose daughter wants to be a fighter pilot. Or the husband who's a fighter pilot who's married to a fighter pilot… It's moving and it's moving because of the guys, not because of the women. Because of the guys who have interacted with us who appreciate what we bring to the Squadron, who go out and help defend us when needed.

Even without reaching critical mass in the fighter pilot community, the powerful majority can positively impact the culture and minimize the consequences of being the only.

Work Ethic and Performance

Participants frequently discussed how a solid work ethic and high performance can reduce the effects of being the only. On the surface, this makes sense, and participants reported finding comfort in this concept. Amelia stated, "I'm just like, no, you don't get to define me. I get to define me. Through my performance, through my attitude, through the things that I accomplish, I will define myself." Marina agreed, "I love that what I do is based off, like, how hard you work and how, how you can do your job. I don't feel like I have the job because I am a woman. I feel like I'm here because I earned it just like all the guys. So, that part is nice." Bessie shares how this concept boosted her confidence, "… your accomplishments kind of speak for themselves. You probably wouldn't have got there if you didn't deserve it type of thing."

The tricky aspect of this antidote is that performing well is more complicated for the minority person. In the fighter pilot world, minority status affects performance due to the increased pressure it generates. Bessie described how it negatively affected her performance, "… but there definitely have been times that's really, I don't want to say it's [the pressure from being the only] crippling, but it's very much like I'm even frustrated that I'm frustrated about it type of thing and it's taking your mind off what it probably should be on." Amelia described her experience as the only,

> I was within one ride of washing out of training. One type of training I was having an issue with, and I failed it. I failed the next one, I had one more [chance], or I was done. And that's kind of when I just went, "Okay, I have got to let this crap go. I can't worry about what people are saying, thinking about me. I can't worry about the future of women fighter pilots being on my shoulders. I can't carry that." So that was a very important lesson to me about halfway through [aircraft] training. Your brain can't hold all that and do what you're asking it to do.

Performance can be subject to unconscious bias and personal interpretation, and is ultimately unreliable and resilient. This phenomenon is referred to as the idiosyncratic rater effect. Multiple participants reported that the standard of performance was higher for them. Marina stated, "I can't get away with the same mistakes that the average guy can get away with. I have to be better than average to be judged as average." So, if higher performance requirements and the additional pressure are considered; female fighter pilots start out with a deficit. Jackie described a common phenomenon for female fighter pilots where it was assumed that they are not aggressive enough. She stated,

> And I remember an IP in the back seat going, "You're not aggressive enough. You need to bank it up 90 degrees, pull 9 Gs and get it." You know, and I was like, "Oh, okay. I need to be more aggressive." Meaning pulling more Gs and yank and bank the jet. And, you know, once I got more experienced, I'm like, "You don't have to pull 9 Gs every time. You just need to quickly and efficiently get to the formation that is expected of you. And, but they, I don't know if it's them thinking, "Oh, she's timid or she's afraid." Or, or; I don't know. But I've heard it from a lot of girls that we were told we're not aggressive enough.

When the concept of idiosyncratic rater effect was presented to Amelia during member-checks, she felt it was more palpable and applicable in the training environment. She felt

evaluation became more objective once a fighter pilots achieves qualifications and is established. At that point in a career, she felt idiosyncratic rater effect morphed into more of a selection bias for career-enhancing assignments such as leadership roles, weapons school selection, Stan-Eval, etc.

Participants also indicated that poor performance can lead to out-group membership and ostracism, which further increases pressure and diminishes performance. Participants emphasized the importance of performance for camaraderie and in-group membership. Yet, Beryl described a colleague, "I saw how cruel they were towards her and how it had totally wrecked her personal life. And there was another kind of confirmation for me of like, 'Gosh, even if you are the best of the best like she was, like it's just, they're never going to like you or respect you.'" Her statement indicates that it is possible to end up in the out-group despite performing well.

Overall, participants embraced and found comfort in the idea that success is tied to performance, but they reported experiences that didn't always play out that way. They told a utopian story of an objective and performance-based industry, but in reality, it's much more nuanced and vulnerable to biases. Amelia, the first woman to fly an [aircraft] stated, "I hope that it's gotten better. I hope that it can be truly a performance-based industry where if somebody can fly the airplane, they are part of the team. Right?"

Fighter Pilot Culture

The fighter pilot culture is a unique sliver of military culture that's difficult to define. Most aspects of the culture serve a purpose, and participants were careful to highlight the purpose, and overall, they defended the culture and its traditions. Amelia stated, "So, I don't want to be all fighter pilot bashing, you know what I mean? There's been a lot of them that have

been very, very helpful and supportive." Eileen stated, "Overall, I think that fighter pilot culture

is awesome and that anything you give to a fighter pilot, they're going to get it done. And

they're going to do it well. And they're going to do it fairly quickly compared to most people."

Jackie stated, "It's funny and it's fun and these are work hard, play hard people. You know, and

I feel like you can trust them with anything. There are a few outliers … but for the most part,

just the laughs and the camaraderie and the fun, yet the reliability to go out and get the job

done." Even when participants identified room for change, they remained protective and loyal.

> **Beryl:** I think it could be better without it [the negative cultural pieces]. I think you can perform and be the best of the best without all that extra crap and trying to force each other to develop thick-skin. But I'm also a realist, and I see that we're not going to get there right now. And this [fighter pilot culture] has developed people who are incredibly talented and capable. It's the backbone of our incredible Air Force, so I'm not going to be the one to disparage it.

Bessie stated, "I think everyone had a different fight. I definitely feel like it's – it's a fight.

Like, that dichotomy of, like, I'll defend the community for sure, but I also want the community

to be better." As participants described their experiences of fighter pilot culture, two more

strong and unique threads were part of everyone's experience: Camaraderie and Cohesion, and

Hypermasculinity.

Camaraderie and Cohesion

The importance of camaraderie and cohesion to group dynamics and teamwork is well-

researched, and participants listed these items as their favorite aspects of the fighter pilot culture.

> **Jackie:** The camaraderie was really the number one and it was a unique group of people, executing a great mission. And we were really, really close… It was the people and being around them and the fun times that we had and the—the, might sound cliche, but the-- how you execute as a team, you know, the four-ship or the two-ship that you go out with. It just -- It's a, it's a bond that is-- it's hard to describe, but it's an important bond, and that's what made it special.

Once a fighter pilot makes it through training and becomes mission qualified, the ability

to perform at the required skill-level has been rigorously and repeatedly tested. The current

study found that minorities struggle more with aspects of the culture and fitting-in than they do with performance.

> **Amelia:** It was the fighter pilot culture that I had to break through. And it wasn't—when I say that, I don't want to change – I wasn't really trying to change the culture, I was just trying to get them to let me in. I just want to be part of the team.

Individual performance, group performance, and group cohesion suffer more when individuals are ostracized from the group for noncompliance with arbitrary and rigid cultural rules. The participants' experience with camaraderie and cohesion varied depending on their in-group or out-group membership.

In-Group/Out-Group

Participants reported the presence of both an in-group and an out-group in most fighter squadrons, who ends up in each group, and how they get there. Marina, who always felt part of the in-group, reported that sometimes just being a woman puts someone in the out-group. She stated, "As a girl, you kind of sit sometimes outside the circle. I never felt that I didn't belong, but there are always things that I wasn't going to be invited to." In response to this type of out-group scenario, the early generation of women formed the Chick Fighter Pilot Association (CFPA).

> **Amelia:** And I just think that's the greatest thing ever. So, they started that whole—let's have a network to support each other. Let's have somewhere you can turn to with stories and requests and things. I love hanging out with those women.

Eileen used a different way of explaining in-group or out-group membership, "Well, there's fighter pilots and there are people who fly fighters or pilots who fly fighters." Participants described the characteristics of both options. Eileen described a person who flies fighters, "Like, just, I guess—I don't even know how to describe it. They don't fit the normal fighter mold, you know? Like, don't wanna hear curse words. Don't wanna hear fighter pilot

stories. Don't wanna hang out in the bar. Jackie appeared to fit the mold and didn't describe

many aspects of the culture that she did not like. She stated, "I loved it. It was easy for me to

navigate. I enjoyed, like I said, the camaraderie. You know, I enjoyed the culture." On the

other hand, Beryl described how the culture did not align with her personal values. She stated,

> The mandatory drinking would probably be the biggest, because of my personal values, I'm not into drunkenness or carousing or swearing and those things were part of daily discussions. Every Friday night was that thing I dreaded. I'd rather be at home in a bubble bath. But instead, you're hiding in the corner of the bar trying not to be noticed so they don't force you to drink more and more and more.

Participants agreed that poor performance will place someone in the out-group. Amelia

reported, "If you don't fly the jet, you're never going to fit in." Yet, they also confirmed several

barriers to performance experienced by minorities: Idiosyncratic rater effect, tokenism, and the

requirement to perform at an above average level to be considered average. Reputation also

emerged as an important aspect of in-group and out-group membership. A female fighter pilot's

reputation was heavily linked with performance and was unrelenting. Jackie described,

> I think their [male fighter pilots] reputations follow them as well. But probably not as strongly. And it's like with any minority. You screw up, and people remember that forever. If the white male makes the same mistake, it's not gonna be memorable for people. So, people will remember it, but you [male fighter pilots] don't stand out as much. So, I do think our reputations probably are stronger and carry through longer than the guys'.

Bessie described how the in-group and out-group criteria has changed with the

generations, and she placed the older generation of pilots in the out-group. "It's just a fucking

uphill climb against—some of these old guys. They've just thought the same stuff is funny for

so long, and they consider it tradition." One additional population that was frequently in the out-

group was the religious fighter pilots. Amelia stated,

> … the out-group tended to be, it's sad to say, but they tended to be very religious. They didn't appreciate a lot of the standard fighter pilot culture. So, they kind got pushed out. They didn't appreciate the frat house feel. There was a lot of swearing. A lot of derogatory terms.

The dual-mil participants agreed that being married to another fighter pilot helped them with their in-group membership. Jackie stated, "… it just doubled our network and our friendship groups. Because then we had both squadrons, and we hung out with both squadrons. We both knew all the pilots. Whereas sometimes, you don't really get to know the pilots from the other squadrons."

Overall, the culture is nuanced that we can't simply label it as "good" or "bad." The culture and traditions fit for some participants more than it fit for others, and participants described the varying cultures amongst squadrons and communities. As the Air Force directs funding and manpower to programs aimed at increasing diversity, it is important to work toward a more flexible and diverse culture. People are different, and there will always be problems when they feel they are forced into a single rigid mold.

Hypermasculinity

Participants described how masculine characteristics are more valued than feminine characteristics in fighter pilot culture. Eileen described trying to fit-in by acting like one of the guys, "He [my husband] would say I would try to act too much like one of the guys. I would, like, drinking too much. That was kind of the big thing is trying to hang out, as drinking too much and that kind of stuff." Beryl also observed this tactic, "She [a colleague] tried to keep up with the guys. And so, she drank as much, and she dipped as much, and she swore as much, and she ate as much." Minority group members often try different tactics to gain acceptance into the majority culture in-group.

The "S" Word

Sexism grew so large in the data that it morphed into its own theme and was separated from the theme of Fighter Pilot Culture after the second round of interviews. The word Sexism was off-putting for participants, but in the end, it was the only fitting label for some stories. To represent this tension for participants, the theme is named *The "S" Word*:

> **Jackie:** "I wish um, I hate that word, it sounds so negative, but I don't know, I mean it's, it's spot-on—I don't know how you'd change it."

Systemic Sexism

Systemic sexism is a multi-layer problem of culture and institutional failure. During member-checks, several participants had an easier time accepting the existence of hostile and benevolent sexism. In one participant's words, "There are bad people everywhere." Conversely, they had a harder time with the concepts of systemic sexism and institutional betrayal. They appeared much more loyal and protective of the Air Force culture and institution than they were of individual "bad people." It seemed easier to believe that a single person could do harm, but it was more difficult to reconcile an entire system, that they'd dedicated their life to, perpetuating harm. One type of systemic sexism that emerged is institutional betrayal.

Anthropometric Measurements, Aircrew Flight Equipment, and Guard and Reserve Hiring speak to flawed Air Force systems that allow systemic sexism to thrive at the local level. During member checks, Jackie described how she viewed the gear issue.

> Sexism to me is, like, blatant discrimination and as far as the gear, I don't feel like it was a discrimination. Like, "We are intentionally making you have this lesser equipment." It's more of a laziness factor or a cost too much money. It's not like, "Oh, you're a girl so we're gonna give you, intentionally give you gear that doesn't fit because we want to discriminate against you or we think you are the lesser sex." It's like, "Oh sorry, you are in the .01%, we don't have gear for you, suck it up." And that's an Air Force-wide problem, it's not fighter specific either.

Marina described Guard and Reserve Hiring practices, "We don't hire any random people. That's the way that most Guard and Reserve hiring works…anybody has a bad experience with somebody, they're automatically taken off the list. Because we just don't want

that culture in a squadron for 10 years…it helps to keep it feeling like a family." She highlighted a helpful aspect of the process, and at the same time, she illustrates the risk and ease of bias dictating a hiring process that depends on a small group of people's opinions of a "bad experience."

Institutional Betrayal

Institutional betrayal refers to wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution. Institutional betrayal can be both pragmatic (compromised safety, negative career impacts, inadequate training, inadequate gear, sexual assault) and psychological (gaslighting, guilt, stress, ostracism). For example, Amelia described entering a system that was woefully unprepared for people like her. "And then it was just kind of like a whirlwind. Had some public affairs training and we went into the press conference with General [name] and then we had like media-- I was on [a popular national news show] the next day." At the national press conference, she stood next to the same General that, six months earlier, had publicly announced, "I'd rather fly with a less qualified man than a woman." When the policy changed, he'd already set the tone as a leader, "Then six months later, he's at the press conference introducing us. Now, what does that tell the fighter pilot community? 'Yeah, I still don't believe in this and I'm being forced to do it and you guys know, I'm not buying this policy.'" This is a quintessential example of institutional betrayal. Amelia was sent into an ill prepared system by leadership that, clearly and publicly, did not support her or the policy. It's very subtle, and on the surface, the system and the leaders are "doing the right thing," but dig a little deeper, and they are setting a "first" up for failure.

During member-checks, Amelia asserted that, for sexism to be institutional, it must demonstrate failure on several levels. She stated,

> The institution, I don't think is responsible for individual behaviors, but if I go to the institution… and then institution says, "suck-it-up-buttercup," then that's institutional. Now you've got two or three layers going, "You know what, you wanted to be a fighter pilot; this is what you get." There's a difference between individuals who are not being properly supervised or are not living up to the core values, and how many layers of leadership see that and let it go before it becomes institutional? And I say it takes more than one."

Interviews and member-checks identified a tension between the academic definition of institutional betrayal and the definition endorsed by participants. In the example of institutional betrayal provided by Amelia, an individual action *could* be pragmatic or psychological institutional betrayal depending on the culture and work environment created by the organization. The current study repeatedly demonstrates the role of leadership in creating a culture that doesn't tolerate sexism, sexual assault, or sexual harassment. When leadership allows an individual to act inappropriately without consequence, institutional betrayal occurs.

Military Sexual Assault and Harassment. After the first round of interviews, sexual assault and sexual harassment emerged as a common experience even though I didn't directly ask about it. During second round interviews, I asked participants to share their experience with sexual assault and sexual harassment in the military. I also offered to remove any details they did not want published from the final manuscript. All participants had some level of experience with either sexual assault or harassment, and several commonalities emerged in their experiences.

When asked about experiences with sexual assault and harassment, no one responded as if the idea of sexual assault or harassment was unimaginable, unlikely, or rare. Regardless of their personal experiences with either, participants had imagined and rehearsed their planned reactions to sexual assault.

> **Marina:** I've always joked like, umm like, I dare, I dare one of the guys that I work with to try something inappropriate with me. "I dare you to because I would love to cut off their member." Like that would be-- "I wouldn't think twice. I would love to punch you in the nose and break it and watch it bleed." So, go ahead, try something.

These rehearsals demonstrate the cognitive vigilance participants have about their own safety. In Marina's case her imagined response demonstrates strength and action. And, typical responses to sexual assault often result in a freezing or placating response in the moment (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019); these very responses are often used to perpetuate rape myths. Should women not respond with strength and action imagined in assault scenarios, they may struggle with later cognitive dissonance and self- blame.

If participants had not directly experienced sexual assault or harassment, they considered themselves "lucky." They also downplayed their experiences by citing that worse things have happened to other people.

> **Jackie:** It happened to me. That was the grossest violation I'd ever experienced during my entire career, which in the big scheme of things, is not terrible, you know? It was awful, but I know much worse things happen to plenty other people.
>
> **Bessie:** I feel like I've been—um, I don't know if lucky is the right word in that regard. Like, I, um—yeah. I don't know.
>
> **Eileen:** But it wasn't like, thankfully it wasn't really bad. It could have been a lot worse.
>
> **Beryl:** I can give you a couple examples, but I don't have anything significant.
>
> **Amelia:** That's really the worst that I had. There were other kinds of harassment, you know. Nothing where I truly felt threatened, you know, just the standard kind of BS.
>
> **Marina:** Especially for what—I mean, he just inappropriately grabbed my butt. So, it wasn't anything super bad. But I was definitely uncomfortable with him doing that.

Many participants reported altering their behaviors and adopting precautions that they believed protected them from sexual assault.

> **Amelia:** But I would look around and go, 'Yeah, I need to leave now.' There are a few times where I just get that… something was making me feel uncomfortable. And I would go back to my room. A lot of times I would find one of my squadron members I trusted and go, 'Hey, I'm heading back to my room.' And they would just watch me go for a little bit and make sure that nobody was walking right after me.

Marina: He was a group commander at the time, and sometimes we're flying nights. I'm sitting there with a female airman next to me, and there's nobody else around. I had to make sure that I wasn't in a situation where that could happen again… I told the squadron that women shouldn't be alone in the squadron at night. I was recommending they just have a guy on the team.

Beryl: I totally avoided everything sexual. I didn't get drunk on purpose because I didn't want it to lead to anything sexual. I have very strict boundaries for myself.

The air of distrust was palpable, which begged the question: How do we reconcile the described wariness and caution with the desire for camaraderie and the necessity for group cohesion? All participants identified contradictory feelings of safety. On one hand, they described incredible bonds similar to a family, but on the other hand, they described a requirement to remain vigilant and alert around the same group of people. Bessie and Amelia cited protective demographics.

Bessie: I've been married the entire time that I've been in the Air Force. I got married, like, 3 days before I entered the Air Force.

Amelia: I got married at 19, and I was 29 when I got to [base] for my first assignment. So, we'd already been married 10 years, you know. So, I never felt as much. But I was older, highly trained, I was a Captain, and we'd been married for a while.

Again, in conflict, two participants felt protected by their marital status. However, one participant reported a sexual assault that occurred while she was married.

On an intellectual level, participants seemed to understand that it was not their fault, but this knowledge didn't preclude them from analyzing their behavior, clothing, and actions. They second-guessed whether they were somehow at fault.

Eileen: Though, I mean, I realize that my behavior was inappropriate but that doesn't make what happened my fault. I shouldn't have had any drinks. And dancing the way I was dancing was inappropriate for being a married woman. But it still doesn't mean that I asked for it or that I deserved it. You know what I mean? So, that was a really hard thing for me to understand, but it's hard 'cause I have children. How do you teach them that, like, it's never your fault? But there are ways that you can help protect yourself. But it's still not your fault.

Jackie: And I was walking around – it's Guam, so I had a sundress on—that was knee-length. You know, but spaghetti strap. And I have nothing up here that would be of interest of anybody, so it's not like cleavage going on. But, you know, just a, a cheapo dress.

Beryl: I could see a lot of other women who didn't have those boundaries. I see how that could turn messy really quickly, especially when you are in such a hierarchical atmosphere, you have mandatory drinking events, and you're the only woman.

They also rationalized why it happened.

> **Jackie:** And it was partly due to the fact that we had been out drinking. It probably wouldn't have happened had he been sober.

> **Marina:** So, again, bad people. There are bad people everywhere.

> **Bessie:** And he's not making a comment every day, so it's like a couple comments a month.

Some participants reported that the perpetrators had a known history.

> **Eileen:** It's good riddance 'cause the guy was a creep and he ended up being really stupid and getting kicked out of the Air Force, or at least his wings taken from him, but it wasn't good.

> **Bessie:** I was like, 'He's creepy as hell, like, just stay away from him.'

> **Marina:** And this individual I knew had problems—had done inappropriate things to other friends of mine. So, it really didn't surprise me.

Participants also reported that some perpetrators were well-like and popular in the squadron, which made reporting even more difficult. They did not feel as if they would be believed.

> **Jackie:** It was awkward because he was loved by the squadron. Everybody thought he was the greatest guy; he had the nicest wife.

> **Beryl:** It started before, when he was playing guitar at Chapel, and they were Christians from Texas. Anyhow, he kind of just slowly was escalating… I don't know that anybody would have believed me, because he was happy husband, new father, in the band at church, well-liked, easy going to everybody.

Participants also reported that perpetrators were frequently in positions of greater power.

> **Eileen:** Well, there was one of the instructors, when I was in [airframe]. We were on cross-country…

> **Jackie:** I was a very young Captain, he was a Lieutenant Colonel in the squadron – and, you know, it – um, so yeah, it happened… It was just totally inappropriate, and I would expect, expect more out of my DO. The second-highest ranking guy in my squadron. To a young, fairly new girl in the squadron.

> **Marina:** It was, like, a Colonel when I was a Major and he was, like, inappropriately touching…advances.

Reporting behaviors were mixed, and overall, participants didn't trust the institution to react appropriately. Only one participant reported to the SARC and received Victim Advocate services. After reporting, she became a victim of institutional gaslighting.

> **Eileen:** I brought one of the victim advocates with me to a meeting where they were trying to get me in trouble for an unprofessional relationship, at first, when they found out about the situation.

Several reported to Squadron Commanders, several made no report, and several feared retribution.

> **Jackie:** The only person to go to was the squadron commander. We didn't have SARC. We didn't have any of that stuff back then. So, I would've gone to the squadron commander, and he probably would've said, "Okay, I'll talk to him." It would've been swept under the rug.

> **Marina:** I just went to my squadron reserve commander because I, as a Major, I really laid into him. So, I wanted to make sure that if it came back around, that somebody in my chain of command knew my side of the story… So, I didn't want to be the Major that was in trouble for yelling at a Colonel

> **Beryl:** At the time, there really wasn't much in place either. There was, I think I remember there being a sexual assault hotline that you could call.

Participants described why it would be difficult to report.

> **Bessie:** There's a price to pay to speak-up for sure. There's a lot of barriers, that's what they talked about in Green Dot training… There could be a lot of consequences. There's a price to pay, you know, figuring out what price you are willing to pay, and how the results will impact you and if it's worth it or not.

> **Beryl:** I guess there probably are ways – they could send you to another squadron, but you'd have to PCS and that takes time. And then you show up at a squadron unannounced… what the heck just happened, right? And everybody knows everybody else. And so, the word is out—I mean you're doomed to fail at that point. And where all of you upgrades and all of your performance is 100% political."

Overall, participants reported various experiences of support.

> **Eileen:** The SARC was very supportive. My DO was very supportive. The squadron commander was not.

> **Amelia:** I was very fortunate at that particular timeframe; both of my squadron commanders were really good. My DOs were knobs, for lack of a better word [laughter]. And I know I could have gone to one of them and said, "Hey, this is getting out of hand. Somebody needs to do something about this guy who's annoying me," you know? And I think all of them knew me well enough that it wouldn't have been an issue.

> **Beryl:** But I don't know that it would have—I guess I want to believe that if it had escalated to that, that something would have been done. But there's so much between that and…there's a pretty large continuum. And so, I think anything short of actual rape was just fair game.

> **Bessie:** It blew my mind that he [the commander] was aware of harassment that was happening and did nothing about it. It blew my mind.

Finally, many of the incidents disclosed by the participants could have been stopped by a bystander or were stopped by a bystander. The current study also indicates that a bystander

intervention from a majority group member might be even more effective. Bystander intervention is powerful, but several barriers for intervention emerged in the study.

Additional aspects of systemic sexism and institutional betrayal stemming from the workplace environment and culture emerged. The themes of *Heterosexism; Language and Humor, and Roll Calls; Naming Ceremonies; and Shenanigans* all produced examples of institutional betrayal. Institutional betrayal exists whenever leadership placates and allows unprofessional and discriminatory practices to exist or fails to protect a member of the institution.

Ambivalent Sexism

Different than systemic sexism, ambivalent sexism considers the actions and biases of single individuals. These biases affect an organization's culture in a negative way, but they are not, yet, ingrained in the organizational structures, policies, practices, and procedures. And they are not formally or informally sanctioned by the organization. Ambivalent sexism has two sup-components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism.

Hostile Sexism

Hostile sexism reflects overtly negative evaluations and stereotypes about gender. Participants described several experiences with hostile sexism. Jackie stated, "I'm on this old fighter pilot Facebook group, which is somewhat ridiculous. They make up all these excuses, 'Well, women can't pull Gs; they're not physically fit.'" Amelia encountered hostile sexism when arriving at her first assignment. She stated,

> … basically, there was four of us coming from the same training class and the squadron commanders get together and decide who is going to get who and they were arguing over who was going to get me. But like, who *wasn't* going to get me. I call it the last one picked on the playground. No, you take her. No, you take her.

One type of hostile sexism that several participants encountered was pregnancy discrimination. Several participants indicated that they encountered more sexism due to their status as a mother than as a female. Jackie stated, "It [discrimination] was more at the end of the career because we had kids, versus early on in the career because I was a woman." Hostile sexism is an example of an additional pressure endured by the participants.

Benevolent Sexism

Benevolent sexism is a set of attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling and tone. Benevolent sexism tends to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial, but only serve to justify women's subordinate status to men. In many situations, these attitudes may be referred to as chivalry or simply having "traditional values." Amelia described it like this, "The worst kind [sexism] isn't overt … they know they need to watch their mouth about the views that they have. It's just a lot of biases … you just feel like they're not giving you the benefit of the doubt." Participants indicated encountering benevolent sexism over the course of their careers.

Amelia linked tokenism to the existence of benevolent sexism. She stated, "One of the reasons that guys were so against women flying fighters is they would think about their wives or their daughters or their mothers, and there's no way they can do that." If we reached critical mass in the fighter pilot field, our preconceived and biased notions of wives, mothers, and daughters would broaden. The power of benevolent sexism lies in perpetrator's the ability to camouflage sexist remarks as chivalry.

Likability was another place where benevolent sexism emerged. Likeability is required for a woman to be successful, but the line between likeable and weak is a very fine and challenging

line to navigate. Eileen stated, "A couple times, I had people kind of be taken aback when I give direct feedback… when it comes down to being critical, I have to make the extra effort to sound nice or else I sound like a bitch." Participants in the more recent generations describe the more subtle benevolent sexism, which is less hostile and combative, but also more difficult to recognize and name.

Internal Experience

Participants described their internal experiences of being a female fighter pilot. Internal experiences consisted of their resiliency skills, the fighter pilot mindset, and moral injury.

Resiliency Skills

During member-check procedures, the theme of *Coping Skills* changed to *Resiliency Skills* after two participants felt the term sounded victim-like. Most participants avoided any terms implying that they were suffering, just getting by, or needing pity. Participants used multiple resiliency skills to perform a challenging job, and to fit-into the fighter pilot culture. *Diminishing of the Self* refers to the multitude of ways the participants embraced inauthentic or foreign personality characteristics attempting to join the in-group and not disturb the status quo. Some participants embraced feminine and nonthreatening characteristics to take on a mother or sister role in the squadron. Others tried embracing the more masculine traits of the male fighter pilot. Other participants made an intentional effort not to disturb the culture, and they molded themselves to that culture and avoided making waves. Jackie stated, "I'm trying to think of it from the guy's perspective. You know, if because I, they didn't worry about offending me or they didn't have to change their behavior."

Participants identified *Internal Self-Assurance* as a crucial characteristic for a successful fighter pilot. They discussed several ways that they developed a strong internal self-assurance over the course of their career. One tactic was the development of a strong internal dialogue. Amelia described hers, "I just think that I'm not going to let other people tell me what I can do… I'm just like, no, you don't get to define me. I get to define me." Participants also reported that their strong belief system protected them from the temptation to compromise their moral code or value system, even if it resulted in out-group membership. Several participants attributed their positive experiences to an ability to ignore peer pressure, speak their mind, and stick to their value system. Finally, they identified the importance of identifying and utilizing your support system. They learned to listen to those who truly believed in them while ignoring those who didn't.

Learning to ignore those that aren't supportive, morphed into its own sub-theme called *Ignoring and Avoiding*. Participants described just ignoring things that didn't sit well with them but were also out of their control. Jackie stated, "… I never wanted to ruffle feathers or do anything to—you know, you just, I hate to say "blend in," because I was never one to just blend in. But at the same time, I didn't let things phase me." Eileen agreed, "I'm pretty good at compartmentalizing, I guess. I've always been kind of that way. Like, there's nothing you can do about certain things and so you just move on." Similar to *Ignoring and Avoiding* was *Learned Detachment*, which was described as a process where, over time, participants developed an apathetic response toward others' opinions. Their apathy appears to be a learned skill shieling them from naysayers, conserving emotional energy, and providing control. Amelia relayed a quote that became her personal motto, "Those who matter don't mind and those who mind don't matter." Bessie stated, "Ultimately, I've learned to care less and less… I'm not going to let other

people's opinion of me change my actions." Beryl's apathy focused on things within her control, "I took more of the mindset of; I can't fix it, so I would have to try to fix myself."

The use of *Counseling and the Chaplain* was a coping skill that was underutilized by most participants. One participant had engaged in counseling several times and reported that it was helpful. For the most part, the other participants preferred to engage natural supports. Participants provided several reasons for avoiding professional mental health support. One concern was a lack of confidentiality on a small base or in a small community. Time constraints were also a concern, as most operational squadrons work 10-12 hours shifts. One participant listed a combination of ego and hopelessness as a barrier. She stated, "You were taught that you were the best of the best and that nobody is going to be as good as you or relate to you. And so, it's like, I can deal with my own problems and there's no way to fix what I'm in the middle of." She also described how the looming task of finding someone that could understand seemed daunting, "But also back to that word of feeling isolated. I just couldn't imagine that anybody could understand what I was going through. You know, you would have a civilian counselor who would have no idea. Or you would have a military counselor, that was maybe a woman, but had no idea. Like, you would have to start from the beginning to explain the challenges and the nuances and I just—" Another participant reported going to Couple's Counseling, although, she did not feel that the counselor understood the military aspect of her life. She described her attempts to explain the fighter pilot life and its role in her marriage as "tiring."

Other coping skills used by participants included: *Timing,* which meant they would just "wait out" the unsupportive or problematic person. Several participants reported *Approaching People Directly* after determining the reward was worth the risk of speaking-up. Finally, participants reported more traditional skills such as *Exercise* and *Education*.

Fighter Pilot Mindset

In addition to their internal experience, participants described their mind-set. The unique nature of the fighter pilot job requires a unique, and mostly learned, mind-set. Participants described an *Indoctrination* into this mind-set that started immediately. Beryl stated, "And as soon as the selection happened there was like a dividing line into you are now being ushered into the fighter-pilot world." One aspect of indoctrination was the requirement of *Growing Thick-Skin*, which is a necessary trait in many military career fields, but it is taken to another level within fighter aviation. It was described like this, "that's just what we do as fighter pilots, and if you don't like it, grow thicker skin." Another necessary aspect of the mind-set is *Confidence.* Amelia described the importance of having confidence in your abilities, "Mistakes can cost your life or someone else's. So… you have to have developed that confidence." Bessie described how confidence is also necessary when navigating the social aspects, "I think you need to be a strong person and stand-up. I think a lot if it is as long as you have confidence, people don't question it."

Participants identified several ways they developed thick-skin and confidence. Many displayed a growth mindset and identified the experience of *Post-Traumatic Growth* over the course of their careers. Every fighter pilot experiences hardship, challenge, and pain; it's a requirement of the job, but the participants described how they used that adversity to become stronger. Amelia stated, "These experiences that I had that were not necessarily positive at the time, have given me the ability to be a better instructor when I'm teaching people." They talk about adversity as a positive, and they continually challenge themselves to grow and improve. Fighter pilots view complacency and comfort as failure. Bessie stated, "… it's been cool, like,

stressing myself again and seeing how I handle it." Overall, they learned how to benefit from adversity,

> **Eileen:** … some of those experiences are what made me into the person that I am now… you know what I mean? So, you have to go through adversity sometimes in order to know what it's like to be on either side of it, if that makes sense? You have to know where the negatives are to feel like there's positives.

Participants cited their *Early Engagement in Sports* and *How I was Raised* as contributing factors to their development of confidence, thick-skin, and the ability to thrive in adversity. The *Early Engagement in Sports* was crucial to the development of mental strength. They highlighted being involved in highly competitive individual sports from a young age, and how that taught them to handle pressure. Eileen stated, "I was an [elite athlete] for 18 years. So, I was used to being, you know, confident and on my own and always critiqued." Jackie stated, I swam through college at the Academy… it's kind of that same mental mindset of you put all doubt aside and you just go out there and you, you train to win." Participants also attributed some of their mindset to *The Way I Was Raised*. They indicated that early lessons from parents and their childhoods stuck with them. Jackie described her family, "… my dad would always bring me down [help regulate my emotions]. Like, 'Get over it… move on and stop acting like a princess.'" Bessie reported, "And my parents were, uh. [laughter] very hard on me… I think that I got just a lot of pressure." Beryl also described high expectations, "they expected a lot and you knew it if you weren't keeping up to their standard." Marina learned to be tough from her brothers, "My brothers made my life a living hell growing up… I spent my whole life getting beat up by my brothers."

The above aspects of the fighter pilot mindset combined into a personal *Relationship with Anxiety.* They didn't deny anxiety or fear; instead, they acknowledged their presence and created

a relationship. Jackie reported using anxiety to help her, "I feel like I thrive on that [anxiety]. But it's not a negative feeling at all." Marina reported dialoguing with God, "… when I get nervous if I'm flying, like, I'll say a little prayer, and I'll just ask God to help me do the things that I know how to do because I know that I'm ready to do the things that I have to go do." Overall, participants described a rich mindset, how it was developed, and how they've learned to harness it.

Moral Injury

Moral injury is the trauma that occurs when a person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct. Morally injurious events can be as simple as behaving in a manner that is inconsistent with one's strongly held morals and beliefs. Beryl reported moral injury from repeatedly trying to fit a mold that was inauthentic, "… it wasn't something I could sustain because there was so much pressure to be one of the guys and to be like "them." Marina described another type of moral injury that she's recently experienced as a leader, "It's a disenfranchising type of, of, feeling… I've dedicated 25 years of my life-- thinking we had core values, and we don't.'"

Participants who consistently described the fighter pilot culture as a more authentic fit for their personality, reported less moral injury. In general, Jackie did not struggle with the fighter pilot culture and stated, "I mean, there was some raunchy songs… But I wouldn't say that it was totally against my morals or that I was hurt or damaged because of it." Consistent feelings of moral injury over a sustained period can create conflict between ones' sense of self and ones' actions, which can lead to moral injury syndrome. Moral injury syndrome can consist of depression, re-experiencing, avoidance, substance use, spiritual/religious decline, and suicide. Symptoms of moral injury syndrome frequently over-lap with symptoms of burnout.

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Manufacturing a Break: Burnout

Eventually, the afore mentioned aspects of the fighter pilot experience funneled into fighter pilot burnout and the need to manufacture a break. This break looked differently for participants, but universally, they described feeling like something had to give. Methods of catching a break ranged from taking a flying assignment outside the fighter community, moving to the Guard and Reserves, moving to a part-time status, moving to an AETC base, retirement, and accepting staff positions. During member-checks, Marina elaborated on this experience.

> OPSTEMPO is a lot when you get to that age, because you've probably been doing it for 10 years, now you are getting close to your service commitment, so you are thinking of that as well. Plus, you have that clock ticking if you want to have a family. And you don't want to be a part of that fast-paced life when you are doing the family thing.

Family

Participants reported that experiences with burnout forced them to make a change and they recognized that something had to give. At that time, they described that it boiled down to a sort of, career vs. family decision. Five of the six participants reached this point in their careers and chose to prioritize their family. Amelia chose retirement over squadron command when her son was diagnosed with [a life-threatening disease], Beryl chose to quit flying when she was ready to have children, Jackie and Eileen moved to the Reserves for more stability, and Marina moved to a part-time status in the Reserves for four years while her children were young. The youngest participant, Bessie hasn't hit burnout, but she is at a crossroads in her career where she reports pressure to choose between having children and going to Weapons School. During member-checks, the five mothers reported feeling satisfied with their decision to prioritize their family, Eileen stated, "It all comes down to priorities. It's God, marriage, family, and then work." One participant questioned if, as women, they really had a choice. Amelia stated, "They

[men] choose between their career and family, yes… They choose career and nobody notices because that's the expected choice." She also didn't like the term, "Having it All," because it makes women sound greedy. She stated, "Guy fighter pilots have it all. They have fatherhood and partnership, and it, it differentiates us, right? Like, we're greedy, we just want to "have it all." Well, no, we just want life. We just want regular lives… why is that a bad thing?"

The Mission

The Mission is depicted on the nose, the smallest area of the jet. Interestingly, in a study about female fighter pilots, the theme that was the most closely tied to the actual job of being a fighter pilot, was the shortest, easiest to conceptualize, and the least problematic for the participants. The job of being a fighter pilot: flying the jet, reacting to threats and emergencies, deploying into combat, and being brutalized in debrief was not the difficult part of their experiences. Aside from the normal stories of hooked rides in pilot training and challenging upgrades, the participants did not report issues with performing their job.

During member-checks, Bessie described how her loyalty to the squadron and the mission could cause her to leave though.

> The [career] choices people make, I assume a lot of them [women] wanted to stay in or wanted to do something different but didn't see a path to do that. And yeah, I kinda feel similar in that, 'Yeah, I *do* want to be in a fighter squadron, like, I don't really want to go do a staff job, but I've seen what that looks like'… People have different stages and certain people are prioritizing family, even the guys, it just not a cool thing to do to be the person who shows up at eight and leaves at four. And knowing that you put in a ton of time earlier in your career and you will at a later date, but for right now, that's what you need to be doing. I feel like I'd be letting the squadron down by not being able to fly. Even if people were like, 'No, that's not the case,' it wouldn't prevent me from feeling like that. And I don't want that feeling, so I'm going to leave.

Success

During second-round interviews, participants described their idea of a successful career. Their answers fell into two categories: *Safety* and *Legacy.* They all listed flying the jet well and

safely. They also identified positively impacting others as a hallmark of a successful career.

Jackie described how her work as an AOC at the Academy is the highlight of her career,

> You know, like, and I love that. I think that's the greatest thing ever. They're all loving their jobs. They love what they do and they're having good experiences. You know and they, they will write me for advice now. I mean, I'm like old-as-crap and gone, you know, from the Air Force, but I just got two phone calls about a year ago because they're up for the staff jobs. And they're like, "Well, I'm kind of interested in doing what you did. I want to go back and be an AOC or should I go to the Pentagon? Or should I do this?"… I love the fact that they value my opinion and, and you know, if I can help them in some way, shape, or form and have them graduate from the Air Force after 20 years and say, "Yep. It was a great career." So that's why I just—I don't know, I loved it, I really did.

"I Just Want to do My Job"

Ultimately, the current study identified that female fighter pilots just want to do their jobs. They want to enter a squadron offering the same opportunities, the same quality of gear, the same ability to have both career and family, the same level of support and acceptance, and the same level of safety and respect. It's really very simple. They want to mission plan, brief, step, fly, debrief, and go home to their family.

CHAPTER VI

TRUSTWORTHINESS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The following chapter reviews the trustworthiness, limitations, and implications of the phenomenology constructed of six female fighter pilots in the United States Air Force. Despite the unique and ground-breaking achievements of female fighter pilots, the experiences of this population are largely unknown. The research question for this study was: What are the experiences of female fighter pilots in the United States military? I examined this question through a qualitative phenomenological methodology and generated a description of participant experiences grounded in the data and the participants' own words. I worked to establish a trustworthy and rigorous study, yet limitations still emerged. This chapter will discuss how trustworthiness was established; present study limitations; implications for counselors, counselor educators, counselors-in-training; and the Department of Defense. Finally, considerations for future research are discussed.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established using multiple strategies including prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member checking, rich thick description, bracketing and clarifying researcher bias, inquiry auditing, and expert triangulation and feedback.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are based on the creation of an open and trusting relationship with participants during the interview process. My 20-years in the military as a whole, 10 years as maintenance personnel in a fighter community, and six years as a military aviator allowed for an easier and more familiar relationship with participants. Being a

member of a similar culture affords me a sense of authenticity and legitimacy that assists in building the trust required for honest disclosure. On the other hand, I am not a fighter pilot, and it is important to recognize the juxtaposition between some experiences that are similar and others that are foreign. I made a purposeful effort before, during, and after interviews to bracket my own experiences, assumptions, and biases to fully focus on the participants and their unique lived experiences.

My ability to bracket my personal experiences is connected to my epoche processes of journal reflections, individual counseling, mindfulness practices, and frequent consultation. My journal provided a space to document personal experiences that proved helpful in better-understanding participant experiences while also identifying personal experiences that might be influencing how I hear participants. My mindfulness practice teaches and challenges me to further develop the skills of nonjudgment, open-mindedness, acceptance, and a present focus that allows me to accept participants where and as they are. Mindfulness also supports me as I set my own experiences and cultural emersion aside.

Finally, weekly meetings with both my personal therapist and dissertation chair provided educated and experienced sounding boards. They helped guide me through the process and held me accountable to the participants, the research process, and my commitment to produce an accurate description of the essence of the phenomenon.

Member Checking

Member checks were used to establish credibility by validating, corroborating, and clarifying gathered information with participants. Member-checking increased the accuracy of the collected information, and further validated information presented in the results section.

Informal member checks were conducted along the way, checking in and clarifying with participants throughout the interview process. Formal member checks were conducted approximately two months after second-round interviews, and my final results were presented with a conceptual model via the telehealth platform Doxy.me. I invited participants to correct, clarify, and redirect me if they felt the collected information was inaccurate, incomplete, or misunderstood. This process also assists in rapport-building between the researcher and the participant, which further increases participant honesty and openness.

Participants confirmed that the global phenomenon presented at member checks accurately captured their individual experiences. All participants mentioned aspects of the global phenomenon that did not align with their individual experience, and these aspects were further explored and considered. After the six member checks, it was determined if the mismatched nuances applied only to that individual's experience or if they applied to the global phenomenon.

I contacted six participants via email to schedule a time to meet and review initial results. I emailed each participant a telehealth meeting link and the conceptual map prior to our meeting (See Figure 2 below).

I recorded the conversations with each participant to ensure the accuracy of their feedback. I provided a summary of the emerging phenomenon and asked participants the following questions: 1. Is there anything about the diagram or description that is especially resonating with you? 2. Is there anything I got wrong? 3. Is there anything that needs to be added? Is there anything that needs to be changed or removed? What are your overall impressions? Participant responses were reviewed and incorporated.

Member Check Results

Overall, the six participants confirmed that the conceptual map and the description of the

phenomenon matched their experiences. Each participant discussed parts of the map that

resonated most with them. Also, participants discussed aspects of the map that did not fit for

them personally. The following is a collection of specific quotations about how the conceptual

map and description of the phenomenon confirmed personal experience.

Jackie: It's objective [the Mission]. The jet doesn't give a crap about gender. It only cares about doing the job.

Amelia: That pretty much sums up our careers; all of that [the mission] is easy-peezy compared to the BS section [the rest of the conceptual map]… When I saw that [the title] on the top, I just laughed at it, and thought, 'That's perfect.'

Bessie: Ultimately, after you get all of your qualifications, it's like your just another Wingman or Flightlead or IP or whatever. And yeah, I'd say that's the easy part, it's the other parts of like all the stuff that's not flying-related [laughter].

Marina: The flying part is when you can compartmentalize, and the BS falls away. And you're just doing your mission. That is true. I think that's true for the guys too… the "isms" might be different, but yeah.

Eileen: Agreed. I don't need pity. I just need people to understand what this is like.

Due to Beryl's busy schedule this time of year, I was unable to connect verbally with her.

Instead, I sent the conceptual map, and a written summary for her review. She provided the

following written reply, "It is all correct for my part… The final paragraph was a spot-on

excellent conclusion." The final paragraph she references is used verbatim as the final paragraph

of Chapter V.

Based on member-check feedback the following changes were implemented in the final

summary. The theme of *Sexism* was changed to *The "S" Word*, which absorbed some of the

topic's sting, and better illustrated the participants' discomfort with identifying its existence.

Coping Skills evolved into *Resiliency Skills*, after participants strongly expressed disinterest in

any wording that sounded victim-like. The term Resiliency sounded more positive and

empowering. *Failure to Follow the Rules* morphed into *Challenging Covert Rules* as participants identified and discussed the nuances of unwritten societal and cultural norms within the fighter pilot experience. They also reported that choosing to challenge those norms was empowering as opposed to a failure. Also, *Anthropometric Measurements, Flight Equipment, and Guard and Reserve Hiring Practices* moved from *Institutional Betrayal* to *Systemic Sexism*. Participants clarified that these sub-themes are systemic in that they span several layers of leadership, but they denied feeling that the institution had wronged them personally. Finally, *Learned Apathy* evolved into *Learned Detachment* as participants further described how they employed this resiliency skill.

Rich, Thick Description

I used rich, thick description to establish transferability. I included direct quotes and abundant and interconnected details from participant interviews to create a holistic picture of the experience of female fighter pilots. A detailed synthesis of 12 interviews and 6 member checks over the course of two years created a vivid picture of the essence of participant experiences. The rich and thick description allows the reader to determine data transferability.

Bracketing and Clarifying Researcher Bias

For me to completely and openly receive participant experiences, it was important to bracket my own experiences by acknowledging and setting aside my bias. Manen (1990) states, "The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we investigate, but that we know too much, Or, more accurately, the problem is that our "common sense" pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing

bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question" (p.46).

I used bracketing throughout the research process to leverage my relevant experience and knowledge while also working to acknowledge my bias, personal experiences, and pre-understandings to prevent unnecessary influence. Bracketing did not completely remove researcher bias, but it assisted in identifying personal experiences with the phenomenon that were similar, different, and triggering. Bracketing allowed me to acknowledge and set-aside these personal experiences, so I could better focus on the meaning being produced by the participants.

I utilized several techniques to successfully bracket my bias. First, I engaged in reflective writing about my personal experiences as an aviator and military member, and my emotional responses to participant experiences. My own experiences as a female military member and aviator were salient during the research process, and I found myself reflecting more on past experiences as I eclipsed my 20th anniversary with the Montana Air National Guard. I often found that participant experiences resonated with my own, and journaling provided an outlet for the resulting emotions. I tried to own my biases in my journal, with my inquiry auditors, and at times, with the participants to be authentic, trustworthy, and open.

I also maintained weekly meetings with a therapist, Dr. Christine King, who provided another space to process my personal feelings and biases. Finally, I met regularly with my dissertation chair, Dr. Kirsten Murray. Dr. Murray provided an open and accepting relationship, which created space to acknowledge and examine my worries, concerns, triggers, and bias. The safety of this relationship allowed for the constant "checking" of my biases. Dr. Murray's vast experience in qualitative research served as a final filter and reminder to remain open to

participant lived experiences and true to the phenomenology methodology. Both Dr. King and

Dr. Murray served as my inquiry auditors. During first-round interviews, I was deployed and

unable to continue meetings with Dr. King due to mission and time zone constraints. I

maintained constant communication with Dr. Murray during this time, and I resumed weekly

therapy as soon as I redeployed to the States.

Expert Triangulation

As a final method to establish trustworthiness, I utilized feedback from several female

pilots with whom I have existing relationships. These colleagues assisted in checking my

assumption and biases. I also solicited feedback from several male ex-fighter pilots to ensure the

accuracy of terms, maneuvers, processes, and procedures. In addition to aviators, I solicited

feedback from an E-8 Aircrew Flight Equipment member to verify the accuracy of terms related

to flight equipment. Finally, I solicited feedback from a weapons school graduate to ensure that

any mission-related details were unclassified.

Overall, the methods of prolonged engagement and persistent observation, member-

checking, rich, thick description, bracketing and clarifying researcher bias, and triangulating my

findings with experts in the field helped establish trustworthiness. Despite my efforts to

establish trustworthiness, limitations still emerged.

Limitations

Several limitations emerged in the study. The primary limitation in the study is a lack of

variation within the sample. It is important to accurately represent heterogeneity, or variation,

within the population. The purpose of seeking heterogeneity is to ensure that the research

study's conclusions accurately capture a range of experiences within the participant population. Adequate variation was not achieved and presents a study limitation.

I intended to acquire participants from all branches of the military, and in the end after reaching out to members of the Navy with no response, only recruited Air Force members. This was not a complete surprise, as I expected to have an easier time recruiting within my own military branch due to greater social connection and access. As a result, the cultural nuances of other military branches and their effects on participant lived experiences are not represented. I achieved moderate variation in rank and status, which ranged from Captain (O-3), to Colonel (O-6), and two retired participants. Despite my efforts, I was not able to recruit from the lowest ranks of Second and First Lieutenants. Aviators at the rank of Second Lieutenant are still completing flight training, and aviators at the rank of First Lieutenant would typically be finishing training or newly arrived at their first assignment. I suspect that aviators at this career point, are too consumed with achieving mission qualification. Variation in duty status was moderately achieved with participants representing active duty, The Reserves, and retired. I was unable to recruit a participant from the National Guard. Variation in race and sexual orientation proved difficult due to the small population of female fighter pilots. All participants were straight, white, married, and five of the six participants had children.

This study included six participants who each participated in two interviews and member check procedures. My intention was to interview participants until data saturation was reached, which was approached after the second round of interviews. Twelve interviews comply with both Johnson's (2006) and Creswell's (2007) recommendations for data saturation in a phenomenological study. Data saturation is the point at which further data collection and further analysis of data does not provide new information, all themes are fully understood, and

relationships among sub-ordinate themes, themes, and sub-themes are clear. By the 10th of 12 interviews, participants stopped producing new information and subsequent interviews served to bolster existing themes and relationships. Time constraints were not placed on the interviews, and participants were able to engage for as long as their schedules allowed, which resulted in long, detailed, and nuanced interviews wielding a wealth of insight. Interviews ranged from 50 minutes to two-and-a-half hours in length. Due to limitations in heterogeneity, additional interviews with a more diverse participant group would have likely produced greater detail and nuance based on each participant's unique experiences considering the influences of rank, race, sexual orientation, branch of service, and familial status.

An additional limitation was the quality of communication during some interviews. I conducted the first round of interviews while in a deployed location where the internet quality was sometimes unreliable. As a result, interview transcripts contained short and sporadic sections where the audio was unclear. Similarly, Eileen's second round interview contained short sections where audio was unclear due to a poor internet connection. As a result, some information could have been misinterpreted or missed. I did my best to clarify the meaning of missing sections during second-round interviews and member-checks.

Another consideration is the recruitment of voluntary participants, so motivations for self-selection may impact the results. For example, two participants, reported that they had positive experiences and wanted their positive stories heard in an effort to counter the negative stories that are more frequently in the news. Multiple participants were hesitant to speak negatively about some aspects of the fighter pilot culture and sexism. Despite reporting some difficult and challenging experiences, there were literal and figurative efforts to protect the fighter pilot culture and reputation. Similarly, the primary goal of the study is to accurately

represent participant experiences. An aspect of this, is the importance of honoring the participant's exact words and trust in the meanings they have made with their experiences, and represent their unique realities without seeking one predetermined truth of the female fighter pilot experience. As always, there is a possibility that participants did not disclose their complete experience. Several of the interview questions addressed topics that were sensitive in nature (such as military sexual trauma), and participants may have, understandably, limited disclosure for self-protective reasons.

In addition, four of the six participants are still in the military, and three of the six participants are continuing to fly for the military. Because they are still immersed in the culture and the experience of being a fighter pilot, their experiences and active Air Force service continue to be shape and influence their experiences in this research process. This may result in limited time for career reflection and an awareness of the consequences of disclosure on their current careers. Retired participants, on the other hand, reported that they've had time to reflect on their careers, which provided some changes in perspective. Both retired participants were also less concerned with confidentiality and embraced more of an "I don't care what people think of me" attitude. While I honored the primary research goal of accurately reporting participant disclosures with direct quotations, as co-constructor of the results, I also made connections in the data between participants, questioned inconsistencies, and incorporated current research.

In summary, limitations to the study include variation of the sample, periodic lost communication due to poor internet, and possible consequences arising from voluntary participants with the potential for additional motive, and limited disclosure and reflection.

Implications

This study combined the diverse experiences of six female fighter pilots into a single global phenomenon capturing the essence of their individual experiences. These experiences provide valuable knowledge for counselors, counselor educators, counselors-in-training, and the Department of Defense.

Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators

This study provides a rare glimpse into the culture of the female fighter pilot. The American Counseling Association (2014) promotes the ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and fidelity, which form the basis for multicultural competency. Ethical counseling encourages counselors to understand and advocate for diverse and underserved populations. The unique nature of the fighter pilot culture and serving as a woman in a particularly male homogenous group, illustrates the ethical duty of counselors to obtain specialized knowledge, awareness, and skill if working with this underserved population.

Counselors also have a duty to honor diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural context. As with any culture and population, there's the risk of counselor bias, so it will be important for counselors and counselor educators to examine and gain awareness of personal bias related to military culture when working with this population. The current study illustrates the nuanced nature of the female fighter pilot experience. Participant experiences are complicated and delicate. On one hand, they expressed challenges, unimaginable adversity, and inequity, but they are also fiercely loyal to their colleagues, the culture, their community, their sacrifices, and their overall experiences. They have immense pride in their accomplishments and service to the country. They describe a reverence and deep gratitude for the same culture and traditions that can also be hurtful. Do not be lured into the temptation to disparage the institution

they sacrificed for and dedicated their life to; participants clearly honored and protected the US

Air Force Fighter Pilot Institution. In the blunt language of a fighter pilot, disrespecting what

they've dedicated their life to will only serve to harm the counseling relationship, and ultimately,

the client.

Acquiring knowledge, understanding, and empathy are essential to achieving equanimity

within any culture or underrepresented population.   Recent emphasis has been placed on the

importance of diversity in the Air Force, and ethical counselors align with this goal through the

promotion of social justice. Social justice encourages the human development and empowerment

of individuals and groups (Crethar & Ratts, 2008). Female fighter pilots are a relatively new,

underrepresented, and under-researched population whose understanding is essential for

promoting diversity, advocacy, and social justice in the contexts of counseling and beyond. The

current phenomenological study depicts the unique nature of their experiences, and hopefully

contributes a greater awareness to the adversity and processes for advocacy female fighter pilots

encounter.

Overall, the participants are highly successful and motivated. They have a lot to teach

about resiliency, stress management, and high performance. It will be important to understand

the resiliency skills that already work for this population, how they learned them, and how they

employ them. Given the high achieving and goal-driven nature of participants, it will be

especially important to identify the goals that they have for counseling, honor those goals, and

partner with them to achieve those goals.

The current study also carries implications for treatment modality. Findings illustrate a

highly motivated group of people that thrive on progress and self-improvement. They describe

themselves as go-getters, and most likely, will not be long term talk-therapy clients. Given the

action-oriented drive of this population, useful tools, psychoeducation, and homework assignments between sessions may prove most effective. The one participant who reported the most experience with professional counseling had a strong preference for the therapist who gave her tools, homework, and asked provocative questions.

The current study uncovered several barriers to counseling that will be important to consider. Overall, counseling was an underutilized resource for most participants. One barrier to counseling for female fighter pilots is access to services. Participants described the long and grueling hours of both pilot training and operational fighter squadrons. It is important for counselors working with this population to offer non-standard hours that coincide with training and operational schedules. Especially for pilot training students, the stress and consequence of scheduling appointments around training or missing training will, most-likely, out-weigh the benefits of counseling. When working with an operational fighter pilot, it might make scheduling easier to maintain regular appointment times.

Most military installations offer varying degrees of mental health support. Frequently, these services are not highly sought-after for a multitude of reasons. The study participants are on "fly status" which means their physical and mental health is extensively monitored. Anything that falls outside of perfection will result in, at least, a temporary DNIF (Duties Not Including Flight) status, also known as "grounded." Depending on the culture of the squadron, DNIF status can result in guilt, shame, and depression. Most military mental health facilities are severely understaffed, do not provide emergency or after-hours services, and vary in provider quality and consistency. As a result, weekly appointments might not be feasible, provider choice is rare, and most military members have some level of distrust toward military mental health, making honest and open disclosure difficult and unlikely.

Many military members choose to utilize Military One Source, cash pay, or alternate insurance options to avoid interaction with military mental health. Bessie reported using Military One Source (MOS) for her counseling. MOS is a civilian service that covers 12 free sessions each year. Providers complete minimal documentation and the documentation is not included in the member's medical record. If providers are interested in this population, they might consider contracting as an MOS provider. When seeing military personnel and female fighter pilots for off-base with military insurance, it will be important to thoroughly discuss limits of confidentiality and diagnosis. Transparency may also be important, and many military clients appreciate reading all documentation before it is sent to their medical facility. Allowing clients to review all documentation builds trust in the counseling relationship and safeguards against the provider unintentionally documenting something in a way that carries unintended consequences.

Participants were skeptical that a counselor, even female military counselor, would be able to understand their unique experiences. Being a female fighter pilot is a rare experience that only they can truly understand. However, the therapeutic relationship is also powerful. Rogers (1961) stated, "If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth and change, and personal development will occur." The current study identified the isolated and lonely nature of being a female fighter pilot, and a strong therapeutic relationship displaying genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and accurate empathetic understanding from the counselor is helpful. Counselor attunement to a female fighter pilot client with curiosity and cultural humility is essential. The details of the common lived experiences of these six fighter pilots provides future counselors

with a base for the practices of scientific mindedness to incorporate potential knowledge threads

to better understand and build relationships with women in these contexts.

The following treatment recommendations emerged in the study: The prevalence of

sexual assault and harassment was staggering. Although, participants seemed to have a general

knowledge of reporting options, the options are complicated and can result in irreversible action.

It is recommended for providers working with a military population to reach out to the local

military installation's SARC office. Most SARCs will be happy to provide information about

military reporting options and perform community out-reach and education. Also, participants

reported incidents of blame, shame, and institutional betrayal perpetrated in response to their

experiences. It will be important for counselors to be competent in identifying and addressing

victim blaming, institutional gaslighting, and guilt/self-blame. Regardless of the chosen

reporting option, survivors of sexual assault will experience adversity. It will be important to

consistently evaluate suicidality; high-risk sexual behavior, and unhelpful coping skills such as

self-harm, hypersexuality, alcohol and/or drug use and abuse, etc. Finally, it is critical that

providers provide a consistent safe environment where sexual assault survivors know they will

find advocacy and acceptance.

The current study also highlighted the prevalence of burnout among participants.

Member-checks identified that burnout frequently occurs around the 10-year point when a pilot's

initial commitment is ending. At this point, they have typically been going all-out for 10 years,

they are deciding if they want to recommit, and contemplating family planning options. All

participants described and illustrated busy and stressful lives. They are balancing an extremely

demanding career, young families, and the additional considerations of being a minority. As a

result, it may be helpful for counselors to teach and encourage self-care, which is defined as

mental, emotional spiritual, and physical well-being and healthy boundary-setting. They may also benefit from Brene Brown's work on shame, Kristin Neff's work on self-compassion, and Emily and Amelia Nagoski's work on burnout.

Finally, the participants clearly and repeatedly reported a strong desire to improve the fighter pilot culture and experience for future generations of women. Regardless of their leadership level, they all reported taking their responsibilities seriously. It will be beneficial if the applicability of counseling interventions can be generalized to their troops. For example, it is important to leaders to demonstrate positive self-care and healthy boundaries, because subordinates watch and emulate what they see. Leaders set the tone, culture, and expectations in the squadron. Is it okay to leave on time for Wednesday evening bible study? Will they be admired or shunned for coaching their daughter's swim team despite being less available to fly? Are they encouraged or shamed for attending weekly counseling appointments? This trailblazing population has an opportunity to unapologetically and publicly define their priorities.

Implications for the Air Force and Department of Defense

Existing research shows that being a minority contributes to a token status, resulting in increased sexual harassment, performance pressure, role entrapment, and self-distortion. The result is a competitive disadvantage and decreased performance. Existing research also indicates that poor performance contributes to weak group cohesion, and cohesion is imperative for successful military operations (Schaefer et al., 2015). Based on the current study's findings, the Air Force may benefit by implementing changes.

If diversity is truly a goal of the Air Force, we can look to the experiences provided by the six participants for guidance on how to achieve that goal more effectively. The current study

supported existing research findings that minority group members experience added stressors in addition to the high stress innate to pilot training and the fighter pilot career. Participants described enduring sexual assault, sexual harassment, tokenism, marital struggles, forced choices between career and parenting/pregnancy, and the threat of washing-out in addition to the normal pressure of pilot training. A piece of pilot training is teaching students how to manage stress and perform under intense pressure. Having counselors available to teach resiliency, stress management, coping skills, mindfulness, boundary-setting, self-care, and performance psychology seems like a natural and effective addition to the standard pilot training curriculum.

The current study found that age matters. On one hand, the Air Force needs young, eager, malleable, and physically fit student pilots. On the other hand, multiple participants discussed the impact that age had on their experiences. Some felt they would have been better equipped to navigate the culture, pressure, and responsibility had they been older. One participant who went through at a more advanced age repeatedly listed this as a benefit, and attributed her age to a higher confidence, greater ability to speak-up, and a more solid sense of self. Imbedding counselors at training bases would provide an accessible resource for young adults trying to navigate pilot training and a life phase where identities are still developing.

The current study also contains implications for manning and the pilot shortage. In the current study, five of the six participants reported experiencing burnout at similar points in their careers. The youngest participant is newer in her career and doesn't yet report burnout. Once participants hit burnout, they were forced to make changes to find relief. Frequently, burnout resulted in the Air Force losing valuable talent and experience. None of the participants described *Manufacturing a Break* because they didn't enjoy flying or experienced decline in their abilities. They all reported *Manufacturing a Break*, because managing life; family; social

dynamics; the grueling schedule; and the constant pressure to progress, upgrade, and promote grew too exhausting. The participants repeatedly described immense gratitude for their careers, and simultaneously described an intense and exhausting lifestyle that, at some point, becomes unsustainable. The current study emphasized the need for relief, greater access to self-care options, and greater acceptance of boundary-setting in the fighter community to retain talented pilots.

As the Air Force approaches 30 years since the combat ban was lifted, women continue to be a minority in the fighter pilot career filed. The current study emphasized the negative effects of Being the Only. Existing research clearly outlines the importance of reaching a critical mass if equality is the goal, but it is unclear about how to best achieve that goal. Participants clearly and overwhelmingly expressed disdain for any initiative that even hints at putting unqualified people into fighter pilot positions in the name of reaching a certain quota. They felt such efforts made things worse and negated women's hard-earned achievements. Conversely, their experiences with loneliness, isolation, lack of mentorship, tokenism, sexism, sexual assault and harassment, and burnout are difficult to ignore and systemic. Systemic change of this magnitude requires a consistent critical mass entry of diverse perspectives and experiences. The following emerged during member checks.

> **Amelia:** As great of an idea [I Just Want to do My Job] as that is, it's not gonna happen. Definitely not in my lifetime, probably not in that young Captain's lifetime… because we're not there yet.
>
> **Interviewer:** Why?
>
> **Amelia:** For the same reason that old, grey, chubby male news anchors are okay, and chubby, grey women news anchors are not okay."

Future Research

The current study illustrates the phenomenon of being a female fighter pilot in the United States Air Force. The study identified currently unresearched topics and paves the way for a future research agenda. The results shaped the experiences of female fighter pilots and established a solid phenomenon while also leaving space for future study into several provocative areas. Also, while a phenomenology was appropriate for the current research question, given the shortage of research, future efforts leave room to utilize additional methodologies.

The current study illustrates that the female fighter pilot experience is permeated by their "only" status. Despite this solid finding, there remains room to further investigate the phenomenon of Being the Only. It would be worth examining the coping skills used specifically to counteract the consequences of Being the Only. It would also be worth comparing the experiences of female fighter pilots who are well-connected with other women with the experiences of female fighter pilots who report being isolated.

Next, the current study was limited by the lack of heterogeneity, which leaves ample room to further investigate how female fighter pilots who hold multiple minority identities fare. Future qualitative work should focus on how female fighter pilots with multiple minority identities' experiences compare to the experiences shared by the current study's participants.

Finally, the current study identified the power that majority group members have in impacting a culture. Future qualitative research might focus on the attitudes, beliefs, and biases of men in the majority group about increasing the numbers of women in the fighter pilot community.

The latter qualitative study has the potential for a follow-up quantitative study. Based on the results of the qualitative study, a minority advocacy program targeted at the identified attitudes, beliefs, and biases of male fighter pilots can be delivered. Pre and post-tests measuring the effectiveness of the program can be delivered.

Finally, the current study identified the experience of burnout and moral injury around the 10-year point in the participant's careers. Measures of burnout and moral injury should be delivered to fighter pilots at the 10-year point. Responses could be compared to see if male and female burnout and moral injury rates are the same or if they differ. Also, it would be interesting to see if levels of burnout and moral injury predict pilot retention or separation at the end of their first service commitment.

Summary

Despite the combat ban being lifted in 1993, 28 years ago, female fighter pilots remain a minority. The six participants displayed immense courage throughout their fighter pilot careers. They experienced *Tokenism, Loneliness and Isolation*, *Sexism*, *Military Sexual Trauma*, and *Moral Injury*. Several participants described a constant fear of failure and fear of letting down future generations of women. Despite the challenges, study participants demonstrated *Post-Traumatic Growth* in the way they responded to and managed adversity. They "flipped" the difficulties and challenges they faced; harnessing the lessons to expand their strength, wisdom, and motivation. They spoke with *Confidence* about how their adversities formed who they are today. Multiple participants disclosed Military Sexual Trauma and courageously shared their experiences in the current study. They summoned the courage despite their fear because they desire improvement for future military members.

Participants also described finding inspiration in the achievements of the mentors who paved the way. Participants identified the lack of *Mentorship*, the hazards of looking ahead and not seeing anyone "like you" to emulate, and their efforts to provide mentorship for future generations of female fighter pilots. They described the significance of their grassroots effort to improve camaraderie and mentorship by creating the CFPA

Multiple *Resiliency Skills* were reported including: *Approaching People Directly* with feedback when they had the power to induce change and determined that the risk of speaking-up was worth it. Two additional methods are *Learned Detachment* and *Ignoring and Avoiding.* These skills allowed participants to detach from things outside their control or from things where the risk of speaking-up was not worth it. *Diminishing of the Self* also emerged as a method allowing participants to blend-in, fit-in, and keep the peace. Additional methods included obtaining professional supports through *Counseling/Chaplain* and *Having a Solid Belief System*.

The importance of developing *Confidence* and *Internal Self-Assurance* was also identified. Participants described how confidence and internal self-assurance are crucial attributes for both flying and navigating the cultural aspect of being a fighter pilot. They reported learning these attributes from the *Early Engagement in Sports*, from their family of origin, mentors, adversity, and achievement. They frequently used their past successes, upgrades, and qualifications to reassure themselves and continue to accept future challenges.

Participants described *Growing Thick-Skin* and their ability to accept feedback and criticism as being crucial to a successful career. They also described *The Relationship with Anxiety.* None of the participants denied the existence of anxiety, instead, they described how they learned to work with it and how the relationship with anxiety evolved over the course of their careers.

Finally, Participants talked about the *Camaraderie and Cohesion* that they experienced in the *Fighter Pilot Culture*. Ultimately, all participants described the camaraderie as being core to their experience. They identified problematic aspects of the culture, yet most participants reported a desire to retain, perhaps an improved version, of most traditions and rituals. They also identified the importance of *Identifying and Utilizing Supports.* When it's inevitable that you will encounter resistance and adversity, the importance of gathering those who support you grows. Participants reported that *Family* and family planning considerations are a priority, and heavily influence career decisions. Ultimately, after all the above considerations, participants reported, "I Just Want to do my Job."

Glossary of Terms

ACSC – Air Command and Staff College. The formal training required before promoting to 0-5.

ADO – Assistant Director of Operations.

ACMI Pods – Air Combat Maneuvering Instrumentation. They collect data as the aircraft negotiates training scenarios.

Active Duty – Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States

AFE – Aircrew Flight Equipment. The shop that maintains the aircrew's equipment. Used to be called Life Support.

AFI – Air Force Instruction. Manuals that guide process and procedures in all career fields in the Air Force.

AGR – Active Guard and Reserve. National Guard and Reserve members who serve full-time.

Air Force Academy – A military academy for officer cadets of the United States Air Force and United States Space Force. Graduates of the academy's four-year program receive a Bachelor of Science degree and are commissioned as Second Lieutenants in the U.S. Air Force or U.S. Space Force.

ALO – Air Liaison Officer

Altus - Air Force base located in Altus, Oklahoma.

AMXDmax - Aircrew Mission Extender Device. The most recent urinary device.

Andrews - Joint Base Andrews is a United States military facility located in Prince George's County, Maryland. Andrews Air Force Base is the airfield portion of Joint Base Andrews.

Aviano – Avian Air Base in Italy.

B-Course – The basic instructional course where pilots learn to fly a specific type of fighter. It is also referred to as the "School House."

BDUs – Battle Dress Uniform – camouflage fatigues. This uniform is no-longer in commission.

CAF – Combat Air Force.

Call Sign – Given during a fighter pilot naming ceremony. Given by the naming committee, call signs are based on the commission of a heinous act, can be associated with the physical characteristic of the person being named, or are based on a natural play off the person's name.

CAS – Close Air Support

CDC – Child Development Center: military version of a daycare center.

CFPA – Chick Fighter Pilot Association. The group created for foster mentorship and camaraderie by the early generations of female fighter pilots.

Commission – A commission is a writ of congress appointing a person an officer in the armed forces.

CSAR – Combat Search and Rescue

CT – Continuation Training.

Davis Monthan Air Force Base – Also known as "DM." An Air Force base located in Tucson, Arizona.

Depot – Depot-level maintenance is performed on materiel requiring major overhaul or a complete rebuild of parts, assemblies, subassemblies, and end items, including the manufacture of parts, modification, testing, and reclamation, as required.

Deputy OG – The deputy to the Operations Group Commander.

DNIF - Duty Not Including Flight. This is a flight status meaning that a pilot is not medically cleared to perform flight duty.

DO – Director of Operations

E-Flight – A slang term for the enlisted squadron members.

ENJJPT – Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training program. ENJJPT is the world's only multi-nationally manned and managed flying training program chartered to produce combat pilots for

FAIP – First Assignment Instructor Pilot

FBO – Fixed Base Operator

"Fini" Flight – Final Flight. The "Fini" flight is a military aviation tradition which marks a pilot's retirement from the Air Force, or sometimes, their last day with a unit.

FTU – Fighter Training Unit.

G's – The gravitational force equivalent, or, more commonly, g-force, is a measurement of the type of force per unit mass – typically acceleration – that causes a perception of weight.

Green Dot Training – an Air Force strategy to decrease interpersonal violence across the service: It is an interactive training program designed to help Airmen.

G-Suit – A g-suit, or anti-g suit, is a flight suit worn by aviators and astronauts who are subject to high levels of acceleration force. See Figure: 6

Heritage Room – Another term for the squadron bar.

IFF – Introduction to Fighter Fundamentals. Where they send you after T38s in UPT to go fly -38s and learn how to shoot guns/missiles and drop bombs.

IG – Inspector General: Responsible for conducting investigations and inspections.

IP – Instructor Pilot

IPUG – Instructor Pilot Upgrade

IQ check – Instrument Qualification

ISR- Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance.

JTAC – Joint Terminal Attack Controller

Life Support – The older term for the shop that maintains aircrew equipment. Aircrew Flight Equipment is the updated name.

Luke – Luke Air Force base outside Phoenix, Arizona.

LT – Abbreviation for first and second Lieutenants. See Officer Rank Figure below.

Major – See Officer Rank Figure below.

Mayor – The social director of the squadron. The mayor runs Roll Call.

MSG – Mission Support Group

National Guard – One part of the Reserve component of the United States Air Force that serves during state and federal missions to include both domestic emergencies and overseas combat missions. Any state governor or the President of the United States can call on the Guard. Members of the National Guard can be Air Force or Army, and they can be in full-time or part-time statuses.

Nellis – Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, NV. Home of Red Flag.

Number two sorties – A sortie given for proficiency, to practice a certain skill. A "freebie."

O'Club – Officer's Club.

OG– Operations Group Commander.

OIF – Operation Iraqi Freedom. 2003-2011.

Operation Northern Watch – ONW. An operation to enforce the Iraqi no-fly zones spanning from 1997 – 2003.

OPR – Officer Performance Report. An annual performance evaluation that all Officers require.

OPSTEMPO – Operations Tempo. The rate of US Forces involvement in all military activities.

OSW – Operation Southern Watch. An operation to protect the Iraqi no-fly zones spanning from 1992-2003.

"Patch" – See Weapons School

PCS – Permanent Change of Station. A military relocation.

Piddle Pack – A pilot's urinary release bag.

Piper – Manufactures general aviation aircraft.

PIT – Pilot Instructor Training

PME – Professional Military Education. The professional training, development, and schooling of military personnel. It encompasses many schools, universities, and training programs designed to foster leadership in military service members.

Poopie Suit – This a nickname for an anti-exposure suit. The anti-exposure suit is a dry suit made of rubber and it is worn over your undergarments. It is a requirement when flying over areas where the water temperature is less than 60 degrees Fahrenheit.

Punk – A freshly minted wingman, usually a 2nd or 1st Lieutenant.

Red Flag - Exercise Red Flag is a two-week advanced aerial combat training exercise held several times a year by the United States Air Force. It aims to offer realistic air-combat training for military pilots and other flight crew members from the United States and allied countries. Red Flag is held at Nellis AFB, NV.

Red Flag Alaska – Same as Red Flag but is held at Eielson AFB and Elmendorf AFB in Alaska.

Reserves – One part of the Reserve component of the United States military. Can be activated by the President of the United States. Members of the Reserve can be in part-time or full-time status.

ROE – Rules of Engagement.

Roll Call – A fighter pilot tradition meant to create an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie. This tradition take place in the squadron bar, also known as the Squadron Heritage Room.

ROTC – Reserve Officer Training Course. This commissioning option is located on college campuses. Cadets earn their college degree while simultaneously completing commissioning requirements, and they commission upon graduation.

RTU – Replacement Training Unit

SAPR - Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. A US military training program designated to educate service members and to provide support and treatment for their families who have experienced any form of sexual assault.

SARM – Squadron Aviation Resource Management. SARM personnel verify aircrew are current and qualified for the mission they are scheduled to fly, ensure they're not on a medical status that prevents them from flying an aircraft or a simulator and help track the completion of annual training requirements.

SEAD - Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses. A mission that neutralizes, destroys, or temporarily degrades surface-based enemy air defenses by destructive and/or disruptive means.

SERE – Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape. A training program that prepares U.S. military personnel, U.S. Department of Defense civilians, and private military contractors to survive and "return with honor" in survival scenarios. The curriculum includes survival skills,

evading capture, application of the military code of conduct, and techniques for escape from captivity.

SOF – Supervisor of Flying

Sortie – A military flight mission.

SOS – Squadron Officer School. A formal training required before promoting to the rank of O-4

So-to-Speak – A term used following any word or phrase that could possibly have sexual connotations. It is a way to say what you want to say by not saying it but saying something so you can say it.

Spangdahlem Air Base – a NATO base located near Spangdahlem, Germany.

Stan-Eval – Standardization and Evaluation. The section that manages check-rides and upgrade training within Operations Groups.

Tailhook – A infamous scandal that occurred at the 1991 Tailhook Association Convention. Over the course of three days, at least 83 women were assaulted by Navy and Marine aviators.

TDY – Temporary Duty.

TR – Traditional. A part-time member of the Reserves.

Traditional – A term referring to a Guard and Reserve status where the member is not a full-time employee. Also known as a Drill Status Guardsmen (DSG). Also known as "part-time" or "part-timer."

UPT – Undergraduate Pilot Training. Where Air Force pilots receive initial flight training. Upon completion of UPT, they receive their wings.

Vance – Air Force base located in Enid, Oklahoma

Vice Wing Commander "Vice" – A duty title, not a rank, to describe the second in-charge at a military Wing.

Victim Advocate –(VVA). Volunteer Victim Advocate for the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program.

VML- Vulnerable to Move List. A list that tells military members that they are identified for a move or PCS.

Weapons School – A prestigious, competitive, and grueling 6-month course that teaches graduate-level courses that provide the world's most advanced training in weapons and tactics employment. A Weapons School graduate is referred to, unofficially, as a "Patch" and, officially, as the Wing Weapons Officer. Below is the distinctive patch that only Weapons School graduates wear on their flightsuit.

Wing Commander – The highest title on an Air Force installation.

WSO – Weapons Systems Officer. WSOs occupy the rear seat in a F-15E and operate the weapons systems.

A-10 Thunderbolt II- Better known as the "Warthog" or "Hog" A single-seat attack aircraft designed to provide "close air support." Has a 30 mm gun and is capable of carrying bombs, rockets, and missiles.

C-21- A twin turbofan-engine aircraft used for passenger and cargo airlift

F-15 Eagle - twin-engine, single seat, all-weather tactical fighter aircraft

F-15E Strike Eagle – Twin-engine, dual seat, multirole strike fighter derived from the McDonnell Douglas F-15 Eagle. A WSO (weapons systems officer) flies in the rear seat, and operates the targeting and weapons systems.

F-16 Fighting Falcon – Better known as the "Viper" and is a single-engine all-weather multirole aircraft.

F-35 Lightning II - is an American family of single-seat, single-engine, all-weather stealth multirole aircraft that is intended to perform both air superiority and strike missions.

T-1 Jayhawk - a twin-engine jet aircraft used by the United States Air Force for advanced pilot training.

T-6 Texan II - a two-seat, single-engine turboprop trainer aircraft.

T-38 Talon - a two-seat, twinjet supersonic jet trainer.

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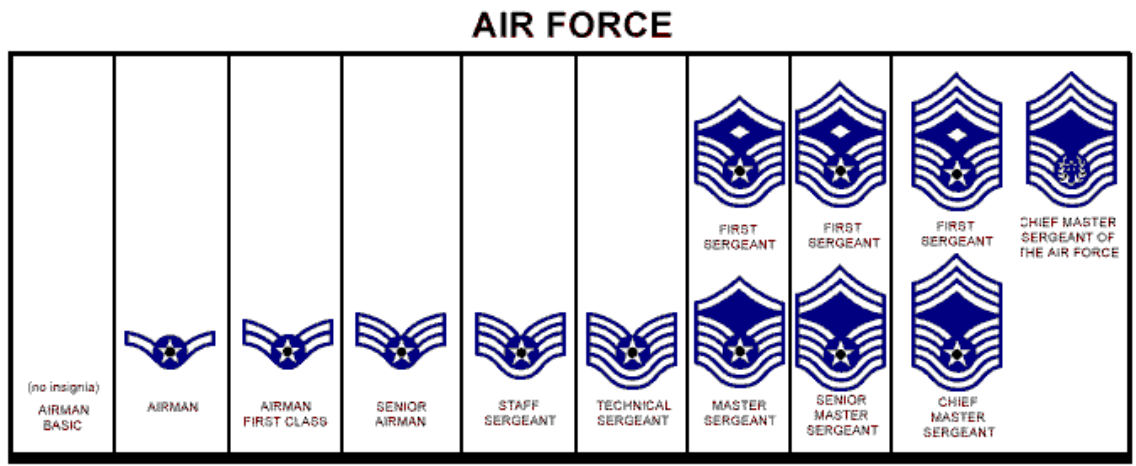
Figure 4: Enlisted Rank

Figure 5: Officer Rank

Figure 6: Aircrew Flight Equipment

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
FWA 00000078
Research & Creative Scholarship
Interdisciplinary Science Building 104
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
Phone 406-243-6672

Date: June 3, 2019

To: Alissa Engel, Counselor Education
Dr. Kirsten Murray, Counselor Education

From: Paula A. Baker, IRB Chair and Manager

RE: IRB #115-19: "The Experience of Female Fighter Pilots in the United States Military"

Your IRB proposal cited above has been **APPROVED** under **expedited review** by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46, section 110. Expedited approval refers to research activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) fit within the following category for expedited review as authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110:

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Each consent form used for this project must bear the dated and signed IRB stamp. Use the PDF sent with this approval notice as a "master" from which to make copies for the subjects.

There is no expiration date on this approval (per revised federal regulations effective 1/21/2019). However, you are required to notify the IRB of the following:

Amendments: Any changes to the originally-approved protocol, including the addition of any new research team members, must be reviewed and approved by the IRB *before* being made (unless extremely minor). Amendment requests must be submitted using Form RA-110.

Unanticipated or Adverse Events: You are required to timely notify the IRB if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience an increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw or register complaints about the study. Use Form RA-111.

Human Subjects Protection Training: As the Principal Investigator(s), it is your responsibility to ensure that the training certificates of all research team members are current (within 3 years) throughout the duration of the project.

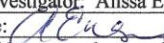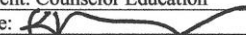Please contact the IRB office with any questions at (406) 243-6672 or email irb@umontana.edu.

Form RA-110
(Rev. 08/18)

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA-MISSOULA
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
AMENDMENT REQUEST

Please provide
IRB Protocol No.:
_____

Email this request as a Word document to *IRB@umontana.edu*, or provide a hardcopy to the IRB office in the Interdisciplinary Science Building, room 104. NOTE: Submission of this form from a University email account constitutes an individual's signature; **students** submitting electronically **must** copy their faculty supervisors.

Project Title: The Experience of Female Fighter Pilots in the United States Air Force	
Principal Investigator: Alissa Engel	Title: Doctoral Candidate
Signature:	
Email address: engel.counseling@gmail.com	
Work Phone: (406)788-8929	Cell Phone: (406)788-8929
Department: Counselor Education	Office location: ED 337
Faculty Supervisor (if student project): Dr. Kirsten Murray	
Department: Counselor Education	Work Phone: (406)243-2650
Signature:	Email: Kirsten.Murray@mso.umt.edu

Detail the proposed amendment (protocol, recruitment, confidentiality plan) below and attach any consent/assent/permission forms for IRB-approval (if possible, use Office's "track changes" feature in your attachments):

The IRB proposal implemented during the first round of interviews will also be followed in the second round of interviews. Interview questions for the second round are listed below:

1. One thing that people have talked about is the experience of being the only or one of a few women. Can we start with you sharing what you brought to the interview that represents some of this experience for you?
2. Another thing people talked about in pilot culture (like many cultures) is there is often an in-group and an out-group. Have you had experiences of feeling like you belong and are accepted? Like you don't?
    a. How has being married to another fighter pilot influenced this?
3. Looking back on your career, are there times when you experienced internal conflict with your personal beliefs or felt inauthentic?
4. One of the most sensitive things participants have talked about is the prevalence of military sexual trauma and sexual harassment. Do you have any experiences you'd like to share about either topic?
5. Tell me more about how you learned to manage the criticism, pressure, and stress of performing at an elite level.
    a. Do you have any stories of over-coming adversity that you'd like to share?
    b. How do you define success as a pilot?

A thorough informed consent will be conducted, and participants will be informed of their right to review data collected about military sexual assault or sexual harassment before it is disseminated. They will also be informed of their rights to withdraw comments at any point before the research is publicly disseminated.

This Section for UM-IRB Use Only

IRB Determination:

_____ Approved by Exempt Review, category # _____
_____ Approved by Expedited Review, category #_____

SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: The Experience of Female Fighter Pilots in the United States Military

Investigator(s):

Alissa Engel is the principal investigator for this study. Alissa is a Ph.D. candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision at the University of Montana. The Counselor Education department is located in the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education and Human Sciences at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. Alissa can be contacted at (406)788-8929 or engel.counseling@gmail.com. Kirsten Murray, Ph.D. is the supervisor for this study, and can be contacted at (406)243-5252 or kirsten.murray@mso.umt.edu.

Inclusion Criteria:

To be eligible for this study, participants must be:
- Participants will be female.
- Participants will be trained to fly a military fighter aircraft.
- Participants will be willing to participate in at least two 60-minute interviews and a member-check.

Purpose:

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experience of being a female fighter pilot in the United States military. Currently, there is little research examining the experiences of female military pilots, and even less examining the experiences of female fighter pilots. The results of this research study will add to the dearth of information in this critical and under-researched area, and assist counselors and helping professionals as they strive to better understand and support this population.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked a series of interview questions about your experiences as a female fighter pilot. The study will require participation in a a minimum of two interviews lasting approximately one hour each. Your initials _____ indicate your permission to record the interview. Interview recordings will be encrypted and stored on a password-protected hard drive. No identifying information will be included in the transcription.

Risks/Discomforts:

Mild discomfort may result from discussing your experiences as a female fighter pilot. You have the right to stop the interview at anytime without consequence. The researcher will provide appropriate counseling referrals if participants wish to further discuss feelings surfacing during the interview.

Benefits:

Your participation in this study will further inform counselors and helping professionals about the experiences of female fighter pilots and help identify areas for future research. However, there is no promise that you will receive any benefit from taking part in this study.

The University of Montana IRB
Expiration Date_____
Date Approved _____
Chair/Admin _____

Confidentiality:

Your records will be kept confidential and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Your identity will be kept private, and if the results of this study are written in scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used. The data will be stored on a password-protected hard drive, and your signed consent form will be stored in a locked cabinet separate from the data. The recording will be transcribed without any information that could identify you. All data from the current study will be destroyed after seven years.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in or you may withdraw from the study for any reason and at any time without penalty.

Questions:

If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, please contact Alissa Engel at (406) 788-8929 or engel.counseling@gmail.com. Kirsten Murray, Ph.D., the supervising professor, can be reached at (406) 243-5252 or kirsten.murray@mso.umt.edu. If your have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Montana Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (406) 243-6672.

Statement of Your Consent:

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____   _____

Subject's Signature   Date

The University of Montana IRB
Expiration Date_____
Date Approved _____
Chair/Admin _____

Figure 1: Conceptual Map after round-one analysis

✸ "I JUST WANT TO DO MY JOB." ✸

✸ Deployment & TDY ⋯
✸ Flying the Jet

⋯⋯⋯⋯ ✸ Training
✸ Success

THE MISSION

✸ Motherhood
✸ Partnership
✸ Having it all

FAMILY

Systemic Sexism ✸
Ambivalent Sexism ✸
Institutional Betrayal ✸

Manufacturing a Break:
BURNOUT

Sexism

Moral Injury

Fighter Pilot Culture

Internal Experience

BEING   THE   ONLY

Community Difference ✸
Camaraderie & Cohesion ✸
Hypermasculinity ✸

✸ Coping Skills
✸ Mind-Set
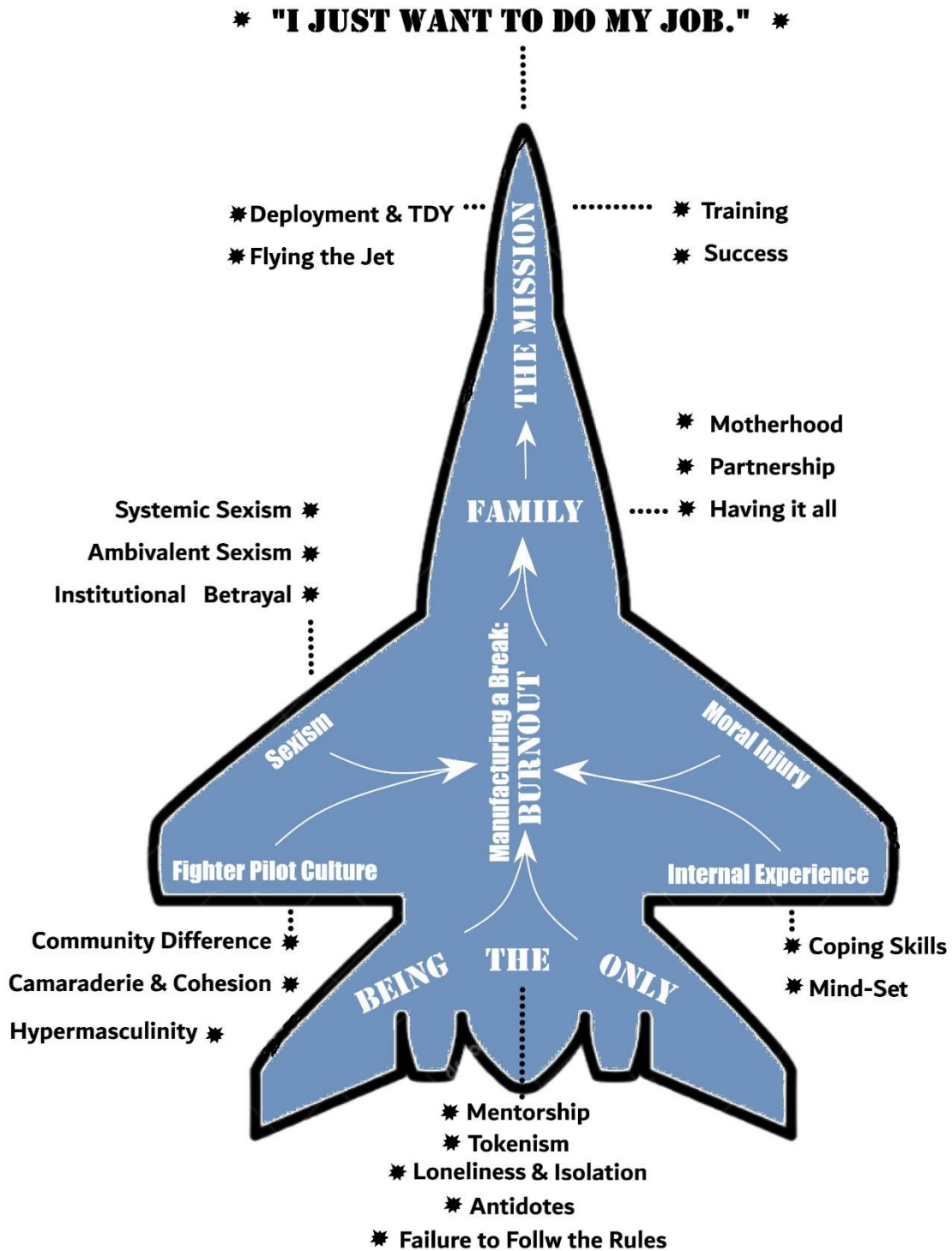
✸ Mentorship
✸ Tokenism
✸ Loneliness & Isolation
✸ Antidotes
✸ Failure to Follw the Rules
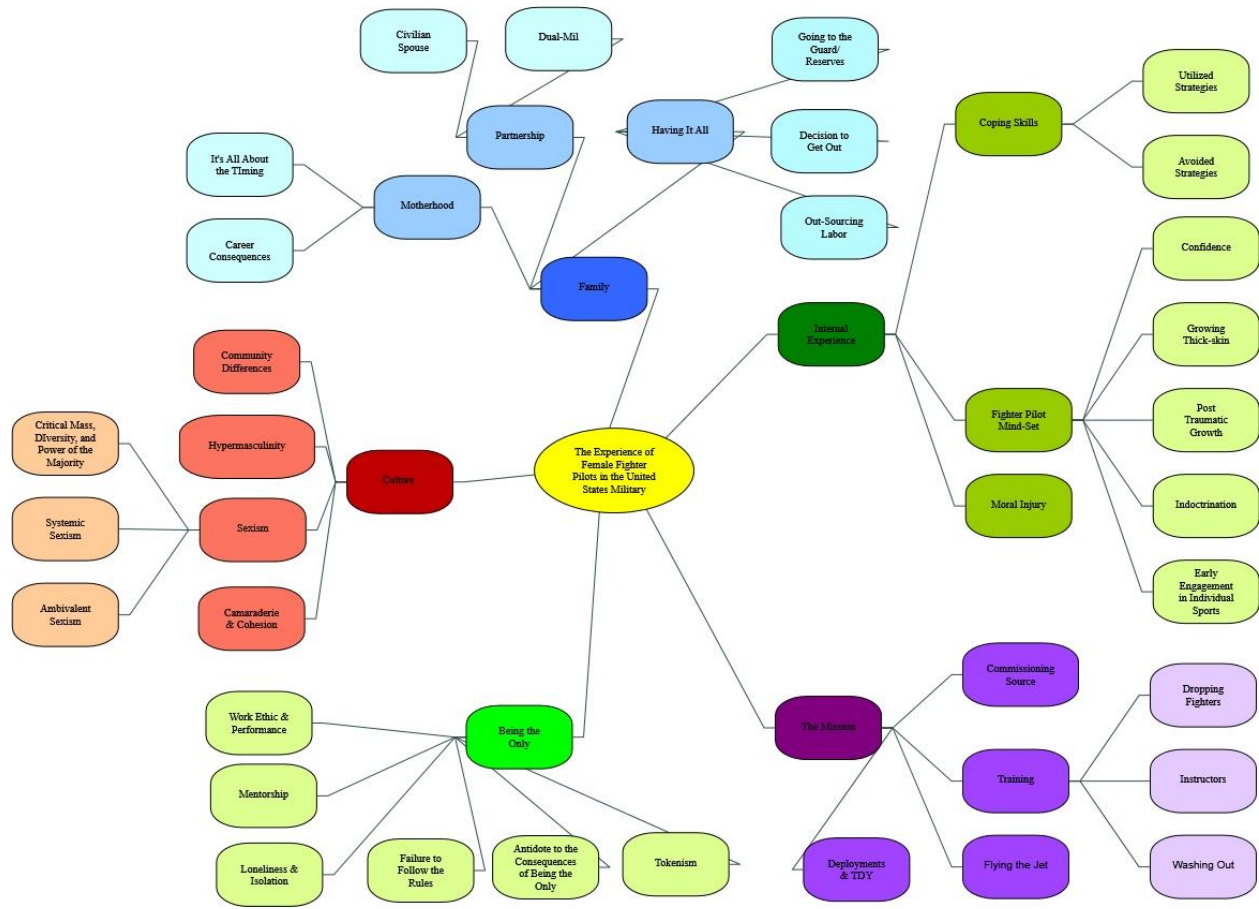
Figure 2: Conceptual Map After Round Two Interviews

Figure 3: Conceptual Map of Experiences After Member-Checks