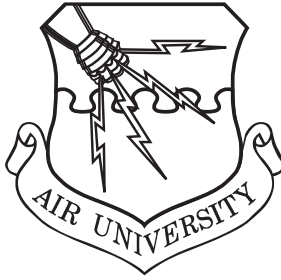




ONE Team, ONE Fight

Diversity and Inclusion

Edited by
M. Carter Matherly, Richard A. Greenlee, Jr., & Tara B. Holmes



One Team, One Fight

Diversity and Inclusion

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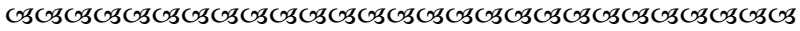
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*This volume is lovingly dedicated to
Colonel Tara Lunardi.
She unabashedly exemplified the true spirit of
inclusion and belonging
during her twenty-seven years of distinguished service.
Her unmatched ability to recognize
the humanity and potential
in every person ensures that her legacy
is woven into the cloth of the
Department of the Air Force through the countless
Airmen and Guardians who knew her.*



Tara is fondly remembered for her inherent talent of fostering community everywhere she went. She viewed caring for others as a personal mission, not simply the professional responsibility of a leader. If you worked with or for her, no matter your rank or position, she saw the best in you—even when you could not see it for yourself. Your feedback mattered to her, and she solicited it directly. What’s more, she acted on it. She fought tirelessly to remove barriers to success for the service members around her and to create equitable workspaces. Her efforts resulted in the first time the Inspector General conducting the Unit Effectiveness Inspection of her organization had ever witnessed a unanimous consensus by all members that they felt included and important. She shared this with her loved ones as her proudest achievement.

Empowering others through her own vulnerability was a particular gift Colonel Lunardi shared. Reaching just over nineteen years of service, she wrote about changing her views and making a deliberate choice to help other women succeed, saying, “It’s never too late to be part of the solution.” A year later, she conducted the research you will find in chapter 14, which garnered three awards, including the Com-

mandant's Award for the top overall research paper from Air War College. Most recently, she co-chaired the Office of Special Investigation's Diversity + Inclusion Council and disclosed her personal experiences facing adversity at its roundtable in August of 2023. In her closing remarks, as she often did, she invoked the words of Representative and civil rights legend John R. Lewis, fiercely advocating for her audience to get after "*the good trouble.*" In her own words, "We may not have the authority or power now to change much more regarding the rules of the game, be it equal pay, fitness standards, combat fields, diversity ratios, promotion quotas, or maternity leave, but we can and should do what we can to help one another."

She would often remark in both personal and professional settings that "the first one through the door may get bloody, but someone's gotta do it." We believe Colonel Lunardi would want us all to challenge ourselves by facing whatever is on the other side of our own doors. By reading this book, you are sure to discover something waiting behind yours.

Now, go make some good trouble.

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Foreword

I have a long family history of military service. My grandfather served during WWI, my father began his twenty-year Army career serving in the Korean War, and my uncle served in Vietnam. A distinct difference between their service and mine is that they all entered the military when it was segregated. Yet, when I entered the Air Force in the early 1970s as an Airman (E-1), no person of color had been promoted to the top grade of four-star general in any military service.

During those years of the civil rights movement, the Air Force had mandatory race relations courses, instructed by members from the Social Actions Office. As an attendee of those courses, I can attest that they were often intense and hugely unpopular. During those days, there were many who felt the Air Force talked about race too much and others who criticized Air Force leaders for not talking about race enough.

Forty-four years later, I retired as one of only nine black four-star generals in Air Force history, so clearly progress was made during my career. I am often asked if I experienced racial discrimination or bigotry during my career, and my response is twofold. First, did I experience racial discrimination that hindered or otherwise negatively impacted my Air Force career? Absolutely not. However, did I experience bigoted and racially insensitive comments during my career? Absolutely!

While I applaud the progress I've personally witnessed, given the demographic projections for the future, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) will take on an even greater level of importance going forward. The evidence is clear that our great country is becoming more diverse every year. And given those inevitable changes, the Air Force has a choice of either ignoring or embracing that change.

America is a melting pot of diverse races, backgrounds, and ethnicities. In my view, it is diversity that makes America strong, and, indeed, the greatest country on Earth. Likewise, the U.S. Air Force and Space Force are very diverse forces that are the most capable and lethal on the planet. Today, virtually anyone who qualifies can join the U.S. military, which is both a strength and a challenge. The strength is more obvious; that is, we enjoy the talents and comradery of the best America has to offer. Not so obvious is the challenge of leading a force with various backgrounds, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses. Yet, at the end of the day, we all have the most important attribute in common—we are all Americans.

FOREWORD

During my career, I have studied, written, and spoken about DEI many times. I cannot count the number of times I have spoken at Black Heritage Month celebrations. With that experience, I have never read a more comprehensive treatise on DEI than this one. This work is scholarly, well documented and cited, fact based, and something I would recommend for all Airmen and Guardians to read.

As a final note, there are some within our political landscape who believe diversity, inclusion, and equity should be erased from our lexicon—that we should simply stop talking about and studying the issue. I could not disagree more! American history was and is being made by ALL Americans—and it behooves us all to learn the complete history—both good and bad—so we can grow together as fellow Americans.

I am proud of my country, and I am proud of my military service. We must continue the work of bringing all Americans together as we journey towards a more perfect union.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry O. Spencer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

LARRY O. SPENCER
General (Retired)
U.S. Air Force

“Women don’t belong here—you don’t belong here.” These were the words shouted at me by upper-class cadets as I arrived with the other 1,380 basic cadets in the United States Air Force Academy incoming class of 1989 on July 5, 1985.

These loud words, often repeated by instructors who had graduated six or more years earlier as members of the last all-male Academy classes, were shocking and hard to hear. Still a teenager at the start of my Air Force journey, I was stunned by the actions (and inactions) of those who were supposed to be my biggest champions. Where were they when I was trying to prove I belonged at the Academy as a young cadet? Where were they when I was navigating the dangerous hallway alone during Tailhook 1991 as the designated driver for my B-52 aircrew? Where were they for the countless women, myself included, who desired to stay on the command track after having children?

Let me begin by offering my appreciation to the outstanding team of editors, researchers, and authors who brought to life a true champion’s handbook: *One Team, One Fight: Diversity and Inclusion*. I truly believe this work is destined to have more impact on the readiness of our air and space forces than any other Air University Press publication.

In October 2019, thirty-four years into my career and already confirmed for my promotion to lieutenant general, I attended the first Women’s Initiative Team (WIT) Strategic Offsite. Not wanting to discourage candid conversation among the other participants arriving in civilian clothes, I requested the organizers allow me to register as “Mary” and not draw attention to my rank. We all rolled up our sleeves and got to work brainstorming the reasons women were still underrepresented at the senior officer and enlisted ranks and in the career fields that lead to commanding at the highest levels of our Air Force.

For hours, I listened to many women identify the same barriers I’d been witnessing for more than thirty years. As we wrapped up the session by prioritizing which efforts we wanted to tackle in order to have the greatest impact on the largest number of women, my true identity and upcoming promotion was revealed. In my closing comments, I expressed frustration at the glacial pace of change for mitigating the barriers faced by so many women after decades of hearing “Be patient, it will take time” over and over and my dissatisfaction with celebrating “Firsts” with no plan or path for the “Seconds,” “Thirds,” or “Fourths.”

Initially confident that our WIT offsite ideas were aligned with Vice Chief of the Air Force General Stephen Wilson’s Spark Tank innovation

FOREWORD

competitions, I gladly accepted the role of WIT General Officer Champion. Not long afterward, our new Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Charles Brown's challenge to *Accelerate Change or Lose* provided an additional call to action and, later, Under Secretary of the Air Force Honorable Gina Ortiz Jones's inspirational story of serving her nation on active duty as a lesbian under Don't Ask, Don't Tell, only to return to the Air Force as a champion and ally for diversity, provided encouragement to overcome the frozen middle and deep resistance to change inherent to any large bureaucracy.

Jumping with both feet into my new (volunteer) role in late 2019, I quickly discovered the WIT General Officer Champion didn't have any resources, budget, or authorities to task anyone on the staff. No problem. My secret weapon was literally thousands of enthusiastic women (and some extremely dedicated men) in every rank and Air Force specialty code, spread across the globe, who were willing to spend hours and hours of their off-duty time collecting data, analyzing Department of Defense and Air Force policies, reading years of National Defense Authorization Act language, and developing recommendations for revising outdated and exclusive policies. My role as WIT General Officer Champion was to get their proposals past all the people who could say no and in front of the one and only individual who could say yes. Sounds easy, right? Not so fast.

Even with allies in some key offices, the WIT proposals stalled. It became obvious we needed to make the business case for policy change with some of our mid-level and senior leaders. This led to our "5R" model—a rubric for evaluating each WIT proposal using Readiness, Resources, Risk, Retention, and Recruiting. Once senior leaders understood how these proposals were directly tied to our warfighting capability through quantifiable metrics for the five criteria, the criticisms of "diversity for diversity's sake" were negated, and the floodgates opened for a wide variety of changes. Three examples, from among dozens to choose from, include (1) awarding a contract to produce body armor specifically designed for women; (2) removing administrative policies preventing pregnant and postpartum women from attending professional military education, eliminating a barrier to leadership development, career progression, and promotion opportunities; and (3) revising acquisition policy for all future weapon systems to accommodate the 5th-to-95th percentile of the height and body proportions of our recruiting population (men and women).

Our Air Force and Space Force are the best in the world, and I'm very proud of the thirty-eight years I spent as an Airman. I'm grateful for the coincidence and fortunate timing that resulted in an invitation to become the WIT General Officer Champion. My only regret is I did not have a resource as valuable as the one you are reading right now. This compilation of insightful articles full of data and recommendations gives you all the information you need to be a champion at any rank and at any level of the Air Force—flight, squadron, group, wing, or higher.

Are you ready to be a champion?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary F. O'Brien". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARY F. O'BRIEN
Lieutenant General (Retired)
U.S. Air Force

FOREWORD

I am honored to be an Airman. I am proud of the accomplishments of the United States Air Force and our contributions to history. I am proud of our distinguished service in every major conflict of the modern age, our formidable deterrence posture, and our continued vigilance in defense of our homeland and way of life. I am proud to be a third-generation service member, following the tradition of my father, the son of a French-American plumber, and my grandfather, the son of a Spanish farmer. My career, as is the case with the vast majority of those who have served, has been spent in defense of our Nation and the values and basic principles that all her citizens should know, enjoy, and ultimately benefit from. That's why it's important to me that all Americans have the opportunity to serve in some way and that the Armed Forces are accessible to everyone. Those of us in uniform must reflect the traditions we come from and honor the communities we serve.

Over nearly thirty-nine years of service, I have seen our force continuously evolve. We have become more inclusive and more aware, our policies reflecting a greater understanding of the many different people who make up our military. Today, women fly combat missions and serve as Battlefield Airmen. Today, people of color compose a greater percentage of our force. Today, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender service members can openly serve in uniform. None of these statements were true when I began my service; now they are facts. We can admire our past, value our traditions, and still adapt to the world around us. There is more work to be done; not only can we continue to change—I would argue that we must.

We are currently the world's preeminent force in air and space. This is the result of relentless innovation, modernization, and investment, but it is ultimately derived from the strength of our Airmen. It is our people who plan and execute our missions, our people who analyze and strategize, and our people who serve and sacrifice. Those who aspire to join our ranks and serve our country are essential to our ability to maintain our dominance in every domain. We must recognize and value the energy and perspective that every Airman and Guardian brings to our organization and ensure they all have opportunities to contribute and succeed. We must meld all facets of our diverse collective experiences, thoughts, opinions, backgrounds, and expertise and perfect our own tradition of being an agile and adaptive force. Any nation that excludes or ignores entire swaths of its society will decline.

One Team, One Fight: Diversity and Inclusion is a valuable tool for navigating the difficult and important work of driving our service forward. It will help us identify and acknowledge barriers to opportunity, challenge preconceptions and biases, and talk openly and appreciate the experiences that shape our lives and our service. This compendium, the first of its kind in the Department of the Air Force, reflects diverse voices and thoughtful research from our entire Total Force, demonstrating the value of diversity and inclusion in our ranks and offering actionable recommendations for achieving this objective. Together, we must continue to build a force of empowered Airmen and Guardians, ready to work together, using their unique aptitudes and experiences to achieve excellence in all we do.

That's something we can and should all be proud of.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. H. Sasseville', with a stylized flourish at the end.

MARC H. SASSEVILLE
Lieutenant General (Retired)
U.S. Air Force

FOREWORD

I am a proud veteran of the United States Air Force, and I thoroughly enjoyed the nearly thirty-two years that I spent serving Airmen, Guardians, and their families. I ended my career as only the second African American to serve as the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF), and it had been nearly forty-five years since CMSAF Thomas Barnes held the position from 1974 to 1978. Like many, I saw this selection as progress in the area of diversity, equity, and inclusion, but I also watched several Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders, male and female, over the years who were well qualified but never got the opportunity. Both luck and timing—along with experience, skill, education, and character—are integral parts of any person's success and career progression, but so are intentionality and purposefulness. So, while I applaud the Air Force for making progress over its seventy-six year history, I believe there is still much to be done; this book highlights much of that work, the methods, practices, and blueprint that will ultimately lead to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive service.

Throughout my career, I encountered discrimination, bias, and unequal treatment both directly and via more subtle means to include various microaggressions by people who sometimes knowingly and other times unknowingly impacted not just my career but my mindset. After experiencing this several times as a young Airman, I developed a complex where every time something didn't go my way, I wondered if it was because I was Black. You can only imagine how mentally unhealthy this was for me and how much it put me on edge and ready to easily shift blame for my shortcomings to everyone and everything else because of the color of my skin. However, this experience also motivated me to eliminate any and every other reason for someone to exclude me and allowed me to focus on those things that I obviously could control (leadership, professionalism, performance, communication, job performance, education, etc.); if someone was going to exclude me from any opportunities, it certainly wouldn't be for any other reason than my skin color. I can't say that this worked, nor can say that it was a healthy practice thinking about my skin color every day. But all too often, this is what our minority Airmen are faced with on a regular basis. I believe the DEI work the Air Force is currently doing and many of the concepts highlighted here will be helpful not only to those members who struggle with opportunities, inclusion, and equality, but it will be even more helpful to the leaders across the Department

of the Air Force who have the opportunity to motivate, encourage, and inspire them.

My last few assignments in the Air Force afforded me the opportunity to either directly or indirectly influence the careers of many Airmen and Guardians by either hiring them myself or recommending them for opportunities to other senior leaders. I never took this responsibility lightly and never left to chance that if I just allowed the system to work on its own, my staff or the organizations I impacted would end up diverse. Intentionality was key in my decision-making process, and I purposely sought out minority leaders to hire on my team or recommend to commanders, chiefs, directors, and other leaders across the force. Someday this may not be necessary, as the system will perhaps correct itself; however, I'm not sure when or if that day will ever come, and it certainly didn't exist during my time. I've continued this practice into my current role as a leader and encourage every leader across the DAF to do the same. Be intentional about diversifying your teams and ensuring Airmen and Guardians who don't look like you, think like you, practice the same religion as you, or have the same sexual orientation as you have the same opportunities to succeed as everyone else.

I'm forever grateful for all the great leaders I served with throughout my career who afforded me the opportunities to excel and ultimately leave a small mark on the United States Air Force. I worked hard over my career to do the same. It takes each of us to ensure the DAF continues to be the greatest fighting force on the planet—I'm confident that if we all continue to do our part, we will get there. Take advantage of this wonderful resource to help you better understand the challenges we face in this area and be intentional about creating a more diverse and inclusive force for the future.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Wright', enclosed within a large, loopy circular flourish.

KALETH O. WRIGHT
CMSAF #18 (Retired)
U.S. Air Force

About the Editors



Maj M. Carter Matherly, USAF, PhD, served as the editor in chief for this volume, leading a board of editors and peer reviewers and providing direction and oversight to the authors for submitted research. He currently serves as Air Combat Command's functional area manager overseeing Homeland Defense, the Battle Control Center weapons systems, and the National Capital Region Integrated Air Defense Systems operations as part of A3's Combat Integration Branch (A3CI), Langley AFB, Virginia. In his last

assignment, he served as the director of inspections in the Inspector General's Office, Eastern Air Defense Sector (EADS), Rome, New York. He was responsible for directing and overseeing EADS inspections and the execution of its homeland defense mission across six units in New York and Washington, DC. Prior to his role with EADS, he served twelve years on active duty filling numerous roles, including air liaison officer to I Corps G3, Joint Air Component Command Element chief of operations, chief of Central Command's E-8C Mission Planning, assistant director of operations, chief of weapons and tactics, resource advisor, and flight commander.

In 2018 he graduated from Walden University with a PhD in psychology. His dissertation was titled "Influence of Distributed Reporting of Terror Violence on Implicit Associations of Individuals." Following this research, he undertook studies for a master of military art and operational science with Air University. Air University recognized his thesis "Obligatory Discrimination and Implicit Bias: A Longitudinal Study of Implicit Racial and Sexual Orientation Bias in the US Military" as a cornerstone of diversity and inclusion. It won the 2021 Command in Leadership Award for its investigative analysis and

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implication to core leadership attributes and qualities within the USAF. Today, his recommendations provide keen insight to the interpersonal psychological processes all Airmen and Guardians should be aware of and are the basis for training and discussion on unconscious bias in the Department of the Air Force.

Lastly, he provides in-person specialized training focusing on organizational culture, identity, and growth. His unique approach incorporates psychological principles and modern organizational trends to create unified and productive teams.



Lt Col Richard A. Greenlee, Jr., USAF, retired, served as the co-editor in chief for this book. He provided keen leadership to the board of editors and served as a critical liaison with SAF/DI during the book's development and construction. Before his retirement in December 2023, he was the chief, Directors Action Group, to the Second Air Force deputy

commander. He focused on the implementation of Technical Training Transformation, impacting the development, oversight, and direction of all operational aspects of basic military training, initial skills training, advanced, and supplemental non-flying training for 93 percent of the Air Force across 265 specialties. Prior to that role, he served as chief, Data Analytics and Reporting Directorate, in the Department of the Air Force Office of Diversity and Inclusion. He was a career force support officer with most assignments in the personnel arena, many focusing on his acumen in labor relations—an area he now specializes in as a Department of Defense civil servant. He spent seven years in the Regular Air Force with assignments in Mississippi, North Carolina, and Greenland before transferring to the District of Columbia Air National Guard. He served and commanded units ranging from the detachment and squadron to Headquarters Air Force levels. He is the recipient of the Air National Guard (ANG) Personnel Manager of the Year Award – Headquarters level and the Air Force Association's ANG Action Officer of the Year award.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

While completing his bachelor's degree in industrial relations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he spent an Honors semester abroad at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He subsequently completed a master of education degree at William Cary University and postgraduate study in curriculum and instruction at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He holds graduate certificates in social justice from Harvard University and in diversity and inclusion from Cornell and Georgetown Universities. An ordained minister and associate pastor, he holds a master of divinity degree from the Howard University School of Divinity and a certificate in ministry operations and administration from Regent University, and he completed Clinical Pastoral Education, level 1, with Johns Hopkins Medicine. Additionally, he completed professional military education at every level, culminating with a diploma from Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama.



Maj Tara B. Holmes, USAF, PhD, served as the assistant editor for this book and managed submissions and book development. She was key in accessing research and authors providing modern, relevant academic research on diversity and inclusion. Major Holmes holds a PhD from the Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland, College Park. Her dissertation, “The DEI Signaling Threshold: When and Why More Is Not Always Better,”

explored the effectiveness of diversity messaging. She strives to serve the military community with her work and studies topics including leadership, emotions, decision-making, motivation, and teams. Her academic research and writing focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in organizations.

Throughout her time in the United States Air Force, Major Holmes has actively supported DEIA awareness, education, and initiatives.

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She began her mentorship journey in the female military community as a member of and trained facilitator for the Women's Mentorship Network and went on to stand up the first women's mentorship group at the 479th Flying Training Group. She has been an active Women's Initiative Team (WIT) member since 2017 and completed the Cornell University for Women in Leadership certificate program in 2019. While serving at Squadron Officer School, Major Holmes created a research-based, all-gender elective focused on understanding the barriers women face in the workplace and how to foster allyship and better mentoring relationships. As a faculty mentor for the Air University Advanced Research Elective, she created a subtopic for student researchers to directly support six Department of the Air Force Barrier Analysis Working Group teams and their lines of effort. As a think tank coach, Major Holmes expertly facilitated difficult conversations and guided students through a design thinking practice for combating racism in the Air Force. In 2023, she completed the Dare to Lead program. Major Holmes received the 2020 Air Force Diversity and Inclusion Innovation Award and is credited with twenty-one Pacific Power Projection missions and two Continuous Bomber Presence deployments.

Editorial Board

Tara R. Lunardi, Colonel, USAF, served as deputy commander, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Quantico, VA. Previously, she served as the commander of the OSI's 2nd Field Investigations Region (Wing), adjunct professor at the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy, vice commander of the OSI's 7th Field Investigations Region (Wing), and deputy director of security at the White House Military Office. Colonel Lunardi passed away on February 7, 2024. Because of her dedication and commitment to the advancement and mentorship of countless members of the air and space forces, Colonel Lunardi is recognized as an honorary board member of this volume.

Dr. Maiya Anderson, Colonel, USAF, is a permanent professor and head of the Physical Education Department at the US Air Force Academy. Colonel Anderson earned her commission from the US Air Force Academy with a degree in environmental engineering. She received a master of science degree in bioresource engineering from Oregon State University, a master of education degree in intercollegiate athletic leadership from the University of Washington, and a doctorate in sports management from the Ohio State University. She has served in a variety of roles, including squadron commander, flight commander, chief of instruction, executive officer and chief, Medical Plans and Programs. She deployed as a bioenvironmental engineer to Southwest Asia and directly supported contingency operations in Iceland and Ecuador. Her research interests are in the areas of leadership development of college students and student athletes. She also focuses on furthering student-athlete well-being and development, the environmental interface and impacts of adventure sports, and diversity and inclusion in sports and the military.

Dr. Kelly R. M. Ihme, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF, is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Distance Education at the United States Army War College and adjunct doctoral faculty in the Forbes School of Business at the University of Arizona Global Campus. She is a board-certified psychiatric nurse, an intelligence officer, and an organizational psychologist. Her work for the Army War College comprises campaign planning, future operations, and international fellows outreach education. Dr. Ihme's research focuses on mindfulness, primary prevention, and leadership. She has presented at multiple national and international conferences and contributed publications to the field of combat

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behavioral health and military leader training. Additionally, she is the lead Resiliency Officer for the Pennsylvania Air National Guard.

Dr. Tristan K. Martin is an assistant teaching professor in the Department of Marriage and Family Therapy at Syracuse University. As a licensed marriage and family therapist and American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists certified sex therapist, he provides clinical support for the LGBTQ community, specializing in gender transition. Dr. Martin's research focuses on transgender sexuality, and he has presented at multiple national conferences and contributed publications to the field of family therapy on transgender issues. Dr. Martin is a member of the United States Air National Guard.

Dr. Tamesha T. Armstead is the executive assistant of the Defense Health Agency's Florida Panhandle Market, 96th Medical Group, Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. As the inaugural diversity and inclusion director of the 1st Special Operations Medical Group, Hurlburt Field, Florida, she implemented and monitored new programs and practices that effectively increased advocacy, diversity, equity, and inclusion. She has joint service and special operations experience and participated in deployments in direct support of Operations New Dawn and Iraqi Freedom. MSgt Armstead holds a doctor of education degree in learning and organizational change from Baylor University.

Capt Ayana Cole-Fletcher, USAF, is passionate about promoting mental health and diversity and inclusion. She graduated from the United States Air Force Academy with a degree in English and minor in Chinese. She has been actively involved in promoting and organizing heritage events and has worked extensively with special emphasis organizations. In her civilian life, she is a published author of a poetry collection.

Editors' Preface

September 18, 1947: The Department of the Air Force is established.

July 26, 1948: Executive Order 9981 mandates equal treatment regardless of race or color.

January 30, 1960: Brig Gen Benjamin O. Davis becomes the first African-American general officer (later promoted to four-star rank).

July 16, 1971: Brig Gen Jeanne Holm becomes the first female general officer in the USAF (later promoted to two-star rank).

September 1, 1975: Gen Daniel "Chappie" James becomes the first African-American four-star general in the USAF and Department of Defense.

February 10, 1993: 1st Lt Jeannie Leavitt becomes the first female fighter pilot in the USAF and, shortly thereafter, becomes the first female fighter pilot to serve in combat (later promoted to two-star rank).

December 22, 2010: Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010 was signed, thereby allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual people to serve openly in the military.

June 5, 2012: Gen Janet Wolfenbarger becomes the first female four-star in the USAF.

January 24, 2013: Secretary of defense rescinds the 1948 Combat Exclusion Policy, thereby allowing women to serve in combat roles.

March 2, 2020: Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr., becomes the first African-American chief of staff of the Air Force.

January 25, 2021: Executive Order 14004 (2021) was signed, enabling all qualified Americans to serve in the military, specifically including transgender individuals.



As one takes note of the above list, the Air Force has come a long way in diversity and inclusion. However, it has not always been a smooth journey, and there is still much work to be done. This book is neither a historical exposé on past events in the USAF or DOD nor a challenge to leaders and policymakers to speed changes. It is a tool for all Airmen and Guardians to lead better communication and foster effective discussion on the topic of diversity and inclusion.

One Team, One Fight is intended to fill the gap in literature discussing hard topics in the Department of the Air Force and how we all play a role in growing our collective force to be the fastest, most lethal, and

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preeminent in the world. A diverse and inclusive workplace environment is just one component required to achieve these goals.

Diversity and inclusion are more than just achieving a seat at the table or being allowed to serve in the force, hold a specific Air Force specialty code, deploy, or any of the other routine components of being an Airman or Guardian. The essence of diversity and inclusion comes from the latter of these two words—*inclusion*. While influencing diversity starts with policy and directives, inclusion is a cultural shift. Inclusion involves accepting others regardless of the different lives we collectively lead and diverse backgrounds we come from. Inclusion involves championing others not specifically because they are different but because together our unique perspectives and ideas collectively increase mission readiness, flexibility, surety, and agility in ways our competitors cannot match.

While written from the perspective of Airmen and Guardians, this book is meant to be a tool for all service members to navigate diversity and inclusion. It covers many topics and uncomfortable realities for all our members. The research presented herein is qualitatively and quantitatively based research. Each piece offers its own discussion points on diversity and inclusion.

Collectively, these works offer thematic trends for service members to explore. This project started as a handbook for the Air Force to foster growth among Airmen and Guardians. However, it was identified that many of the issues, history, and problems the handbook addressed and discussed were not just service-level issues that the Department of the Air Force uniquely experienced but ones that all services struggled and continue to grapple with.

We structured the book into six parts, each showcasing world-class research tackling challenging areas of conversation and leadership. These sections include Airmanship and Guardianship, race, sexual orientation, gender, culture, and diversity in practice. This structure is intended to enable individuals, leaders, and teams to better understand and discuss the areas presented. The work is academically oriented and followed rigorous peer review on numerous levels with the intent of presenting sound, factual information to grow each of us as a leader. These topics are uncomfortable. These topics will elicit emotion. These topics will grow each of us. Note that many of the subjects presented touch on several areas and may also fit into other parts. We placed them as they are to facilitate a building block approach to foster discussion and self-reflection through each chapter and part.

You may feel some emotion when reading about some of the subjects presented herein. Anger, sadness, motivation, loss, happiness, and excitement are some feelings you may experience throughout this work. We encourage you to objectively analyze those emotions and ask yourself, “Why am I feeling this way?” Follow that with the twenty-question game—ask yourself why twenty times. At the end of the twenty questions, you may have learned something deep about yourself or your history.

Airmanship and Guardianship. The first section in the book examines the criticality of building a cohesive, inclusive force through strong Airmanship and Guardianship principles. The Air Force’s core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do together with the Space Force’s core values of character, connection, commitment, and courage establish the building blocks on which we lead and are led. Part 1 aims to build our leadership scaffold bit by bit, stacking upon the bedrock of core values. The chapter “Start with the Breath: Countering Minority Stress and Brain Health Stigma with Evidence-Based Resilience and Self-Care Practices” appears first to ensure all our teammates and readers have the tools to manage high ops tempos and high-stress scenarios. We recognize that not everyone processes stress the same, nor do they experience the same stressors. Recognizing stress in ourselves and our teammates is vital to becoming a highly effective team. The goal is to help share the message that stress is common and normal and that others may have moments of higher stress as a reaction to similar stimuli. It is not a sign of weakness. It is, however, a sign of a different perception of the world, which may be lifesaving. The second chapter in part 1, “Constant Cultural Adaptation of Airmen,” speaks to the vital nature of cultural flexibility among our members and within ourselves. Not only are we called on to travel to distant lands with different cultural standards and backgrounds, but we also can improve ourselves as individuals through exposure to new and different ideas. Understanding the importance of diversity of thought, life, culture, and history, for example, is a critical attribute for any leader and directly adds to our lethality when we are asked to defend the nation. The third offering, “Toward Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Military,” reminds us that wearing the uniform is a privilege that some cannot have for reasons beyond their control and that it does not make them any less of a teammate. Empowering membership within our teams and ranks broadens our talent pool and strengthens our forces. The fourth chap-

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ter in part 1, “Authenticity and Acceptance: Imperatives for a More Adaptable Military,” aims to help break down barriers to diversity that can be erected by the large bureaucratic nature of service. After reading the previous three chapters and taking time to internalize their messages, we encourage readers to digest this chapter and reflect. Adapting is hard, stressful, and potentially frustrating. Leaders should look introspectively and ask, “Who on my team do I perceive as not authentic?” and “Why have we failed to accept them for their differences?” This chapter dovetails into a detailed discussion on improving agility in “Contingency Theory in the Department of the Air Force.” This chapter is a key component in imbuing Airmen and Guardians (or any leader for that matter) with the agility to adapt to new environments and problems. The chapter astutely highlights that organizations that cannot internally adapt to change ultimately fail. Fostering a healthy and diverse culture within our walls is the only way to ensure an agile, adaptive force capable of defeating a hostile actor. Our last chapter in this introductory section, “Air Force Leadership Diversity,” is a qualitative dive into diversity among senior leadership in the force. It reveals many of the factors contributing to promotion to the general officer ranks. We include this topic here to highlight that *diversity* is not a term solely associated with race, gender, sexual orientation, gender presentation, economic background, or cultural heritage but encompasses all things that make us unique, including those associated with one’s career such as Air Force specialty code, special assignments, and so forth or the lack thereof. Homogeneity itself by nature of its lack of diversity and inclusion may preclude accessing all available talent, presenting an unforeseen hindrance that weakens the force in the face of a persistent, evolving threat.

Parts 2 through 5 of the book are “hard discussions.” These include conversations on race, gender identity and sexual orientation, gender disparity, and the culture in the Department of the Air Force.

Hard Discussions on Race. Our first hard discussion is on racial inclusivity and equality. It is vital to note that the topic is not isolated to a Black and White focus but spans a wide spectrum of race and ethnic origin. Despite the Air Force being segregated for less than a year, from its inception until 1948 when the armed forces were desegregated, statistical research shows a continued struggle in this area. The first piece in part 2, “Racism IS a National Security Issue,” echoes General Spencer’s closing comments in this introduction. In this work, the importance of becoming a better force is clearly laid out. The author

cites specific examples of how diversity has led to combat effectiveness and, often, the success of a mission. The second chapter in this section, "Privilege and Its Potential Impact on Readiness," may create a reaction through its title alone. Reflecting on the words in the chapter titles and the order in which they are presented throughout this book will undoubtedly create a feeling, image, or narrative in the reader's mind. Take note of this response, and objectively ask why those initial feelings were present. What makes them valid? What makes them invalid? And most importantly, what experiences led to the development of the narratives?

Hard Discussions on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation.

There are members serving today who recall when one could only serve in the armed forces if they had a heterosexual orientation. Even more recall when service members could only serve with a homogeneous sex and gender pairing dating to their birth. This section tackles some of the most recent integration efforts within the force, opening with the empirical study "Building a Culture of Inclusion in the Modern Military: Acceptance and 'Outness' Post-LGBT Bans." It highlights the criticality of fostering cohesive units that empower and embrace all members equally. Examining any modern or historical team will show high levels of synergistic interaction and cooperation among its members. Fostering the safety, vulnerability, and purpose needed for world-class teams is impossible when members are left out, regardless of whether active or implicit separation. Implicit attitudes affect every one of us in some form or another. The prevalence of implicit racial bias and implicit sexual orientation bias is presented in "Obligatory Discrimination and Implicit Bias: A Longitudinal Study of Implicit Racial and Sexual Orientation Bias in the US Military." It discusses an empirical ten-year longitudinal study on implicit attitudes in the US military highlighting the shifts over time. The study notes that while attitudes across the force have improved, there is still significant progress to be made. The last chapter in this section, "The Transgender Airman," presents research on what is perhaps one of our most vulnerable populations within the force, transgender service members. It lays out an informative introduction to the terminology and history of transgender service members. It also offers methods and suggestions to further a positive and inclusive culture across units that allows every Airman and Guardian to be a lethal defender of the nation.

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Hard Discussions on Gender Disparity. It is strange to think that the first female fighter pilot in the USAF was not eligible to fly her dream platform when she commissioned in 1992 due solely to her gender. Prior to 1993, women were prohibited from flying combat aircraft and, in fact, could not serve in any combat role. The Combat Exclusion Policy, enacted in 1948 as part of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, was officially lifted in 2013 but was not fully implemented in the services until 2016. While the removal of such policies is critical to allowing all members the opportunity to serve equally, such long-standing policies have systemic residual effects. The first chapter in this section, "Factors Affecting Female Air Force Officer Retention," focuses on retention issues relating to USAF female officers. The study presents quantitative research spanning ten years of HAF/A1 data from 2009 to 2019. Next, the author of the book *There from the Beginning: Women in the US Air Force* brings to our discussion a relevant excerpt titled "Women in the Air Force: Past, Present, and Future." This selection gives us insight into the history and institutional challenges faced by women serving in the force. Topics presented in this chapter highlight how institutional norms can create artificial barriers to female retention and advancement and help us understand the unintentional creation and furthering of institutional bias. For example, Gen Jeanne Holm became the first female general officer in the USAF on July 16, 1971, and was the first woman in the US armed forces to be promoted to major general on June 1, 1973. The military would not see its first female four-star general until the US Army promoted Ann Dunwoody in 2008, and the Air Force promoted its first female four-star, Gen Janet Wolfenbarger, on June 5, 2012. These promotion dates exemplify the advancement challenges faced by female service members, necessitating the need for discussion on who is promoted to general officer and why. This topic is examined in the chapter "General Officer Gender Diversity: How Do We Get from Here to There?" Finally, it is important to acknowledge that policies external to the Department of Defense can influence the disproportionate burden, stigma, and impacts restrictive policies can have on female service members, explored in "Pregnancy Policies at the Service Academies: Proposed Solutions to a Problem of Inequity and Injustice."

As mentioned, in 1948 racial segregation ended in the armed services, and women were allowed to serve as regular members of every branch. In 1971, women were no longer forced to leave the service if pregnant. The repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" in 2011 allowed people

to serve openly regardless of their sexual orientation. In 2013, the Combat Exclusion Policy was overturned, extending the opportunity to serve in combat roles to women. In 2021, restrictions on military service of transgender individuals were lifted. Yet the collective force is still struggling to end biased policies and attitudes. Although these populations are now free to serve openly, we must contend with the question of whether they feel empowered to do so. A recurring theme to note throughout this book is how comfortable our Airmen and Guardians are to be themselves and to express themselves in ways that foster trust and vulnerability. Leaders at all levels must continue to carry out our responsibility to create inclusive cultures and ask whether what we are doing is enough.

Hard Discussions on DAF Culture. Every organization has a culture—simply defined as the shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that influence the attitudes and behaviors of those in the organization. The Department of the Air Force has a distinct culture, just like each of its sister services. The first chapter in this section, “The Moral Emotional Experience of DEIA Initiatives at Work,” argues that the shared artery extending from society through an organization’s DEIA initiatives to individual employees is morality—or what is considered to be morally good, acceptable, and worthy of pursuit. Therefore, it is constructive for all Airmen and Guardians to examine this postulate. Next, “Disability Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force” discusses creating awareness about the need for including people with disabilities in the workplace, ensuring these individuals help to develop policies and processes, and then moving beyond awareness and policy to initiating organizational change.

Also in this section, a deployed squadron commander shares lessons learned in “Everyone Is Valued: A Mission-Focused Approach to Inclusion.” The chapter highlights many of the reasons that inclusion and diversification efforts directly translate to mission success by ensuring that all team members know they are valued, creating a sense of organizational community. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr., stated, when he was the Air Force chief of staff, that the Air Force must “accelerate change or lose.” The last article in this section, “Leveraging Diversity to Unlock Organizational Innovation,” speaks to the evolution of diversity and the connection between innovation and diversity, which could accelerate the speed of change required to dominate our near-peer adversaries.

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Diversity in Practice. The last section is arguably the most important and offers information that does not specifically fit the previous sections. It provides guidance for all service members in building inclusive teams. “Hosting Cultural Events to Foster Diversity Awareness and Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force” offers a blueprint for conducting diversity awareness events. This guide assists with cultural-specific events but can be readily modified to highlight any diversity or familiarization effort a team may need. “Start at Human: Cultivating a Diversity Mindset in the Workplace” offers tips and methods for creating a human-centered approach to leadership and management. Following the “People First . . . Mission Always” mantra reminds us to lead people, not resources, and to act with empathy, not reprisal. Finally, “Creating a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Curriculum for US Air Force Medical Professionals,” while directed at the medical community, offers an insightful, replicable approach for creating and implementing diversity and inclusion curricula in the modern force. It sets a standard worth repeating across units, wings, and deltas throughout the force.

One can envision the collective force as an air formation. The formation consists of all generations of aircraft and space systems. The formation is three-dimensional, comprising altitude deltas and ranges in azimuth. Each aircraft or system holds a different spot within the formation that is ideally suited to its strengths. Some aircraft and systems may be at a high altitude, or even in space, to counter incoming fighter missiles and ballistic missiles; others may be at a low altitude to strike ground targets. Some are slowly gathering intelligence while others are silently doing work that cannot be known. We are all on the same vector, heading in the same direction. If one of the aircraft in the formation is threatened, the formation reacts to protect the threatened aircraft and ultimately the mission.

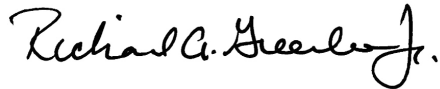
We would not ignore a threat to another flight just because that threat did not affect us, nor would we ignore the unique capabilities a weapons system would bring to the fight. Why would we do either with our Airmen and Guardians?

To our enemies, our mixed formation flight is confounding. It is impossible to easily pick it apart, as collectively the vulnerabilities are few and covered by others' strengths.

Your wingmen in arms,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Carter Matherly'.

M. CARTER MATHERLY, PhD
Editor in Chief

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard A. Greenlee, Jr.'.

RICHARD A. GREENLEE, JR.
Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.), USAF
Co-Editor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tara B. Holmes'.

TARA B. HOLMES, PhD
Major, USAF
Assistant Editor

Acknowledgements

Seeing any large project across the finish line is a tremendous feat that does not occur in a vacuum. This book is one such project that required an enormous effort from numerous people, including our contributors, editorial board, authors, and reviewers. What was originally a small compendium of essays has evolved over a two-year period into an authoritative volume rivaling any academic handbook in print. Without the support of this entire team, this book would have never come to be.

We are indebted to Air University Press leadership for seeing promise and purpose in the original manuscript and supporting its development. Our project editor at the press, Ms. Jeanne Shamburger, deserves untold credit for her efforts to ensure the chapters and the book met only the highest academic and publishing standards. Without the countless hours and edits she devoted to this book, it would never have been completed. She also supported us with invaluable mentoring in the management and development of this book. Thanks also to the rest of the AU Press team who made this publication possible: illustrator Catherine Smith, typesetter Diana Faber, and reviewer Donna Budjenska.

An earnest and humble acknowledgement to the amazing leaders who took the time to write forewords for this book. Thank you for your sincere and personal words. Finally, we would like to acknowledge all the Airmen past, present, and future who stand up for what is right and just with the sole motivation to make the world a better place for others.

PART 1

AIRMANSHIP AND GUARDIANSHIP

Chapter 1

Start with the Breath

Countering Minority Stress and Brain Health Stigma with Evidence-Based Resilience and Self-Care Practices

Kelly R. M. Ihme

Jenny Syed

Clare Moeller

Workplace stress is a ubiquitous issue affecting employees' mental and physical well-being, ultimately impacting performance and productivity. The military workplace has other avenues of stress, such as deployed operations, family separation, or frequent relocation. These stressors are even more pronounced for individuals who identify as part of a minority group, whether due to race, ethnicity, neurodiversity, gender, or sexual orientation. Compounding each of these stress factors is the continued stigma on mental health despite the known positive impacts of resilience and prevention activities on overall wellness, stress management, workplace engagement, and effectiveness. One mediating factor against workplace minority stress and a way to build resilience is self-care.¹

Background

In 2020, Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 6400.09, *DOD Policy on Integrated Primary Prevention of Self-Directed Harm and Prohibited Abuse or Harm*, was published; it established policies to mitigate self-harm and promote force readiness through environmental and prevention-based practices.² Elements of such integrated primary prevention include programs to teach, foster, and reinforce healthy behaviors throughout a career. The instruction highlighted skill development to improve healthy coping, emotional intelligence, resilience, and communication. Over the past decade, an ever-increasing number of studies and programs have emerged, both civilian and military, to target and capitalize on resilience and self-care.³

The Air Force currently funds several interventions recommended in a 2011 Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) study to promote resilience and address social-behavioral problems and self-harm within

the force, yet the rates of suicide and interpersonal violence have remained or increased.⁴ The continued presence of harm in the armed forces negatively impacts recruitment and retention, particularly among females and minorities.⁵ Especially concerning is the rate of behavioral health disorders, which was higher among female service members over the last five years.⁶ Unfortunately, most workplace resilience programs are aimed at individual wellness or performance and fail to account for organizational culture and how the workplace or toxic leadership contributes to stress.⁷ The effects of organizational culture especially influence minority stress. Failure to change culture while only promoting individual resilience programs, particularly in male-dominated workplaces such as the military, “may not create resilient workers but may in fact result in detriment to mental and emotional well-being and workplace health and safety standards.”⁸

The Department of Defense advocates a plethora of resilience programs, many provided without demonstrated effectiveness, to combat the perception of wellness “institutionalization” pervasive in the military.⁹ This institutionalization perpetuates the previously mentioned problem of wellness promotion without culture change that continues to damage women and minorities. Airmen feel overwhelmed with the frequency of resilience program options and changes (due to funding or beta projects) and discouraged by a lack of access to those same programs.¹⁰ The perception is that programs are created to make headlines and are “another briefing” but are not resourced or developed for functionality.¹¹

A recent *Air Force Times* article listed no less than ten sources for resilience programs and twenty-one separate resources for resiliency, with no overarching unifying process for access to or information about them.¹² The Department of the Air Force Resilience website attempts to unify programming information, but the problem of access remains.¹³ Highlighted programs are unit specific (Operation Neuro-Fitness) and only offered at certain bases or major commands (The Bridge), career communities (LevelUP), or geographic regions (Operation GRIT). They are not available to the Reserve Component (Family Advocacy Program) or are crisis-based (sexual assault response coordinator [SARC]). As currently designed, Air Force resilience programs promoted from an institutional perspective are exclusive and performative and fail to target core theoretical components of resilience.¹⁴

In this chapter, we will discuss minority stress and its problematic existence in the workplace along with the influence of masculine and

toxic leadership on minority groups. Although culture change in the DOD would mitigate many problems and increase the effectiveness of resilience and self-care initiatives, we limit our discussion to individual self-care programs to present the most evidence-based self-care practices and increase Airmen accessibility to these practices outside of the institution. The goal is to provide actionable content for military members to strengthen their individual readiness and buffer themselves from a negative workplace to combat personal issues that could lead to psychological and physical problems.

Due to the continued stigma of brain health, this chapter also presents an accessible discussion of the autonomous nervous system (ANS). The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems (SNS/PNS) are unconscious and largely autonomous components designed to provide humans the ability to instinctively react to their environments and to control aspects of their bodies not requiring conscious input, such as heart rate and breathing.¹⁵ A 2018 literature review identified a unique relationship between emotional dysregulation and executive function degradation with military service, suggesting that skills targeted to improving emotional dysregulation may positively impact service members.¹⁶ We provide a brief overview of the autonomous nervous system along with two common theories on how the ANS may regulate resilience, performance, and wellness.

Finally, we update the literature since the 2011 Defense Centers of Excellence study regarding current and former DOD programs targeting the ANS and provide data on two current initiatives within a military population (YogaShield and HeartMath). We conclude with recommendations for evidence-based programs that promote sustained behavioral change for self-care and resilience to assist members in mediating the impact of minority stress.

Minority Stress

Minority groups in the military include, but are not limited to, racial and ethnic minorities, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, neurodiverse persons, and religious minorities. Each of these groups may experience unique stressors and challenges in a military setting. Although there have been strides toward greater inclusivity and diversity, these groups continue to face stressors affecting their health and well-being.

Minority stress, a term first introduced by Ilan Meyer in 1995, refers to the unique, chronic, and cumulative stress experienced by individuals belonging to stigmatized minority groups.¹⁷ While the theory of minority stress evolved from research of gender minorities, there is increasing applicability to other minority groups. Members of multiple minority groups, such as a gender-minority person of color or an ethnic minority woman, face more avenues by which negative experiences can occur.¹⁸ Minority stress can manifest from several sources for service members, including but not limited to discrimination,¹⁹ harassment,²⁰ stereotyping and prejudice,²¹ cultural dissonance, and identity concealment.²²

Numerous studies indicate that individuals from ethnic minorities, women, and LGBTQ+ communities are more likely to experience minority stress in the workplace.²³ This type of stress can impact the health of minority employees, leading to poor job satisfaction, reduced productivity, and increased turnover rates.²⁴ Research in the field of minority stress consistently demonstrates these detrimental physical and emotional effects, with a recent meta-analysis supporting the theory that minority stress is the primary model to explain physical health disparity in sexual minorities.²⁵ Despite the breadth of research indicating negative health outcomes of discrimination, particularly with racial/ethnic minorities, as of 2021 there was no research on the health of US service members exposed to discrimination in the military.²⁶

Toxic Leadership

Workplace culture and toxic leadership can be a significant source of military member stress. Toxic leadership is a spectrum of behaviors that includes but is not limited to micromanaging, rigidity, poor decision-making, setting a bad example, mean-spirited aggressiveness, and a poor attitude.²⁷ As previously noted, outward discrimination and harassment also contribute to toxic workplaces. Results of working in a toxic workplace are well researched, but less is known about how these environments fully impact minority workers. General impacts are employee stress, increased employee cynicism, mistrust of leadership, higher instances of punitive discipline, discouraged creativity, lower morale, poor organizational ethics, and lower levels of followership.²⁸

Multiple studies suggest that minority groups have a higher likelihood of experiencing and identifying toxic behaviors.²⁹ Looking through a gendered lens, women may view toxic leadership behaviors more negatively and are also more attuned to negativity from a leader, while men showed a higher likelihood to collude with a toxic leader.³⁰ This phenomenon of male collusion was further demonstrated in research specifically looking at “masculinity contest cultures,” such as the military. Men in those environments had increased work engagement and found their work more meaningful due to a desire to avoid appearing weak, while women suffered typical impacts of a negative culture, including greater stress and less engagement.³¹ However, men tended to perceive authoritarianism as toxic more than women, while racial minorities experienced all aspects of toxicity more than White individuals.³² Perceptions of a toxic environment are significantly correlated with a desire to job hunt, leave employment, or both.³³ In a period of recruiting crises, retention of skilled military members should be a priority.

Minority members are attuned to toxic environments since they already have a heightened likelihood to experience negativity due to their minority status. Minority stress compounds the already challenging military lifestyle, increasing the probability of negative physical outcomes for minority military members. The repercussions of recurrent and prolonged stress are discussed next.

The Impact of Stress

The ever-growing cognitive workload of military mission sets can—without proper task/interface development, intentional skill development, and internal regulation—result in poor performance, increased errors, and personal stress.³⁴ Stress on the human autonomous system is pervasive and causes deteriorating effects. Prolonged or sustained stress results in emotional changes, including reactions of fear, frustration, and anger that directly and negatively impact relationships and social engagements.³⁵ In male-dominated career fields, female and minority stress can be significantly higher.³⁶ Additionally, stress undermines mission performance through degraded problem solving, impaired cognition, longer reaction times, and narrowed attention to detail.³⁷ Stress and its manifestation in our bodies are generated from the autonomic nervous system.

Autonomous Nervous System

The most common association individuals have with the ANS is through the fight-or-flight response. This instinctual neurochemical reaction is designed to prepare the body for action in reaction to external stimuli, such as running from or fighting a threat, and also to calm the body once the threat has subsided. These reflexive systems, very generically, involve sensory information gathered from peripheral nerves or centrally via the vagus nerve being sent to the brain.³⁸ Specific centers in the brain—particularly the amygdala, hypothalamus, and brainstem—then take those inputs and create a response that modifies the activity of autonomic nerves. The ANS monitors and regulates major physical systems such as heart rate, blood pressure, hunger, gastrointestinal activity, and the experience of pain.³⁹ However, the ANS is much more than a simple priming pump for physical exertion.

The two main components of the ANS are the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Sympathetic nervous system activation is predominant during conditions of stress—the fight-or-flight response—to provide increased blood flow to the body tissues necessary for physical exertion.⁴⁰ The parasympathetic nervous system is predominant in resting conditions—the so-called “rest and digest” response—such as through increased blood flow to the gastrointestinal tract.⁴¹ The systems maintain distinct functions and anatomy that innervate most tissues and work opposite each other to maintain homeostasis.

Sympathetic nervous system. Preparing the body for physical exertion in response to stress is a key role of the SNS. The main nerves responsible for SNS actions run along both sides of the spinal cord and have innervations throughout the body. When a stress is introduced, the SNS signals initiate multiple simultaneous reactions that include, but are not limited to, release of the hormones cortisol and epinephrine (adrenaline), pupil dilation to enhance vision, increased heart rate to increase cardiac output, bronchodilation to increase oxygenation of the blood, decreased gut motility and insulin secretion, and vasodilation to increase blood pressure.⁴²

Activation of the SNS “often involves mass discharge of the entire system.”⁴³ As a result, a human has the necessary physical responses to escape a predator or engage in a firefight with an enemy. The design of the SNS was a necessary adaptation in early humans, but

misinterpreted or chronic activation of the system can cause problems. Most modern-day, first-world stressors are not the potentially life-threatening events our ancestors faced, yet the SNS interprets those stressors with the same “mass discharge” of neurochemicals and neuronal activation. A traumatic combat memory or high-tempo operational workplace environment elicits the same automatic physiological response as being chased by a predator. In today’s workplace, this chronic activation of the SNS can lead to conditions such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), obesity, insomnia, anxiety, and depression.⁴⁴

Parasympathetic nervous system. Ensuring the body can relax, rest, and conserve energy is the purpose of the PNS. The main pathways of the PNS arise from the cranial nerves, near the brainstem, and the sacral nerves, located in the pelvic region.⁴⁵ The vagus nerve, known as cranial nerve X, holds 75 percent of all parasympathetic fibers, making it a key component of the PNS.⁴⁶ The PNS works to reset the body following SNS activation, primarily through the hormone acetylcholine, and includes reactions such as pupil constriction, decreased heart rate, increased digestion, increased urine secretion, decreased amygdala response, and increased relaxation.⁴⁷

Unlike the SNS, the nerves of the PNS are not as diffuse, and a response is thus more localized. Instead of a whole-body activation, the PNS triggers specific areas to achieve effects. Without the PNS, the impacts of SNS activation would remain, and the chronic issues described previously would occur in everyone. Damage to the spinal nerves from trauma, illness such as Horner’s syndrome, or prolonged activation of the SNS can cause PNS dysregulation.⁴⁸ This dysregulation can manifest issues such as malabsorption in the gut, urinary and sexual dysfunction, drooping eyelids and small pupils (miosis), and depression.⁴⁹ An increased area of research over the past decade has focused on the PNS and its physiological modes of action, impact on mood and self-regulation, and effects of external therapies promoting PNS activation to counter the persistent problems of chronically triggered SNS reactions.

Theories about ANS Regulation

ANS regulation is a growing focus area in multiple disciplines, from psychiatric treatment to mobile application development. The ANS holds a key to understanding human instinctive reactions and provides

an opportunity to explore the mechanisms by which humans can influence or control their own autonomic responses, largely through actions influencing the vagus nerve. Two of the most common theories grounding the research in this area are the Porges polyvagal theory and the neurovisceral integration model.

Porges polyvagal theory. Stephen Porges's theory postulates that vertebrate evolution, particularly in mammals, produced changes to the vagus nerve pathways regulating the heart, resulting in a "face-heart connection" that facilitated and reinforced social engagement and enabled social interaction to influence visceral states.⁵⁰ In layman's terms, the human nervous system evolved to promote sociality and to respond to and be influenced by the feelings of safety that arise from such sociality. The polyvagal theory hypothesizes that the neural circuitry necessary to activate the PNS, specifically vagal pathways, evolved through human communal activity, and the safety provided by human social engagement further reinforced the PNS.⁵¹ The theory places ANS activation as the central variable in feelings of psychological safety.

Porges believed that by activating the PNS, particularly through cardiac vagal control, humans can downregulate from a stress reactive state (SNS activation) into a calmer and more psychologically accessible state. Further, consciously attuning the PNS and vagal activation could impact instinctive reactions and promote prosocial behaviors.⁵² Components of Porges's theory draw criticism. The term "polyvagal" is misleading because the vagus nerve is not the cause of PNS activation but merely a transmitter, some of the evolutionary claims associated with the theory are discounted as inaccurate, many anatomical mechanisms of action are incorrect, and no empirical research exists to prove the theory correct.⁵³ Additionally, from a therapeutic perspective, the prioritization of social engagement and a ventral vagal state over client-informed treatment can be detrimental to populations where sociality is physically taxing, emotionally harmful, or both, such as those with neurodiversity.⁵⁴

Neurovisceral integration model. Julian Thayer and Richard Lane's model looks at the ANS's functional and structural components to understand emotional regulation and dysregulation.⁵⁵ Key elements of the model are that certain neural structures "involved in cognitive, affective, and autonomic regulation are related to heart rate variability (HRV) and cognitive performance."⁵⁶ The vagus nerve is believed to contribute to cardiac functioning, and therefore activities that influence vagal activation—the "rest and digest" mode—promote positive

wellness outcomes and better self-regulation.⁵⁷ This model emphasizes the heart and activities affecting heart rate as conduits to enhance brain function, decrease emotional reactivity, and improve self-regulation.

The neurovisceral integration model has empirical research, through neuroimaging and physiological and pharmacological data, supporting the interrelationship of the heart and mind via the vagus nerve.⁵⁸ Multiple studies have demonstrated that vagal modulation could positively impact cognitive functioning, adaptive responses under stress, and emotional control.⁵⁹ Several interventions utilized in recent studies sought to impact the vagal response through heart rate variability to include paced breathing, biofeedback, and heart rate monitoring. Another research area is the correlation between self-reported resilience and PNS reactivity.⁶⁰

Regardless of the grounding model, research suggests a relationship between emotion and ANS activation.⁶¹ DODI 6400.09 guides the services to develop interventions to combat self-harm and improve resilience through environmental and prevention-based practices. Prevention-based interventions can be accomplished through a variety of ANS-directed skills. In 2011, the DCoE released a review of mind-body skills for ANS regulation. The next section updates that review.

Literature Review

The intent of the DCoE 2011 review was to highlight promising techniques for regulating stress via the autonomic nervous system. It focused on thirteen strategies that were used in a military context and could be incorporated into existing programs at that time. Since 2011, research for some of these techniques has increased but for others has languished. In this update, we briefly review literature focusing on evidence globally due to a lack of studies using military samples for most of the techniques. Finally, this update aligns with the original review by categorizing three types of ANS stress-regulating practices: (1) breath exercises; (2) body-based tension modulation exercises; and (3) mental focus, such as mindfulness techniques.⁶²

Breath Exercises

Breathing is one of the few autonomic activities that can be consciously controlled. Research suggests that exercises aimed at slowing, pacing, or focusing on breathing can reduce anxiety and reactivity,

improve focus, decrease heart rate, and impact resilience. Breathing techniques are relatively easy to add to existing training, often available at no cost, easily transportable, and usable in almost any environment. Breath techniques reviewed include paced breathing, Breathe2Relax, and Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY).

Paced breathing (PB). Inhaling and exhaling at predetermined rates is the essence of paced breathing. The technique had evidence of positive effect in parasympathetic nervous system activation during the 2011 report, and the recent literature supports and adds to that knowledge. Newer terms have arisen to refer to PB, such as “tactical breathing” and “box breathing.”⁶³ A 2017 meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found that slow breathing exercise can reduce resting heart rate and blood pressure.⁶⁴ PB studies typically use heart rate variability (HRV) as the dependent variable where increased HRV is indicative of vagal, or PNS, activation.

More nuanced research now evaluates the impact of specific breathing rates, measured in hertz (Hz), where normal PB is 0.25 Hz and slow PB is 0.1 Hz. Since the effect of PB on HRV is largely accepted, new research is focused on the anatomical and neurologic pathways to determine the specific mechanism of action.⁶⁵ The particular impacts of PB include increased cardiac vagal activity,⁶⁶ higher emotional control and less arousal,⁶⁷ increased alertness,⁶⁸ improvement in depressive symptoms,⁶⁹ and improved anxiety symptoms and athletic/artistic performance.⁷⁰

A repeated issue noted in some studies was some psychological discomfort with paced breathing, as the pacing was slower than normal rate breathing.⁷¹ Training and practice of the technique noted better psychological outcomes related to perceived breathing discomfort.⁷² More research is needed comparing slow and normal PB, the effect of PB on different groups, longevity of results, and the exact PNS pathway of impact. Paced breathing is a valid evidence-based practice for improving physiological and psychological states.

Breathe2Relax. The National Center for Telehealth and Technology developed the Breathe2Relax application in 2011,⁷³ although some research and sites credit the Defense Health Agency, and a meta-study indicates two possible versions.⁷⁴ At the time of the original DCoE study, there was no research validating the use of the technology. The Breathe2Relax app is free to download to Android and iPhone platforms and requires an internet connection for certain features. Breathe2Relax is mentioned as a tool in multiple studies, but few had experimental

designs with adequate sample sizes specifically demonstrating the app's effectiveness.⁷⁵

Since 2011, the use of technology to complement behavioral health treatment or as standalone self-help tools increased. Most studies reviewed digital technology and apps, such as Breathe2Relax, more globally⁷⁶ regarding usability,⁷⁷ use as therapeutic supplements,⁷⁸ and participants' willingness to use them⁷⁹ versus app effectiveness on the target behavior. Overall results on the effectiveness of applications remain scarce, and although many apps offer evidence-based interventions and may be suited to foster the intended resilience or wellness effect, more study is needed on the precise effect of these tools.⁸⁰ The main emphasis of Breathe2Relax is to train and prompt the user in diaphragmatic breathing.

Diaphragmatic breathing is a deep breathing technique that promotes movement of the abdomen and diaphragm during breathing as opposed to chest and shoulder movement. Typically, users place their hands on their abdomen and upper chest to confirm which is moving and to validate the abdominal rise.⁸¹ Unlike paced breathing, diaphragmatic breathing focuses on the depth and movement of the breath as opposed to pacing and speed. One comparative study showed no significant difference between PB and diaphragmatic breathing on HRV.⁸² Additionally, pacing can be used in conjunction with diaphragmatic breathing.⁸³ A recent meta-analysis of diaphragmatic breathing indicates that more research is needed, but it may help reduce stress and anxiety, improve respiratory function in pulmonary disease patients, and reduce hypertension.⁸⁴ As with paced breathing, the technique is free, portable, and easy to train and can be accomplished without digital technology.

Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (SKY). SKY or Warrior Breath is a yoga breathing technique that uses four types of controlled breathing patterns while focusing on a chant and the body.⁸⁵ It is primarily a breathing exercise and does not have positional elements like traditional yoga.⁸⁶ The breathing patterns are a cyclical mix of slow, medium, and fast breathing, with a return to slow cycles, a five-minute rest, and an introductory set of different slow and fast breathing techniques. Since 2011, research on SKY suggests improvement in self-report measures on perceived stress, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction,⁸⁷ improved cognitive function,⁸⁸ improved post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms,⁸⁹ and changes in brain rhythms.⁹⁰

Our review found no standard SKY protocol in experimental designs, with differences noted in length of intervention (30–60 minutes), breath cycles per minute (some studies were half the speed of others), and initial orientation and training for this intervention (four days online to five-day intensive in-person workshops).⁹¹ Some research omitted any parameters of the SKY intervention,⁹² did not use an intervention,⁹³ used a modified program for veterans,⁹⁴ or referred to using the Art of Living method without specific parameters noted.⁹⁵ Additionally, much of the research referenced in new studies on broader psychological impacts of SKY was performed before 2011.

The variety of breathing speeds used in SKY and a lack of standardization make it difficult to determine which specific element of the practice is producing results, although some studies showed that slow-paced yoga breathing affected HRV.⁹⁶ Most studies had small sample sizes or no experimental design. Other studies noted limited or indeterminant impact of SKY but offered it as a possible adjunct tool for current therapeutic interventions.⁹⁷ Unlike previous breathing tools, SKY requires a certified trainer (in person or online), an intense orientation period, and frequent practice.⁹⁸ There is no research comparing in-person to online training or assessing the length of practice required for long-term effects. Once a person is trained, the skills are transportable but may not be appropriate for practice in all locations due to the time commitment.

Research into breathing and the relation to the ANS has expanded over the past decade with mounting evidence that slow or paced breathing actively impacts heart rate variability and cardiac vagal activity, indicators of PNS activation.

Body-Based Tension Modulation Exercises

Body-based exercises work to reduce stress postures and reactivity of stress hormones. These techniques may impact stress management and PTSD through different postures and movements. Currently, two of the reviewed techniques are proprietary, and little research is available outside the organizations that developed them. The reviewed programs are yoga, Tension/Trauma Releasing Exercises (TRE), and the Trauma Resiliency Model (TRM).

Yoga. Practicing yoga involves body postures, breathing, and meditation. Certified instructors or yogis teach yoga either in person or online. Typical practice is thirty to sixty minutes weekly and requires

adequate space for the asanas or body postures. No pre-training is required to practice, although frequent practice allows familiarity with the postures. The 2011 review discussed yoga's proposed benefit to movement, stress management, and cognition but noted small sample sizes and a lack of ANS measurements as detractors from confirmatory results.⁹⁹ A meta-analysis of pre-2011 meta-analyses corroborated yoga's positive impact on mental health and pain-related impairment while noting the need for more randomized controlled trials and larger samples.¹⁰⁰ Recent research still suffers from small samples,¹⁰¹ samples with yoga experience (a confounding variable),¹⁰² or designs that do not differentiate the elements of yoga practice, making identifying ANS mechanisms difficult.¹⁰³

Since 2011, some studies of yoga practice incorporated bioindicators of ANS impact, such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), heart rate monitoring, and blood tests. Evidence supports yoga's impact on the ANS and indicates that its practice improves neuroplasticity and reduces depression severity,¹⁰⁴ improves cerebral oxygenation,¹⁰⁵ increases grey matter volume,¹⁰⁶ enhances brain wave activity,¹⁰⁷ decreases salivary cortisol (a stress marker),¹⁰⁸ and impacts heart rate variability.¹⁰⁹ A 2017 meta-analysis suggested interventions that included yoga asanas were associated with reduced cortisol, blood pressure, resting heart rate, and fasting blood glucose.¹¹⁰ A 2019 meta-analysis of new research using brain imaging determined that yoga practice had a positive effect on multiple brain structures, including the amygdala and hippocampus.¹¹¹ Yoga research also continues to support the stress management effects of practice, and its use as an adjunct treatment can be considered.¹¹² These studies expand the knowledge of yoga's benefits holistically, although more differentiated research is needed on the individual elements of yoga, with larger sample sizes and longitudinal designs.

Tension/Trauma Release. Neurogenic tremor is a brainstem response triggered to deactivate the SNS following a fight-or-flight response.¹¹³ People may experience this reaction naturally as shakiness following a shock or scare or tremors when extremely nervous. Developed by Dr. David Berceci, Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises (or TRE) are a series of exercises designed to evoke that brainstem response of shaking or tremors to help heal trauma and reduce stress.¹¹⁴ At the time of the 2011 DCoE study, the technique had been used by pre-deploying military personnel but had no experimental research supporting efficacy.¹¹⁵ Currently, TRE remains poorly studied. The available

research is sparse and generally over five years old, had small sample sizes, used nonrandomized or uncontrolled samples, and relied on self-report measures.

More recent studies demonstrate some support that TRE increased heart rate variability¹¹⁶ and positively affected self-reported sleep and stress¹¹⁷ and self-reported skill performance under pressure.¹¹⁸ There was no standard intervention modality identified among studies, with TRE ranging from twice-weekly group practice for four weeks to ten weeks of training with group and individual practice. Two recent studies had either one participant or no follow-up response from participants in which to evaluate effectiveness.¹¹⁹ Only one recent study utilized a randomized controlled intervention (TRE, placebo, control groups) with follow-up. There were no differences noted between the groups in depression, PTSD, insomnia, or physical health; however, the TRE group did demonstrate improved cognitive function and working memory.¹²⁰

TRE studies all recommended further evaluation and larger samples to support preliminary outcomes. TRE is easy to learn, accessible, able to be trained to large groups in person or online, and portable, with no known contraindications. There are fewer than thirteen certified TRE trainers in North America, and the program is proprietary. Scaling this program would require investment in DOD-trained certified providers at an approximate cost of \$3,000 each. Class costs range from \$25 to \$250 and can be attended prescheduled or on a drop-in basis through the TRE website.

Trauma Resiliency Model. This model utilizes nine biologically based skills for sensory awareness to improve emotional regulation. The foundations of TRM stem from multiple theories that individuals can learn to stabilize and master their physiological symptoms of anxiety and trauma (essentially SNS activation from memories, thoughts, or triggers) through increasing awareness of the body's responses to fear, arousal, and anxiety.¹²¹ The mechanism of action for TRM remains unknown, but it is theorized as similar to mindfulness (discussed in next section). The skills involve increased attention and awareness to feelings of anxiety, hyperarousal, fear, and general SNS activation. This self-awareness is built upon with movement skills to ground, distract, or activate the nervous system to return people to their "resilience zone" or natural and balanced state.¹²²

There was little research on TRM during the DCoE review. There remains scarce empirical research on TRM globally and only one

dissertation with a randomized controlled design, which studied the autonomic interactions from TRM (cardiac vagal tone responded to focused breathing).¹²³ Much of the available research discussed the theory and use of body-based treatments for PTSD and other trauma¹²⁴ and the usability of the training.¹²⁵ Recent studies support that TRM may decrease depressive symptoms and distress indicators, improve well-being, decrease somatic symptoms, and improve resiliency.¹²⁶ Training can occur in a few hours, is portable and easy to implement, can be complemented with the iChill app, can be provided to a group, and costs \$25 and up. Additionally, TRM concepts are cross-culturally applicable, providing an option for diverse groups. Anyone providing TRM must be certified through the Trauma Resource Institute, with a level 1 course costing \$850. Nonclinical personnel are allowed to train only the first six skills.¹²⁷

Body-based exercises have some evidence of positive impact on psychological symptoms of stress and enhancing resilience. More research with larger samples is needed to determine these exercises' mechanism of action on the ANS, particularly TRE and TRM, and quantitative impact on the physiological processes.

Mental Focus Exercises

Mindfulness research has exponentially expanded over the past decade. Research suggests mindfulness and other mental focus activities can positively affect memory, attention, anxiety, resilience, and stress management. Like breathing, mindfulness and meditation skills are portable and relatively easy to integrate into existing resilience programs. Mindfulness, in particular, has many expanded interventions from Mindfulness at Work and Mindfulness-Based Resilience Training derived from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) curriculum, online courses in MBSR and other mindful practices, and mobile applications such as Headspace. Mindfulness programs reviewed are Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness Mind-Fitness Training (MMFT), and Yoga nidra (iRest).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. Jon Kabat-Zinn, University of Massachusetts, created the MBSR course, currently the most common and well-validated training program for mindfulness addressing mental health issues like depression and anxiety.¹²⁸ MBSR is an eight-week course with weekly classes of two to three hours and individual practice of forty-five minutes daily for six days each week.

Practice consists of specific meditation on breath focus, mental body scan, and present-centeredness. The course is provided in person or online, with paid and free options, and research suggests that both versions are effective.¹²⁹ Mindfulness practice after the course is based on the individual and can be supported with mobile applications. A core tenet of mindfulness that differentiates it from meditation and TRM is the nonjudgment of sensations, thoughts, and emotions experienced during practice. This nonjudgmental attitude is hypothesized as the active mental component that makes mindfulness effective.¹³⁰

Newer studies on MBSR impact consistently validate a perception of reduced stress and improved resilience in a variety of populations.¹³¹ Two systemic reviews highlighted positive biologic impacts of mindfulness on the allostatic load, the amygdala, brain waves, and brain structures.¹³² Since then, research has either discovered or validated the biologic impacts of MBSR to include increased brain wave activity in areas related to lower anxiety, higher positive emotions, and high attention;¹³³ increased sensitivity to interoceptive signals;¹³⁴ increased connectivity between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex;¹³⁵ reduced serum alpha-amylase (lower SNS activity);¹³⁶ decreased pain sensitivity;¹³⁷ and reduced interocular (eye) pressure and increased optic disc perfusion.¹³⁸

MBSR has an upfront training requirement, yet the benefits of mindfulness training appear worth the investment. The addition of online modalities provides flexibility and privacy in course delivery and decreases the need for DOD-specific trainers. Post-course practice is free and portable, has no space restrictions, can range from small inoculations of mindful moments to a full forty-five-minute practice, and can be complemented with prerecorded sessions or mobile applications. The DOD initially invested in Headspace in 2020, providing this mindfulness-based mobile app for free, and has recently reinvested in Headspace programming at two Air Force installations.¹³⁹

Mindfulness Mind-Fitness Training. Dr. Elizabeth Stanley developed MMFT to provide the benefits of mindfulness to individuals in high-stress environments. The DOD funded the program from 2008 to 2016, resulting in four studies demonstrating the impact of MMFT on combat troops, including improved emotional reactivity, memory, and stress awareness.¹⁴⁰ An additional study on this cohort showed biological impacts of MMFT, such as enhanced cardiac recovery and breathing rate following stress and lower SNS activation chemicals.¹⁴¹ In 2020, a new online MMFT was released and is a

proprietary program.¹⁴² The online course is delivered in eight sessions for approximately \$400; however, the website offers a complementary version to military members if they apply.

The main difference between MBSR and MMFT is the specific addition of trauma-sensitive exercises, drawn from body-based traditions, to address any dysregulation that may occur during meditation and allow the individual to downregulate those negative responses and increase resilience.¹⁴³ There is less research supporting the effectiveness of MMFT specifically, but available studies are robust, using control groups and randomization. The findings suggest that MMFT practice may protect against working memory and cognitive degradation,¹⁴⁴ reduce mind wandering,¹⁴⁵ and modulate the brain response to negative stimuli.¹⁴⁶ The addition of body-based exercises may confound the data on MMFT and the specific mechanism of action providing benefits. More research is recommended to support MMFT's overall effectiveness and delineate which elements of practice are effective.

Like MBSR, MMFT has an up-front training requirement. MMFT appears portable and flexible, and its adoption may be tailored to need and location depending on the extent of body-based practices. The online curriculum offers flexibility and privacy in course delivery, but there is no train-the-trainer course currently, making a scalable version difficult.

Yoga nidra. Dr. Richard Miller developed iRest in 2003 following a visit to Walter Reed Medical Center to investigate the impact of yoga nidra, a deep relaxation or “local sleep” practice,¹⁴⁷ in patients with PTSD.¹⁴⁸ The practice consists of sixty- to seventy-five-minute classes with meditation covering ten sequential stages, including a body scan, breath awareness, neutralization of negative emotions, and present-centeredness.¹⁴⁹ Because there is no asana or movement component to yoga nidra, this practice is considered distinct from traditional yoga. The 2011 DCoE review provided no validated research evidence for the effectiveness of iRest, although preliminary research detailing the biologic impact of yoga nidra on PNS brain waves was available.¹⁵⁰

Over the past decade, researchers found evidence that yoga nidra may positively impact the ANS and be a useful adjunct for treatment of PTSD and military sexual trauma.¹⁵¹ iRest has fewer targeted studies, and the website contains unpublished reports along with a few studies. General research on yoga nidra suggests the practice may decrease stress and improve concentration,¹⁵² aid medical treatments

in individuals who cannot perform asanas,¹⁵³ positively impact depression and anxiety,¹⁵⁴ improve well-being,¹⁵⁵ and improve sleep quality.¹⁵⁶ Biologic research on yoga nidra, to include iRest, also indicates an ANS impact, particularly in changing the heart rate,¹⁵⁷ increasing PNS brain waves,¹⁵⁸ and lengthening sleep time.¹⁵⁹ An upcoming study on yoga nidra and sleep will include physiological data for HRV, brain activity as measured by electroencephalogram (EEG), and respiratory rate.¹⁶⁰

Implementation of yoga nidra may depend on the source. Trained or certified instructors deliver all yoga nidra classes, which can be completed in person or online and be group based. A proprietary program of yoga nidra is iRest, with its own certification for instructors. The website offers drop-in and free classes (irest.org). Individual iRest class costs range from a free seven-day trial to \$100 for a workshop. The level 1 instructor training cost is \$1,600 and offered in a hybrid or online format. General yoga nidra classes (not iRest) are available free online, and instructor training courses typically cost over \$500. Like traditional yoga, yoga nidra and iRest demonstrate some impact on the autonomous nervous system and would benefit from more differentiated research with larger sample sizes and longitudinal designs.

Mental focus exercises, particularly MBSR, have a robust body of evidence on practice impacts to psychological and physiological symptoms. More research with larger samples is needed to determine detailed mechanisms of action on the ANS and more quantitative impact on the physiological processes particularly for iRest and MMFT.

The above discussion on the update to the 2011 DCoE review focused on thirteen strategies in three categories: (1) breath exercises, (2) body-based tension modulation exercises, and (3) mental focus techniques. The review highlights multiple evidence-based ANS-impacting exercises that could be taught to military personnel; are affordable, portable, and scalable; and provide a skill-based approach in accordance with DODI 6400.09 guidance targeting resilience.

YogaShield and HeartMath

Two additional programs in the DOD that show promise at promoting resilience and align with previously reviewed techniques are YogaShield and HeartMath.

YogaShield

YogaShield is an applied resilience program with four primary components: breath work, physical drills, cognitive declarations, and neurological reset. The focus is on three culturally competent domains: process stress, build resilience, and enhance performance. YogaShield's mission is bringing the philosophy of yoga through somatic and cognitive exercise into practical applications for first responders and military members.¹⁶¹ Taught by certified instructors, the thirty- to sixty-minute classes require enough spacing for a traditional yoga class using body movements.

This program was selected as part of fiscal year 2021's Innovation Incubator pilot programs at the National Guard Bureau. YogaShield falls under the Warrior Fitness and Resilience Division as a systematic skill development program focusing on the neurological foundation to stress response and practical utilization of resilience skills through somatic and cognitive exercises. Currently, there are no peer-reviewed studies on YogaShield programming specifically; however, the elements of breath work and yoga movements, reviewed above, have evidentiary support. Additionally, there are multiple pilot studies in progress at National Guard units to establish feasibility and acceptance of a train-the-trainer model for scalability and the adaptability of the program to classified or restrictive environments.

HeartMath

HeartMath heart rate variability coherence feedback training has existed for over twenty-five years and is already available in the military and veteran population, most prominently in Veterans Affairs and in the Regular Army and Navy components. HeartMath is a form of biofeedback where a device displays the heart rhythm to the user and training is provided to allow users to change their rhythm, through self-awareness and breath work, and create physiological coherence.¹⁶² Certification is required for trainers, including medical professionals, with costs ranging from \$200 and higher.

HeartMath and other biofeedback techniques have evidence of positive impact on HRV, with increasing use of mobile applications and virtual reality to enhance accessibility.¹⁶³ Some criticism of HeartMath and biofeedback is the requirement of technology, with HeartMath costing \$179 and up for equipment, thus potentially decreasing accessibility, compliance, and portability, particularly in secure locations.¹⁶⁴

Some research is mixed on the impact of biofeedback itself versus the breathing component that is part of the training.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, mindfulness training may have a stronger effect than biofeedback on stress reduction.¹⁶⁶ HeartMath is used as part of the Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Performance and Resilience Enhancement Program (CSF-PREP)—formerly known as the Army Center for Enhanced Performance—and the West Point Center for Enhanced Performance as a component of sports psychology. Air Force clinical behavioral health providers have also used this tool.

Conclusion

The military remains a stressful occupation. Years of overseas engagements, mission transitions, and home front upheaval continue to negatively impact members' readiness and health. Members of minority groups have compounded stresses that further negative outcomes. The long-standing, pervasive social behavioral issues in the military indicate a force that is stressed and negatively impact retention and recruiting, particularly for minority groups. The DOD developed guidelines to promote programs that enhance personal resilience through skill development for healthy coping, emotional intelligence, resilience, and communication.

Repeated stimulation of the sympathetic system following high-stress incidents or resulting from a high cognitive workload can lead to chronic activation and dysregulation of the ANS. This dysregulation causes psychological impacts such as anger, frustration, emotional exhaustion, psychological burnout, and depression as well as physical health impacts such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and immune system degradation. Research supports that resilience and readiness can be enhanced with improved control over autonomic nervous system responses, decreasing sympathetic (SNS) activation and promoting parasympathetic (PNS) activation.¹⁶⁷ As noted earlier, higher heart rate variability may act as a conduit to enhance brain function, decrease emotional reactivity, and improve self-regulation and also serve as a physiological marker of resilience.¹⁶⁸ Activities and techniques that impact HRV and the cardiac vagal response offer a pathway to activating the PNS and regulating the ANS for increased resilience and overall well-being.

We reviewed various programs used or in use by the DOD to impact the ANS, updated the 2011 DCoE assessment with new literature, and discussed two additional programs for consideration. A wide variety of programs teach self-care skills to enhance resilience. While many have some effectiveness in impacting the ANS, most programs either lack a thorough evidence base to warrant further consideration, are difficult to scale due to cost or requirements, or are not flexible enough to adapt to military environments. As such, we recommend three programs based on low cost; high scalability, portability, and clinical evidence of effectiveness; and minimal disruption to a military member: paced breathing, yoga, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

Paced breathing is a valid, evidence-based practice for improving physiological and psychological states; it is easily trained, can be accomplished anywhere, and is free. Paced breathing research can focus on comparing slow versus normal PB, the impact of PB on different groups, longevity of results, and the exact PNS pathway of impact. Yoga research supports the stress management effects of practice, while the breathing elements may impact the ANS directly. Yoga is easy to practice, and even though it has some space limits, it is adaptable to any location and physical limitation. The individual elements of yoga require more research, with larger sample sizes and longitudinal designs. Finally, although Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction has an up-front training requirement, the benefits of mindfulness training appear worth the investment. Practice is easy and portable, has no space restrictions, and can be complemented with prerecorded sessions or mobile applications. All three practices are accessible to military members without the need for institutional DOD programs, although positive promotion for each practice through instructor funding, time to practice, and social support would advance a culture of wellness.

In this chapter, we introduced the problems with minority stress and presented a case for practices and skill development that capitalize on and target the autonomic nervous system. These self-care practices can serve as mediators to the negative impacts of minority stress while larger cultural shifts continue. As the DOD looks toward future wellness initiatives and readiness training, it should also seek to promote programs that are easily and readily accessible. Such programs enhance and bolster individual autonomous regulatory systems to improve member resilience and mission performance and decrease the institutionalization of wellness. While positive culture change in DOD organizations is the preferable goal, the authors sought to provide

members—particularly minority members—with personal brain health tools to shield and protect themselves from negative workplace environments and with ways to cope with military-related stress.

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Notes

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Chapter 2

Constant Cultural Adaptation of Airmen

Glenn D. Giron

United States active duty military personnel may be required to travel to distant places whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Annually, the Department of Defense (DOD) spends four billion dollars to transfer active duty military personnel and, if possible, their dependents to a new duty location.¹ Service members get orders for temporary duty (TDY) or permanent change of station (PCS) assignments depending on mission requirements. There are times when they do not bring their dependents because of assignment restrictions as dictated by their reporting instructions. On average, military members deploy without their dependents for two six- to twelve-month tours (some even more) and relocate with their dependents to a new duty station typically every twenty-four to thirty-six months in a twenty-year career.² Military members are expected to learn, adapt to, and overcome any obstacle they face, regardless of the challenge. Normally, service members receive initial training from their gaining units before relocating to prepare them for any hurdles, such as relocation budget constraints, family separation, and adjustment to the local culture.

In the United States Air Force (USAF), Airmen identified to relocate overseas, voluntarily or involuntarily, receive an initial welcome packet emailed from their gaining unit. It contains vital information about their new job and unit, the local culture, and the unit's surrounding areas. After arriving at their new location, Airmen are briefed on the base and unit mission and vision and the host country's and local area's customs and norms. Airmen will have concerns before and after relocating, whether to a foreign country or stateside. Those moving outside the United States must adjust to their new organization in addition to the local culture; thus, they need to increase their cultural intelligence so they can interact successfully whether on or off the job.³ If Airmen do not effectively adapt to their new environment, the outcomes could be detrimental to the USAF mission, Airmen's family members, or even to Airmen themselves. Despite having a unifying

For simplicity and readability, the terms "Airman" and "Airmen" encompass all Department of the Air Force members, including US Air Force service members, US Space Force Guardians, and civilian and military personnel in all job titles and positions from entry-level to top leadership.

military culture, Airmen and their dependents must be trained initially and afforded programs to foster their cross-cultural competence to better perform at work and adapt to the national culture of their new location.

Cultural Identity

All individuals have a national culture they embrace and have accepted; it is the identity that defines who they are, whether it stems from religious, ethnic, cultural, or other influences. National culture affects how individuals think, act, and react on the basis of collected data and accepted practices—similar to a computer absorbing and recording software, ready to execute actions from accumulated information.⁴ People will act and react to situations based on accepted norms and culture.

Organizations also have a culture of their own that assists them in communicating and operating through accepted guidelines that they promulgate. Organizational culture is an invisible social force that propels the organization to act toward an objective as fueled by accepted beliefs, norms, language or jargon, and practices based on individual and collective behaviors.⁵ Employees adjust their cultural norms to blend with the prevailing culture of the organization to complement and adapt to their working environment. They observe and learn the organization's culture to succeed and to better understand how to conduct themselves in that environment. Culture in business means “the way things are done here” or their unique way of conducting transactions and engaging specific to the organization. The military, as an organization, also has a unique culture of its own.

Members of the military function according to each service's respective dogma that they have come to embrace since boot camp. On the surface, they are known for accepting and following the bureaucratic chain of command that focuses on the results of their actions; they have been prepared to operate teams and be flexible and adaptable in uncertain environments to achieve mission success.⁶ Service members in all branches are well trained to follow their respective rules and regulations as set forth by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and service-specific instructions.

Throughout history, Airmen have been known to be innovators and successful warriors on the battlefield. The USAF culture clings to its

core values of “integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do”; therefore, it has developed a culture of learning, adjusting, adapting, and dominating on the battlefield. All Airmen—regardless of age, gender, color, or other differences—are expected to have an adaptable mindset for the sake of accomplishing the mission.⁷ In essence, Airmen who have embraced the USAF’s military culture are able to confront and overcome challenges because their goal has always been mission accomplishment.

Cross-Cultural Competence

The DOD has noted its troops’ lack of cross-cultural competence in war engagements over the years. It identified the need for improving service members’ cultural understanding, training, and discipline to facilitate proper conduct when they are working in another country. Although military personnel are expected to follow the law of armed conflict and have been initially briefed on conduct requirements during war, there have been instances of actions toward locals punishable under the UCMJ.⁸ Even in peacetime, service members from all branches stationed overseas can make offensive remarks or act inappropriately owing to ignorance and lack of training. Such situations sometimes drive the locals to agitate for US service members to be expelled from the host country. To ameliorate such circumstances, the DOD has embraced the theoretical construct of cross-cultural competence. Cross-cultural competence is a learned skill based on training, continual education, and acquired and developed experiences used to effectively act in or react to culturally complex settings.⁹ Since its implementation, cross-cultural competence training has promoted awareness of one’s own national culture while interacting with others and an understanding of how to appropriately act or react in complex cultural communications. Before arriving at an overseas location, Airmen receive initial culture-specific distance learning training for countries where they are most commonly assigned. Airmen are prepped for cross-cultural competence training only when deploying to Asian and Middle East countries; they are not culturally educated and trained to engage on a global scale. In the event they will be stationed at a different location, they receive little to no training about effectively communicating in that country or understanding its national culture.

Regardless of whether they get such training, most Airmen will seek out information so they can accomplish their mission.

Military Training

Another effect of earlier wars, such as the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, is the change in the operational stance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in understanding and using cultural aspects of countries to improve military operations. To successfully carry out its mission, NATO developed training concepts for operations in complex cultural environments. Members are extensively briefed on the target country's language and culture so they can consider these aspects when conducting exercises and simulations for military operations and communicating.¹⁰ The training was designed to equip the warfighter to conduct operations more effectively, establish good working relationships with the locals, and project a positive image of the NATO country's military.

In the USAF, Airmen may lack the information and simulated training platform to successfully engage with local nationals. Although other services are more physically engaged when dealing and communicating with local nationals because of their mission set, Airmen should have the same resources available to them so they will be able to successfully execute with the same skill set when called upon. Further, Airmen are not made aware of the plethora of cultures in the US stemming from the population's diverse ethnic backgrounds. To better convey these differences and support all Airmen in the organization, the USAF implemented an instruction on diversity and inclusion (D&I) to foster equal treatment and respect for all cultures. For example, in 2020, the DOD published several instructions, including DOD Instruction (DODI) 1020.05, *DOD Diversity and Inclusion Management Program*; DODI 1350.02, *DOD Military Equal Opportunity Program*; and DODI 1020.04, *Harassment Prevention and Responses for DOD Civilian Employees*.¹¹

Diversity and Inclusion Training

To follow through with the DOD's directive, the USAF inaugurated D&I instruction to promote respect and acceptance among Airmen coming from different cultures and backgrounds for the betterment

of mission accomplishment. The core values of the USAF are the guiding principles for the establishment of D&I; in conjunction with the Air Force's military culture of innovation, USAF leaders are directing Airmen to establish clear, open lines of communication for the efficient execution of the D&I program.¹² The USAF has a vision of its own military culture and how that vision encompasses the different ethnicities, genders, and cultural backgrounds that comprise it. D&I training initially occurs at Basic Military Training (BMT). It is reinforced at technical training schools where service members learn about their jobs, and it is further supplemented in professional military education (PME) courses in every tier and through annual course discussions as designed by the D&I council at the USAF level.

At the unit level, unit commanders hold D&I councils accountable to ensure D&I initiatives are being conducted as directed by higher headquarters. These councils meet monthly in preparation for ethnic and gender-specific commemorations during the year and request volunteers to spearhead events and advertise them to all units for maximum participation. The councils also lead discussions in the units to help ensure that all service members are represented, their needs are addressed, and the work environment is free of discriminatory practices.

Airmen

Airmen first transition from civilian to military life the moment they graduate from BMT and technical training; they will then report to their first duty location, either one they selected or the Air Force assigned, overseas or stateside. To lighten their anxieties and answer their questions as they transition, Airmen are assigned a sponsor a couple of months before their Report No Later Than Date. Sponsors act as a liaison between the gaining unit and the inbound Airman; they provide information about the local area and their leadership and assist the Airman throughout their transition. Sponsors are usually assigned according to their rank, age, or marital status to match that of the inbound Airmen's. However, some bases do not have a solid onboarding program, and the gaining unit's lack of communication and care can result in Airmen's confusion, frustration, and disappointment. Consequently, the Airman's relocation experience and perception are clouded, potentially resulting in distrust of the gaining unit's leadership. Once fully in-processed at the unit and settled in, the Airman

will have to adjust to the unit's military culture and the local area. Airmen will have to obtain as much information as they can to understand the new culture and norms so they can effectively socialize and be part of the community; they have to build networks and connections to be in a better position to learn and effectively communicate.¹³ While at their new locations, Airmen can face deployments and be sent on TDY and will eventually proceed to their next overseas or CONUS duty location whether voluntary or involuntary. Airmen's PCS cycle and transition continue until the day they separate or retire, so they are constantly adapting to new environments.

Whether an Airman is PCSing, deploying, or going TDY, there is no guarantee they will get a sponsor, a written orientation to the culture of the unit and local area, or the proper cross-cultural competence training—despite regulations requiring these steps.¹⁴ As it stands, it rests on Airmen to actively seek reliable information and training as they transition from place to place. They are at the mercy of the gaining location's protocols and follow-through and their assigned sponsors, if provided, to help them smoothly transition to an unfamiliar place.

Recommendations

Training is one of the most essential actions to prepare an individual for expected or unforeseen military engagements. In the military, it is a tool that assists the warfighter in recognizing the fight, flight, or freeze state and developing an automatic response to any scenario. Training enables an Airman to anticipate the future movement or action of the enemy, operate in a new environment, or better resolve disputes or miscommunication. The Air Force should incorporate cross-cultural competence and D&I awareness training when preparing Airmen for their next duty locations and deployments. It can utilize training available through its sister services, develop cross-cultural competence distance learning by region or continent, and solidify the roles and responsibilities of the unit D&I council to better execute this goal.

The USAF lacks adequate training for its Airmen in these areas. However, the Army has a comprehensive list of distance learning and application training for D&I, and it would be advantageous for the Air Force to utilize this training for Airmen—potentially saving the DOD millions of dollars. There are numerous joint bases where Airmen

could train with Soldiers. Doing so would enhance Airmen's awareness of D&I issues, strengthen their skills in dealing with them, and strengthen their camaraderie with their sister services.

Developing a cross-cultural competence distance learning course that highlights global regions or continents would be beneficial for Airmen and the whole DOD. Targeting the cultural norms of specific ethnicities will inform Airmen of what to expect and how to conduct themselves before relocating or working in foreign environments. Informing Airmen of an area's norms, culture, and expected standards of conduct will diminish opportunities for confusion and miscommunication.

Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of the unit D&I council should be solidified so it can be utilized to its utmost capability. If unit D&I councils work in tandem with the base equal employment opportunity office, they can create events and education and training programs providing information that Airmen can apply. Besides leading the observance of designated events—be they cultural, ethnic, or personal—throughout the year, the D&I council can focus on monthly discussions, involve itself with unit onboarding programs, and execute quarterly events for Airmen involvement. Expanding the council's responsibilities will broaden its scope and reach more individuals in D&I awareness and practice.

Conclusion

The US military has always been a force to be reckoned with because of its superior firepower, advanced technological equipment, and progressive tactical strategy in deterring the enemy. However, if the Air Force wants to continue to build healthy and long-lasting relationships internally and externally, cross-cultural competence and D&I training still have a long way to go. The Air Force has made strides in educating and training its Airmen in these areas. To further improve the experience of its Airmen when they deploy, PCS, or go TDY, the Air Force should utilize the services and training of the Army since its programs can be emulated and adapted. Although the military is in the business of war, developing positive working relationships and effective communication should come first so that the US can cultivate diplomatic relations. Education and training in cross-cultural competence and D&I are the first steps in understanding others and building close relationships.

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Chapter 3

Toward Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the Military

Caroline Raines Greenfield

The arts often serve to familiarize society with new possibilities, and where the arts go, society may follow. For example, the *Star Trek* and *X-Men* movies showcase inclusivity in military and paramilitary operations.¹ In reality, though, the US military excludes persons with disabilities from service. But the nature of warfare and attitudes about the inclusivity of persons with disabilities are changing.² In the information age, warfare requires harnessing creative ability and economic might to compete.³ This chapter explores the idea that including persons with disabilities in the prestigious institution of the military is the right—and smart—thing to do.

The first portion covers the current framework regulating service members and disability, a comparison to the employment of persons with disabilities in the federal civilian sector generally, and implications of inclusion for the military, persons with disabilities, and society. The second part examines the constitutional framework providing deference to the military and denying heightened scrutiny to classifications based on disability. It also looks at statutory and case law regarding employment and civic participation rights for persons with disabilities. The third section uses a civil rights framework and military necessity rationale to show how the military can evolve to include persons with disabilities. It draws historical and modern comparisons and analyzes costs of accommodation as well as embedded design choices. This chapter does not offer concrete policies for integrating persons with disabilities into the services—its purpose is to convince readers that the military should establish such a policy in the first place.

Background

Service Rules Regarding Disability

For the most part, persons with disabilities are excluded from serving in the military. The Department of Defense (DOD) regulation establishing specific standards for eligibility for service provides, with

some exceptions, that anyone entering the services must be free of contagious disease, unimpaired by medical conditions or physical defects that entail time-consuming treatment, capable of completing physical training, unencumbered by geographical limitations, and medically capable of performing duties.⁴ The regulation further specifies conditions that may be disqualifying and provides a process to obtain waivers for certain conditions.⁵ Notably, gender dysphoria is treated under a different set of regulations and is no longer disqualifying.⁶

Types of disqualifying disabilities range from head deformities incompatible with equipment fit, vision impairment, hearing impairment, asthma, cleft palate, a history of various surgeries, ovarian cysts, hermaphroditic genitalia, a history of incontinence, limits in range of motion, conditions that prevent running and weight-bearing, eczema, a history of hypertension, a history of headaches, neurodegenerative disorders, a history of paralysis, brain injury, syncope, narcolepsy, sleep apnea, attention deficit disorder (under certain conditions), bipolar disorders, and depressive and anxiety disorders (under certain conditions), among many others. The regulation is astonishing in its breadth and specificity. The regulation's scope raises questions about whether it can accomplish its intent (or whether many in service, knowingly or not, have some defined conditions) and, more to the point, if such extensive cataloging is desirable and necessary for military effectiveness. This regulation does, however, have an administrability advantage: it provides bright-line rules or clear guidance.

Retention standards are also robust and developed based on "DOD mission requirements, available scientific evidence, and expert opinion."⁷ The list of disqualifying standards is similar and detailed. It includes conditions that require treatment for longer than twelve months or impair military function, including the wearing of headgear, standing during formations, running, carrying equipment, operating weapons systems, subsisting on field rations, working in extreme environments or confined spaces, effectively communicating, and operating for extended work periods.⁸ Conditions that pose a risk to self or others or prohibit deployment are also disqualifying.⁹ This regulation ostensibly provides discretion and case-by-case analysis in application. HIV acquired during service is not per se disqualifying.¹⁰

Members subject to discharge from service due to medical disqualification are provided process rights to contest the discharge.¹¹ Under most circumstances, when a service member is medically discharged, the service characterization is "honorable," and the

individual receives a medical retirement, veterans' disability benefits, or both.¹² Some members who develop disabilities during service, particularly mental disabilities—for example, posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury—will have symptoms like drug and alcohol abuse that lead to their prosecution and discharge from the military under less than honorable circumstances. This outcome can result in loss of benefits and stigma from a negative discharge characterization, such as “under other than honorable conditions,” “bad conduct discharge,” “dishonorable discharge,” and “dismissal.”¹³

Civilian and Contractor Employment and Accommodation

The military adopts a total force concept that includes civilian employees and contractors in operations. Civilian employees and contractors have the rights provided under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA). In 2012, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13548 to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in federal government service and to utilize the talents of this population segment in service to the government.¹⁴ That same year, the Department of Labor promulgated a guide for the federal sector specifying best practices for increasing the hiring and retention of persons with disabilities in the federal government.¹⁵ Despite these efforts, there has not been a significant increase in the representation of persons with disabilities serving in the federal government, and the federal government has failed to meet its goal of 2 percent of the workforce being persons with targeted disabilities.¹⁶ Additionally, civilian employees with targeted disabilities are promoted at a lower rate than the general population.¹⁷

Besides ADA and ADAAA requirements, the federal government must comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and satisfy legal requirements for the universal design of information technology.¹⁸ The Department of Labor also advances the business case for going beyond technical legal requirements and embracing universal design in emerging technology to reduce waste, maximize useability, spark innovation, and save money over the long run.¹⁹ The DOD is legally required to ensure that new construction is accessible to people with disabilities.²⁰ The federal government is meant to be the model employer of persons with disabilities, and it also has an affirmative action program to hire persons with targeted disabilities and disabled veterans.²¹

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Office of Federal Operations has found that barriers to increasing the hiring and retention of persons with disabilities in the federal workforce include bias and fear of the unknown and a lack of understanding of the reasonable accommodation process.²² The DOD must provide reasonable accommodations to its civilian employees even in deployed locations.²³

Implications for the Military, Persons with Disabilities, and Society

Including persons with disabilities is in the best interests of the DOD. First, the nature of warfare is changing. The DOD must modernize to integrate its military might with economic and diplomatic efforts to compete with China and Russia in the information age.²⁴ Modern warfare includes the use of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, robotics, big data analytics, and autonomous devices and systems.²⁵ The military's culture is a counterweight to the agility and innovation needed to affect this paradigm shift. Moving toward inclusion could spur new ways of thinking and open a talent pool of persons with unique skill sets to bring to the mission.

Persons with disabilities would benefit from the increased opportunities to serve and exercise full citizenship rights and from veterans' benefits and hiring preferences available to them after returning to civilian life.²⁶ Society would also benefit because integration could help alleviate apprehension and stereotypes, and universal design concepts could be built into emerging technology from inception. Over the long run, this initiative may save costs for all of society. The biggest hurdles to implementation may be aversion to changing the idea of what a Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Guardian, or Marine is "supposed" to be and the practical challenges in developing inclusive warrior standards.

The Constitution: Military Deference and Rational Basis Review for Disability

A constitutional challenge to exclusion is unlikely to succeed. The military receives more deference from the courts than other government institutions. The US Supreme Court does not weigh in on the day-to-day affairs of the military and recognizes the strong functional imperative of the military to organize efficiently and effectively and to maintain troop readiness.²⁷ Therefore, the Court ordinarily leaves it to the executive and legislative branches to oversee complex and sensitive

judgments related to the composition, training, equipping, and control of the military force.²⁸ For example, the Court has held that Congress did not step out of bounds in excluding women from the draft because women were excluded from combat, and therefore the purpose of raising troops for combat was sufficiently related to the exclusion.²⁹ Additionally, disability distinctions are only subject to rational basis review if the exclusion is not unreasonable or arbitrary and relates to legitimate state interests. The Supreme Court created the precedent that disability is an appropriate “real and undeniable” distinction for legislation, establishing the principle that through rational basis review, states have an interest in dealing with and providing for persons with disabilities.³⁰

Employment and Civic Participation Rights

Service in the military stands at the intersection of employment and civic participation rights. The ADA and ADAAA protect persons with disabilities, persons regarded as disabled, and persons with a record of disability from employment discrimination.³¹ Protected individuals must be hired if they are a “qualified individual with a disability” who can perform the essential functions of the job with or without a reasonable accommodation.³² Unlike Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, and national origin, the ADA and the ADAAA explicitly mandate cost shifting to the employer.³³ If the plaintiff shows that an accommodation is reasonable, the employer who denied the accommodation can only prevail by showing that effecting the accommodation would be an undue hardship.³⁴

Regarding civic rights, two common themes are (1) the access/content distinction and (2) the tension between integration and segregation. Generally, public buildings and programs are required to be accessible to persons with disabilities.³⁵ Voting must be accessible to persons with disabilities; however, the state is not required to accommodate by preserving the right to cast a secret ballot and can instead provide a personal assistant in the voting booth.³⁶ Requirements for jury service cannot categorically exclude blind persons.³⁷ However, when a person with a disability assumes a prominent position in civic life, sometimes the public reaction to that is fear that the individual will be unable to perform effectively. For example, in 1992 the *New York Times* editorial board publicly questioned whether a blind judge could

be fair and impartial because he could not observe witness demeanor.³⁸ The ADA may also require modification of social service programs with physical requirements, such as a prison early release “boot camp” program, to enable a person with a disability to participate.³⁹

Olmstead v. L.C. ex rel. Zimring

The landmark case of *Olmstead v. L.C. ex rel. Zimring* met the segregation question head-on and provided an avenue to challenge the sidelining of persons with disabilities, albeit with a flexible “fundamental alteration” standard that in practice has led to a flood of litigation. As there is no judicial path to integrate persons with disabilities into the services, for purposes here, the policy considerations and rationale are more pertinent than the doctrine. The court found that Congress intended the ADA to integrate persons with disabilities into the community.

However, the court also recognized that the state had a limited budget and that diverting resources for community-based care could limit the mental healthcare budget and services available to others. Unjustified segregation is a form of discrimination under the ADA, but it leaves open the complex balancing question of when segregation may be justified. According to the case’s interpretation, the test requires examining (1) whether experts find that integration is appropriate, (2) whether the individual with a disability desires integration, and (3) whether reasonable accommodation is possible considering the resources of the state and the needs of others.⁴⁰ Justice Anthony Kennedy’s concurrence expresses concern that integration efforts could undermine the state’s obligation to care for individuals with disabilities.

Analysis

Military Necessity

The military is a utilitarian organization with a purpose of providing for our national defense. Doing so entails training and equipping the troops and providing intricate logistical and organizational support. While military leaders may be individually sympathetic to civil rights arguments, the organization historically has struggled to maintain focus on diversity and inclusion efforts in the face of other strategic objectives.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the history of integration of other

groups, particularly women, is instructive concerning the extent and framing of the military necessity rationale. Military utility and civil rights advancement can also be interlocking goals: after all, the Emancipation Proclamation was a war order intended to raise Union troops and deplete Confederate morale.⁴²

Historically, women were viewed as biologically and socially unsuitable for military service. Women served during the two world wars because the war effort required it.⁴³ Women's roles were limited and subject to different rules and regulations than men, and they received fewer benefits and less status.⁴⁴ After World War II ended and the need for women's participation dwindled, Congress limited women's representation in the military by statute; President Harry Truman signed an executive order providing for automatic discharge of pregnant women or women with minor children (by birth, adopted, or stepchildren).⁴⁵

Two societal circumstances combined to expand the integration of women in the armed forces. First, the military transitioned to an all-volunteer force, and it needed women to fill its roles.⁴⁶ Second, the women's rights movement of the 1970s and shifting attitudes effected change.⁴⁷ In 2015, all combat positions were opened to women, and today women comprise approximately 20 percent of the force and 7 percent of senior leaders.⁴⁸

The military necessity rationale for excluding women from service and combat provides a useful comparison. Women were viewed as meek and not suited for violence while men were supposed to be the protectors and defenders.⁴⁹ Vigorous arguments were raised about women's innate deficiencies due to hormonal levels, spatial reasoning abilities, physical strength, and lack of aggressiveness.⁵⁰ Additionally, it has been argued that accommodating pregnant women in the military would be too costly and undermine the military's ability to execute its mission.⁵¹ There was also a fear that women would distract men, soften them (making men less effective at violence), endanger mission safety and effectiveness (by being less capable), and be exposed to the risk of sexual assault, all leading to lower unit morale.⁵² With these fears percolating, the military espoused that full inclusion of women would be ineffective and inefficient.⁵³

So too here, the overt rationale of the medical standards regulations is efficiency and effectiveness. More pertinent is the question of whether such fears, doubts, and overt justifications are rational. As with women serving, there are those who may be concerned that military service will lose its edge, prestige, and aggression if it expands to include a new

“other.”⁵⁴ There is also a question about how to modify standards and what happens to good order and discipline if “exceptions” are created.

It is important to note that similar objections were also raised regarding integrating African American men and homosexual and transgender troops. For example, myths widely circulated that African American men were cowards who could not fight.⁵⁵ However, following President Truman’s 1948 executive order ending troop segregation, Black men fought and died alongside White men, and it became abundantly clear that these stories were untrue.⁵⁶

The utilitarian premise of today’s standards is that all service members need to be interchangeable; otherwise, human factor calculations will be too costly and complex, thus undermining effectiveness. An amicus brief by retired generals challenging the male-only draft, however, proposes that “warfare today requires intelligence and communication specialists, linguists, logisticians, medical personnel, drone and cyber operators, and more” and that such noncombat positions “comprise nearly 80 percent of today’s military occupations.”⁵⁷ This changing nature of warfare begs an interesting question: Are military standards based on physicality and uniformity best for a warfare environment that requires creativity and agility?

Certainly, special forces and other jobs will necessarily continue to exist in the military, requiring specific weight-bearing, mobility, and other physical capabilities. Additionally, positions controlling weapons and weapons systems require specific comprehension and judgment skills. Some positions also require the ability to survive independently in harsh environments, act under firm time constraints, and withstand periods of isolation. However, the need for narrow, job-tailored requirements for some positions does not equate to the necessity of rigorous requirements for all jobs. Completing physical training for the sake of completing it may contribute to a general military ethos, but it is not directly targeted to the needs of the job for most service members.

Likewise, geographical limitations and time-consuming medical treatment are not insurmountable obstacles. Many circumstances impose these limitations today, such as pregnancy, convalescent and caregiver leave, and humanitarian leave and assignment as well as geographical and duty limitations due to pending criminal investigations. It seems reasonable that the military could balance its needs with accommodation for individual circumstances. This increased flexibility may also pay dividends for all service members and for

agility generally as the military seeks to modernize and improve quality of life. Improving organizational flow to fill temporarily vacant duties and positions will build in fail-safes and flexibility.

Geographical limitations in many circumstances will be due to a lack of appropriate medical care at available locations. However, this concern is mitigated by two trends. First, medical advances are making treatment options and technological assistance more portable. Second, the connectivity of modern technology means that many jobs can be (and have been, especially during the pandemic) performed remotely.⁵⁸ Likewise, concerns about headgear fit and the ability to salute and stand in formation have engineerable solutions.

The current medical standards regimen may also be counterproductive to the force's needs. This argument is not to suggest that the military has no interest in establishing cultural identity and military ethos. Such cultivation undoubtedly aids in aligning people of different backgrounds to a joint purpose and providing a sense of belonging that makes success more probable. The military can accomplish this goal by means other than exclusive emphasis on physicality and one-size-fits-all standards.

A realignment of core values toward a culture of professionalism and innovation better suits this era of cyber and space domains. The military is a driver of new technology;⁵⁹ by including persons with disabilities and universal design principles, it is likely to design better products by approaching problems more expansively. This approach could have a positive ripple effect throughout society. Furthermore, the military's objective is not only deterrence and the application of consequences but also the exercise of restraint and the winning of hearts and minds. An organization that can account for differences within itself presumably will be able to do so externally as well.

Because the phrase "good order and discipline" lacks a clear definition, it is sometimes viewed as an amorphous rationale that expresses merely the military's desire to resist reform.⁶⁰ A realignment of the phrase can make room to expand inclusiveness and make the phrase itself more meaningful. Research suggests that people hold each other accountable when there is strong camaraderie, trust, and shared vision.⁶¹ The modern mission is also less about physical combat and more about small units operating independently to perform technical and scientific missions.⁶² Under this view, rigid standards for the sake of rigid standards undermines unit effectiveness. One possible

function of unmalleable, outdated standards is to reinforce identity lines and reaffirm hegemonic masculine hierarchy.⁶³

Cost

Cost is perhaps the most practically difficult argument to refute because the concern seems rational.⁶⁴ How can the expense of accommodation be justified when there is no absolute proof that inclusion will pay dividends and there are many opposing budgetary considerations and priorities? For example, the military needs to modernize its assets, invest in new technological research and development, improve quality of life for its troops, and maintain training and readiness of its force. How can it justify the additional expenses that accommodation will entail?

This discussion does not engage in in-depth budget analysis or economic modeling but attempts to take an aerial view of underlying rationale. Two circumstances suggest that the cost argument is unpersuasive. First, it fails in the civilian realm because of the ADA and ADAAA's mandate to the contrary. Additionally, the federal government is expected to be the model employer. Congress has decided that the costs are justified as a rule, and, assuming that military efficiency is preserved (or enhanced), cost arguments alone should be unpersuasive in the military context as well. Second, to show undue hardship under the ADA and ADAAA, the agency must show that accommodation would be an undue burden given its resources.⁶⁵ The inclusion of African American men, women, homosexual, and transgender troops in the military does not lead to an underinvestment in the national security sector given the priority of national defense in the US government.⁶⁶ Given this priority, it is unlikely that the inclusion of persons with disabilities would either.

Additionally, cost is merely a way that society measures value. Bias and stereotype often affect values about who is worthy of accommodation. As an example, young adults are more likely to engage in impulsive and reckless behavior leading to safety mishaps, injury, and criminal liability.⁶⁷ The military is heavily populated with young adults under the age of twenty-five. The overinclusion of this age group likely bears significant costs, including treating injuries due to reckless behavior, undertaking criminal investigations and prosecutions, losing personnel capable of performing primary duties, and repairing or replacing damaged, high-value equipment.⁶⁸ However, the military

assumes these costs because it values young people and makes assumptions about their future potential. Likewise, persons with disabilities are capable contributors, and costs are likewise justified.

Another cost that merits consideration is that of inclusivity in the military versus utilizing the resources elsewhere to benefit the community of persons with disabilities. Would it be better to put the resources toward inclusive public transit? Universal design of city centers and living spaces? Better medical care and treatment? Medical research and technological advances? Inclusivity efforts in civilian workplaces? The list could go on, and these are all valid considerations. However, this framing could be construed as a false choice. Further, inclusivity efforts in the military need not come at the expense of these other efforts and may further their advancement.

Design Choices

Having examined why the military should move toward inclusivity of persons with disabilities, many questions arise in terms of how to move in this direction. This chapter does not comprehensively examine the many choices inherent in creating a new regulatory framework but highlights some of the options and offers suggestions for the decision-making process.

To begin, the military can move toward retaining more of its wounded warriors who still desire to serve. Regular paths should be established to allow for accommodations in existing career fields, where reasonable, and career field transition avenues. These efforts are underway to some extent. For example, Air Force amputee pilots have returned to flying duty.⁶⁹ However, these efforts are largely in response to disabilities incurred while actively serving and not those occurring prior to joining.⁷⁰ The military should work to mainstream and embrace paths to continued service for wounded warriors that include providing reasonable accommodations. There should also be a visible path to the highest levels of leadership for wounded warriors in the military and improvement to discrimination redress avenues.

A second suggestion is to establish a commission comprised of veterans with disabilities from a broad array of career fields, disability rights advocates, and senior military leaders. The commission should be tasked with reviewing career fields and determining their essential functions. The accessions process and recruiting goals could then match the needs of specific career fields. Recruits can be evaluated

based on whether they can perform the essential functions of in-demand career fields with or without reasonable accommodation. Although in the civilian context one would not undertake this analysis until after offering the position, it makes sense to perform this evaluation at the accessions stage in the military. Recruiters and medical evaluators should be trained on implicit bias, and there should be an accommodations officer overseeing the process to ensure that those who could be reasonably accommodated are not turned away.

If resources were to be allocated for expanding assistive technology, providing for interpreters, and other accommodations, the investment could pay dividends in many dimensions. It could have operational benefits, such as increasing communication with and consideration of persons with disabilities in fields of operation. It could also improve technological advances and make the accommodation costs throughout federal hiring and even throughout society less expensive and unusual.

The commission can also work toward modifying general standards, such as the physical assessment test, saluting, formation, and standing and marching requirements. The commission should also review the *Uniform Code of Military Justice* and disciplinary and discharge regulations. This review should seek to limit punitive measures against individuals with mental health issues and instead shift to rehabilitation efforts. This measure would help new accessions and those who return from war with invisible injuries, such as posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. These individuals sometimes have accompanying behavior changes that lead too frequently to stigmatizing punitive discharges from service. The commission should make recommendations for physical training alternatives and equipment modifications. Efforts can also be undertaken to improve accessibility at all locations.

Further, although the access/content distinction is imbedded in civil accommodation law, the military has an opportunity to improve content and provide access. To the extent the military promotion system has a disparate impact on the promotion of persons with disabilities, as in the federal civilian system currently, the Department of Defense should make efforts to determine the root causes. If arbitrary standards are causing the discrepancies, then the military can initiate the design of a better system that allows all to progress to their full potential. Tackling implicit bias in the system is also likely to benefit other minority groups and better ensure promoting and retaining the best talent. The military should remain vigilant to ensure that it is not perpetuating second-class status and that integration is genuine and effective.

Conclusion

The interlocking goals of improving military effectiveness and breaking down barriers to full citizenship rights for persons with disabilities point to the conclusion that the military should move toward inclusion. The changing nature of warfare and the need for flexibility undergird the military necessity rationale for change. The main barrier will be overcoming long-standing policies and practices that no longer serve the military. However, the history of movement toward inclusion of other groups shows that improvement is possible. Persons with disabilities then will move closer toward possessing the same opportunities and rights of citizenship.

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Notes

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Chapter 4

Authenticity and Acceptance **Imperatives for a More Adaptable Military**

Rebecca F. Russo

Introduction

I've been in for over twelve years now, and I just can't shake the feeling that I don't belong. I detest going to work every day. My boss makes me feel like my opinion doesn't matter because I don't have a ton of technical depth in my assigned career field, and mid-level leadership is undervalued. He keeps telling me to "fake it till I make it," which is disingenuous and costing me a lot of energy. My career field is undermanned, so changing this late in the game is not going to happen. I feel unappreciated and worthless at times, even though my subordinates suggest that they love working for me.

I want to serve my country and love what our service aspires to be, but just can't bear the idea of doing this for another eight years. We advocate that diversity is important yet fail to acknowledge that having a seat at the table is very different from being heard and made to feel like we belong. I want to be part of the solution but just don't know if I can keep doing this at the cost of my well-being. Is there any way to be true to myself while still being part of a team with complex problems to address in the near future? Any advice is appreciated.

—Anonymous

Adapted from message board post, 2020

Imagine showing up every day being asked to solve our nation's most complex war-fighting issues while hiding and faking your way through the day. Such inauthentic behaviors do not come from a disingenuous place but a desire to belong and be accepted as a valued member of any team. Yet those very inauthentic and perhaps conformist behaviors keep you from applying the diverse thoughts you intended

to bring. How does someone unlock their most creative and perhaps novel ideas when they feel like they do not belong? Bureaucracies like the military thrive on conformity. It is part of their very nature. How does the culture of a highly regimented, bureaucratic organization ensure it is unleashing the creativity and innovation of its most important asset, its people?

To solve our nation's most complex problems, the Department of Defense (DOD) needs adaptable organizations and leaders. However, to unleash the true creativity and innovation required for adaptability, individuals and organizations must promote authenticity and acceptance. These characteristics are overlooked components of trust that deserve increased attention to create the environments necessary to produce the sustainable change needed to remain the most powerful military in the world.¹

Adaptability

Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.

—Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky

Adaptability is at the forefront of many organizational change and leadership books and considered a necessary element for the survival of any company.² Although not a company, the United States military has also been studying and championing adaptability for decades with much higher stakes for survival. A review of the National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Military Strategy (NMS) archives show the need for adaptability or adaptation as far back as the archives' inception. For example, President Ronald Reagan's 1987 NSS discussed the benefits of using all instruments of power in concert, yet "all of them must be adapted to changing situations."³ Similarly, the 1992 NMS called on plans to be more adaptive after the Cold War. It stated, "The end of the Cold War marks the beginning of a new era, an era that demands responses and plans that can be readily adapted to the unforeseen and unexpected."⁴ It then launches a whole set of adaptive operational plans that provide a framework for the full range of military operations.⁵

A more extensive review of current and past strategies leads the reader to believe there is more to be done. There is a continuous calling

to be more adaptable, innovative, and creative, indicating that adaptability is not a persistent value of military culture.⁶ In 2020, then Air Force chief of staff Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr., released his strategic approach, *Accelerate Change or Lose*, signaling that adaptation still is not occurring fast enough and winning is no longer a guarantee.⁷ He stated that “we must place value in multi-capable and adaptable team builders and courageous problem solvers that demonstrate value in diversity of thought, ingenuity, and initiative.”⁸ For the past thirty-three years, the national security establishment has continuously made the case that adaptation is a critical component to defeating our adversaries and ensuring the American way of life. However, the consistent call for more adaptability indicates there is room for improvement.

Despite adaptability being a strategic necessity and operational imperative, the DOD continues to struggle with being an adaptable organization and growing innovative leaders capable of addressing the nation’s most complex problems. Perhaps the failures to adapt stem from a misunderstanding of concepts or a highly bureaucratic, regimented organization such as the US military needing to work harder to undo the sameness imbued in every member. Without a proper understanding of adaptability, the culture will continue to be aspirational in that regard and not one embraced and acted on by all members. The connection between adaptability and survivability can be better understood by considering how to work in and through change, how to create adaptable leaders, and how those two imperatives will ultimately lead to adaptable organizations.

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

The concepts of adaptability, agility, and flexibility are often used interchangeably to convey organizational needs to work in and through change. However, there are subtle differences. In the most basic sense, the word *adapt* means to “make fit for new use” and stems from the Latin form of *adaptare*, meaning “to put into position, bring to bear, make ready.”⁹ It revolves around the idea of making something work in a new way, often with incomplete information or uncertainty. *Agility* means “marked by ready ability to move with quick easy grace” or rather, the ability to adapt quickly. An implicit time component is associated with agility.¹⁰ *Flexibility* is “characterized by a ready capability to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements.”¹¹ Therefore, agility is the ability to adapt with speed, and flexibility is the ability to adapt with ease.

Lastly, we need to address the concept of innovation to have a clear understanding of often misused terms. *Innovation* is the “introduction of something new.”¹² These definitions may seem rudimentary but are essential to understand the connection between adaptability and survival.

Change is inevitable, and “the constancy, complexity, and depth of change challenge all of us.”¹³ Robert B. Kaiser reminds us that “from the bacteria that gave up the single life to form multicellular colonies in the primordial soup to the primates that climbed down from the trees and learned to walk upright on the African Savannah, the Darwinian rule has always applied: adapt, migrate, or perish.”¹⁴ How an organization handles change (or adapts) is fundamental to its survival. The more flexible, agile, innovative force will likely survive.¹⁵ In the military context, the idea of adaptability is evident in President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s comments on plans about the D-Day invasion during World War II. He said, “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”¹⁶ Planning provides dedicated time to explore multiple options and think about future situations, but service members will not know how the situation evolves until combat starts.¹⁷ This evolution requires adaptation at the tactical, operational, or strategic levels of war.¹⁸ Therefore, it is a military imperative to build a strong culture of adaptation—led by adaptive leaders to be effective.

Adaptability in the Department of Defense

The DOD must adapt and innovate faster than its enemies to maintain a competitive advantage. Creating an institutional culture comfortable with adaptation is challenging because of the potential vulnerability individuals experience when examining closely held values and beliefs.¹⁹ Adaptation might challenge the authoritative expertise and institutional procedures steeped in tradition and hierarchy that are resistant to change.²⁰ Leadership experts Ron Heifetz and Martin Linsky offer that “adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of confidence.”²¹ The difficulty for leaders at all DOD levels is understanding that adaptive change does not mean undermining good order and discipline. Creating an adaptable military with adaptable leaders is as much about the emotional journey as the operational journey to prepare for the unexpected.²² Successful

adaptation requires trust and connection so that novel, innovative ideas can flow freely and competitive advantage is realized. The overlooked components of the emotional journey that create trust and connection are authenticity and acceptance because they help individuals reduce self-protective behaviors that block the very creativity needed to evolve.²³

Human Dimension of Change

There is little doubt that the complexity of national and international challenges has increased. Whether in business or national security, the number of actors and interactions in our daily lives is increasing.²⁴ The Center for Creative Leadership states that “it’s a truism of today’s . . . environment that the only thing that remains the same is change—and change is even more copious, rapid, and complex than ever before.”²⁵ For the US military to be successful in this ever-changing, complex environment, it must find a balance between known ways of doing things and innovation that allows it to explore new ideas, fail, and recover at a quicker pace than the adversary.²⁶ Doing so requires the defense establishment to tap into the human potential in its ranks and create an environment where members are confident they can bring their authentic selves to the problem-solving table where their unique contributions are accepted. Simply stated, sustainable change and adaptation require highly effective human connection, including a professional intimacy that can withstand intense, stressful situations.²⁷

Heifetz and Linsky observe that “profound change is more honest than grandiose, more incremental than the experience of it and builds from the enduring values of human beings and the orienting values of human communities.” Similarly, Jennifer Garvey Berger and Keith Johnson highlight that “leading in the unpredictable world is about *deep* noticing of the present and of what the current system is tending to do and then nudging it towards a better direction” (emphasis in original).²⁸ The failure to acknowledge the human connection aspect of change keeps leaders focused on the end state and not meeting people where they are to lead them on the journey of change.²⁹ Therefore, genuinely adaptable organizations and their leaders need to embrace a culture of human connection just as much as the technical aspects of the change they are trying to encourage.

Some might argue that the military establishment continues to underperform as a rapid change artist because of the tendency to pair adaptive challenges with technical solutions. It is, by virtue, a stabilizing force that thrives on order and discipline, thereby reducing chaos and stabilizing crises.³⁰ However, “the military may also go too far, suppressing the diversity of views needed to make progress on vital political, economic, and social issues.”³¹ Creating policies and rule sets to regulate how individuals function is a technical way of approaching problems. It will not necessarily change how they feel since technical solutions are unlikely to challenge “priorities, beliefs, habits or loyalties.”³² Adaptive challenges are incredibly complex and may not have a defined solution or require something truly innovative.³³ On the other hand, technical challenges may be complicated but have a solution.³⁴ Only when leaders understand what type of challenge they are attempting to tackle—and the requisite locus of work, including the emotional connection required within the team for novel idea generation—will they be successful in making sustainable progress (table 4.1).³⁵

Table 4.1. Distinguishing technical problems and adaptive challenges

Kind of challenge	Problem definition	Solution	Locus of work
Technical	Clear	Clear	Authority
Technical and adaptive	Clear	Requires learning	Authority and stakeholders
Adaptive	Requires learning	Requires learning	Stakeholders

(Reproduced from Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* [Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009], 20.)

Adaptable leaders understand that solving complex problems is not as simple as breaking them down into smaller, more concrete problems and then hoping that the sum of the individual solutions will create a resolution to the complex issue. They understand concepts like design methodology that encourage “critical thought, innovation, and creativity.”³⁶ However, the human-centered approach to design thinking requires a deep understanding of people and an appreciation for empathy that creates a sense of trust and belonging around the creative process.³⁷ The more trusting a team is, the more likely it will support creative/novel idea generation to solve adaptive issues. Without the true freedom for cognitive creativity, teams will be less likely to provide the additional layers of understanding to incomprehensible problems.³⁸

Organizational Dimension of Change

Adaptive organizations have distinguishing characteristics allowing them to work in and through change more effectively. They can navigate uncertainty and organizational stressors, such as “limited time, incomplete information, conflicting interests, [and] dealing with people,” in a way that gives the organization a competitive advantage.³⁹ Similarly, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky identified five characteristics that define adaptive organizations:

- Elephants in the room are named [sensitive topics addressed/hard conversations had].
- Responsibility for the organization’s future is shared.
- Independent judgment is expected [within the framework of organizational values].
- Leadership capacity is developed.
- Reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.⁴⁰

Having hard conversations, sharing responsibility, and embracing all the markings of a deliberately developmental organization require a tremendous amount of trust and vulnerability, where “trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another.”⁴¹ These bedrock behaviors ensure the organization can weather change and discomfort while developing each person as an individual and the team as a group.

Retired Army general Stanley McChrystal’s view of adaptable organizations in his book *Team of Teams* offers a slightly different view. He contends that “effective adaptation to emerging threats and opportunities requires the disciplined practice of empowered execution. Individuals and teams closest to the problem, armed with unprecedented levels of insights from across the network, offer the best ability to decide and act decisively.”⁴² The combination of empowered execution and shared consciousness (both human-centered ideas) creates the adaptability required to outthink the enemy in a complex environment. However, the framework’s underlying basis is trust (fig. 4.1). Figure 4.1 depicts how “the speed and interdependence of the modern environment creates complexity. Coupling shared consciousness and empowered execution creates an adaptable organization able to react to complex problems.”⁴³

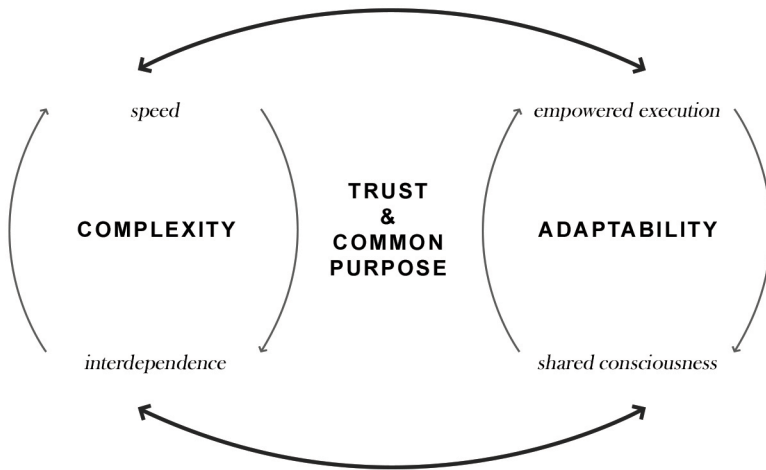


Figure 4.1. Trust as a central component in adaptable organizations.

(Reproduced from Stanley McChrystal et al., *Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World* [New York: Penguin/Portfolio, 2015], 245. Reproduced by permission of author.)

Both of these frameworks demonstrate that human trust and connection are at the core of adaptable organizations. How people feel when they show up to work is how willing they are to be vulnerable and share their creative ideas—the very ideas necessary to adapt through the nation’s most significant challenges. “Anonymous” quoted at the beginning of the chapter has wasted time and energy hiding their feelings and frustrations of being undervalued. In a genuinely trusting and connected environment, the leader would sense that the individual feels undervalued, and the individual would feel comfortable approaching the leader for the same reason. The leader would then have the opportunity to develop the individual’s self-worth by communicating their perception of the person’s contributions and importance to the organization.⁴⁴ This interaction would create deeper trust, and the individual would spend less time and energy hiding their feelings. The individual can then be more focused on the unit’s mission and adaptive problems. Connection and belongingness occur at the individual/local level even if shared values are at the institutional level. Therefore, a critically important factor in the DOD becoming more holistically adaptive is through adaptive leaders’ ability to create trust and connection.

Adaptive Leaders

Adaptive leaders are the critical component to unlocking the creativity of workers that can collectively solve complex problems. They are responsible for creating an environment where individuals can show up as their authentic selves and feel accepted as part of the team. As representatives of the institution, they can influence an individual's perceived institutional worth (positively or negatively).⁴⁵ When the leader creates a sense of trust, value, and belonging, individuals are more likely to perceive their self-worth in conjunction with institutional worth.⁴⁶ This match is likely to promote courage and psychological safety in the organization. These elements, in turn, create the necessary environment for innovative ideas to enter the creative space and inspire investment in the institutional values required for adaptability.

Leaders who excel at adaptability exhibit an understanding of the cognitive, dispositional, and emotional components of change; meet teammates where they are; and usher them to the desired end state.⁴⁷ Looking at the cognitive aspect, influential change leaders can take an objective approach to the change opportunity and lead their team to determine whether a new strategy is required or the current way of doing business needs modification.⁴⁸ They divorce adaptation from authority and allow a trust-built, creative process to drive the change. From a dispositional perspective, adaptable leaders usher in optimism balanced with practicality without creating a sense of inauthenticity.⁴⁹ There is a sense of fluid creativity that makes innovation more approachable. Adaptable leaders also acknowledge the emotional component of change and tease out any sources of resistance.⁵⁰ They often have greater emotional intelligence (EI) and the ability to use interpersonal sensitivity skills to “enhance unity and morale by creating shared emotional experiences.”⁵¹ Therefore, when leaders tap into the affective components of leadership, they are likely to make the team more effective.

The most adaptive leaders create connection and trust to meet people where they are and guide them through the transformation. Collectively, adaptive teams can understand where an organizational culture is and see a path of where it needs to go to reach the desired end state. For example, since early 2010, the military's continued struggle with transforming into a culture intolerant of sexual assault shows the difficulty of creating sustainable change executed at the institutional and individual leader levels.⁵² Despite successful response efforts, prevention remains highly problematic. There has been a steady

increase in reported sexual assaults during military service to a level more than double ten years ago.⁵³

Some might argue that this increase is merely because more individuals are reporting assaults. However, the matter remains that the US military has been unsuccessful at stopping sexual assault. There is a repeated failure to adapt successfully. Quarterly talking points, complicated reporting chains, and ineffective prosecutions create transactional processes attempting to address sexual assault without tackling the underlying issues, such as improper conduct, victim blaming, veil of ignorance (false) myths, and no evidence (logical errors) myths.⁵⁴ Although the DOD recognizes that sexual assault is a cultural and leadership problem, its transactional approach to issues requiring complex, transformational leadership is ineffective. Until sexual assault is driven out of the military, trust will continue to be eroded, and the lack of trust will ultimately undermine the department's readiness and effectiveness.⁵⁵ When trust is broken, individuals are likely to experience fear and participate in inauthentic behaviors that build up their cognitive and emotional armor. They no longer feel safe sharing their ideas, impairing adaptability. Thus, high-trust environments generated by leaders who create affective connections are mission imperatives to solving complex problems.

Ultimately, organizational and individual adaptability are grounded in trust built on authenticity. Trust creates a sense of connection that allows people to spend their time and energy on innovation and creation, not conforming to perceived institutional norms. With an overarching idea of adaptability and how impactful failure to adapt can be, one can now delve into what individuals must do to support an adaptive organization by creating a greater sense of psychological safety through personal journeys of authenticity.

Authenticity

Who we are is how we lead.

—Brené Brown

Authenticity may seem like a recent leadership trend, but experts have researched it for well over a decade. What appears to be new is an acknowledgement that authenticity is tied to trust and connection. In fact, one of the most critical factors that lead to trust is the “ability

to connect authentically.”⁵⁶ Connection is about relationships and the interaction between two parties. Authenticity, underpinned through understanding one’s identity and self-awareness, provides a greater opportunity for trust building. Additionally, authenticity reduces the likelihood of hiding, lying, and faking, which undermine the ability to adapt.⁵⁷

Authenticity is often considered being true to oneself. On the surface, it seems overly simplistic and a highly subjective descriptor, yet it is an overlooked individual component that contributes directly to organizational adaptability. Scientifically, authenticity “is manifested in transparent and moral behavior, a balanced processing of information, and a high level of self-awareness.”⁵⁸ Similarly, an “authentic leader is confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, moral/ethical, future-oriented and gives priority to developing associates to be leaders.”⁵⁹ Research shows that followers are more likely to trust authentic leaders, and trust is one of the most critical components of adaptable organizations.⁶⁰ More importantly, authentic leaders increase individual creativity and group innovation levels, which directly support adaptation.⁶¹ If the military needs to be an adaptive organization and the core of adaptation is trust and connectedness, leaders and individuals must build that connection. However, before leaders can have a truly authentic relationship with followers, they must have an authentic relationship with themselves.

In Bill George’s book *Discover Your True North*, he argues that becoming an authentic person is based on the idea of “peeling the onion” back, layer by layer, to ultimately reach the inner core (fig. 4.2).⁶² However, reaching the inner core requires a commitment to truth and honesty that deals with strengths and potential shortcomings and weaknesses.⁶³ It also requires individuals to work through the various layers of armor and protection to reach their most vulnerable parts that could be shrouded in negative experiences and shame.⁶⁴

Armor is not all bad. It defends an individual, but it also obscures and prevents access. For example, values such as discipline and consistency are the same values that could obscure individual authenticity unless they are part of the individual’s authentic self. Working through individual armor is challenging but even more difficult in the military context because of the anchored value of conformity. Authenticity is still a largely undervalued component in military leadership.⁶⁵ However, leaders who embark on a journey of authenticity foster more trust, allowing for more novel and creative idea generation in their

teams.⁶⁶ Authentic individuals are also likely to have greater eudaemonic well-being. *Eudaemonia* is “Aristotle’s view of human happiness that assesses the goodness of life based on “living in a manner that actively expresses excellence of character or virtue” and asserts that humans can reach self-realization when they consider the six distinct aspects of eudaemonic wellness.⁶⁷ These traits are “self-acceptance, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relationships, personal growth, and autonomy or self-determination.”⁶⁸ Steeped in eudaemonic well-being and self-realization, authenticity creates a more positive environment and directly influences team members’ well-being and self-image.⁶⁹ This authenticity, in turn, establishes more creative, innovative environments capable of adapting to complex challenges.

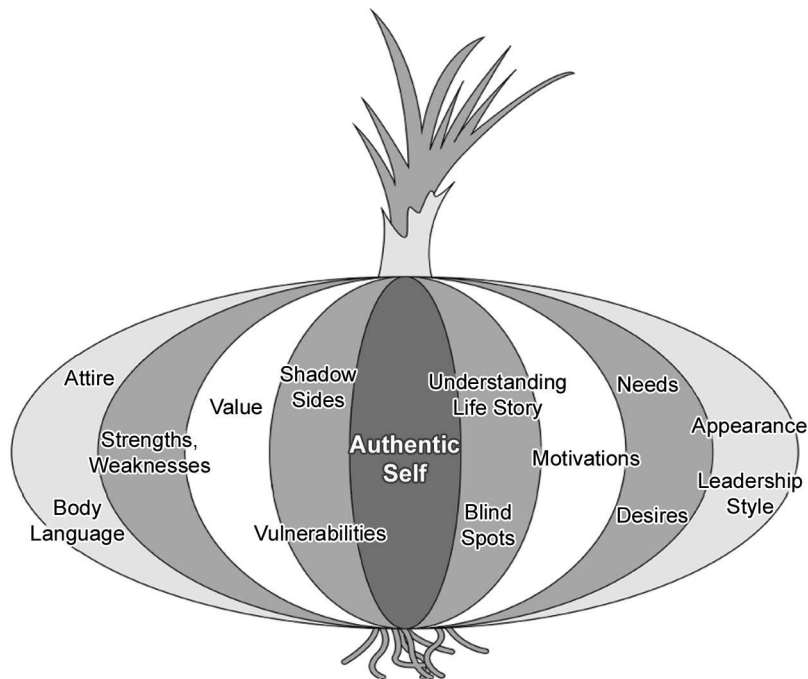


Figure 4.2. Peeling your onion. (Reproduced from Bill George, *Discover Your True North* [Hoboken, NY: Jossey-Bass, 2015], 88).

The journey to becoming a more authentic person is a lifelong, iterative process that requires reflection on several subcomponents, most importantly, identity. Dr. Henry Cloud, a recognized leadership expert, author, and clinical psychologist, indicates in his book *Integrity*

that it is not uncommon for people not to know who they really are and what intrinsically motivates them.⁷⁰ So often, people are defined by others or how they perform in organizations because of superficial motivations or performance fear. Individual self-worth becomes connected to performance. Therefore, any mistake causes individuals to reduce their self-worth.⁷¹ Identity and self-worth are also connected by the continuous loop of comparing oneself to some ideal standard, even if that standard puts us well outside our authentic self.⁷²

Military members are particularly susceptible to self-comparison because the military is a highly socialized organization with an entire premise of “sameness” through accession programs. Furthermore, rapid inculcation into military culture is founded on making new accessions adopt the same values.⁷³ One’s time in basic training is grounded in behaving and thinking the same. Being an outlier is bad. The up-or-out promotion system also links performance to worth, thereby causing people to act how they think superiors want them to act versus their authentic self.

Only when individuals receive the education, time, and space to determine or examine their value system (in concert with the institutional value system) and life’s meaning can they step into their authentic selves.⁷⁴ There is little deliberate education on moving from that socialized recruit to an individualized, authentic leader throughout one’s military career. Thus, the individual needs to dedicate more time to becoming an authentic leader capable of ensuring that one’s self-worth and institutional worth are not singularly tied to military performance. When individuals tie their identity solely to how they think the institution views them through meritocracy-based systems, it can create a sense of inadequacy because they lack sufficient self-worth.⁷⁵ For example, not being chosen for a promotion or special program can invoke feelings of shame and disappointment that further exacerbate inauthentic behaviors.

Only when individuals are secure in their authentic self will they realize that the institution cannot provide the sense of self-worth necessary to eliminate inauthentic behaviors.⁷⁶ When authentic leaders connect with authentic individuals, genuine trust and connectedness fuel the innovation and creativity required to become a more agile institution. Areas worth exploring to strengthen individual and leader authenticity are identity and self-awareness.

Identity and Authenticity

Individuals more secure in their identity have a better understanding of their values, beliefs, “daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking.”⁷⁷ An authenticity journey, grounded in personal identity, is essential for military leaders because one’s “identity as a Warfighter may supersede, and perhaps conflict with, any unique individual identities.”⁷⁸ Further, “a confident, consistent identity also provides someone with a dependable display of leaders’ attributes and behaviors, which can provide the foundation for trust” and effective decision-making.⁷⁹ It is the unique individual identity that creates the diverse perspectives required to find new and innovative ways to solve complex problems. Research suggests that one of the most effective ways to create a more authentic self is through reflecting on and developing one’s life story. Doing so creates a stronger personal identity that acts as an anchoring point for dealing with complex problems.⁸⁰ Leaders steeped in their identity development are also more likely to create transparent and meaningful relationships.

When senior military leaders engage with lower-ranking individuals, many of them follow the movement created by Gen Mark Welsh, USAF, retired, to share their stories and ask others to “tell me your story.” There is no doubt they do it because it is a great way to start an open-ended conversation with someone they do not know very well, but it is also a chance for them to know someone at a deeper level. Research also supports this technique empirically by showing a correlation between life storytelling and perceived authenticity.⁸¹ An individual’s understanding of their own life story is not just about understanding the facts and occurrences. Their experiences shape the way they think. For authentic leaders, life stories serve as a “‘meaning system’ from which to feel, think, and act . . . [enabling them] . . . to analyze and interpret reality in a way that gives it personal meaning.”⁸² Everyone’s lens is different; although two people may experience the same event, how they feel and process that event is unique. The interpretation is different, just as each human being is different, no matter how nuanced.

Additionally, people are hardwired to defend their thinking and actions to “avoid difficult value choices.”⁸³ Change disturbs a natural equilibrium between the individual and the institution or environment, making it a naturally disorienting phenomenon.⁸⁴ When people have to reassess their values, beliefs, or way of doing things, their natural

inclination is to push back first, not experience the disequilibrium. However, an effective leader can create trust in the discomfort. The most skilled authentic leaders make teams comfortable in constant disequilibrium. They foster this environment by creating connections and enabling the individual to realize that any change to values or beliefs is part of a necessary evolution, not a disorienting revolution.

If who we are is how we lead, then what we have experienced drives how we behave. If individuals experience crucible moments without much time for reflection and processing, protectionist armor may keep them from reaching their authentic core.⁸⁵ However, if they create the connections between the crucible experience and how it made them feel, they are more likely to lead from a place of authenticity. This authentic clarity is gained through reflecting on and telling one's life story: "Personal narratives are people's identities because the life story represents an internal model of 'who I was, who I am (and why), and who I might become.'" Further, "identity is a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell about ourselves."⁸⁶ By developing our own life stories, we can be unencumbered by inauthentic practices of modeling other leaders and instead be steeped in our genuine convictions.⁸⁷ Life story development removes barriers of inauthentic leadership such as "status, honor, or other personal rewards" that can erode trust and create an environment that stifles creativity and innovation because followers deem the leader as untrustworthy.⁸⁸

How we view our life experiences is directly tied to self-worth. If someone views their life story through a primarily negative lens, focused on perceived failures or misgivings, self-worth is likely to be very low. This correlation comes from the idea that identity is based on a personal comparison with idealized behavior and continued self-assessment at the "unconscious and sub-conscious levels."⁸⁹ Practicing reflection and challenging individual beliefs are fundamental to overcoming the tendency to compare to idealized behavior. Often, the idealized behavior can be far from someone's authentic self, and comparison can result in a perceived constant state of underperformance. Therefore, continuous, deep reflection on individual values, beliefs, and experiences is necessary to ensure that the standard of comparison is challenged. Reflection will help individuals as they continue to peel back the onion to get to the authentic core and learn how to become more adaptable.

As mentioned, sustainable change is often difficult because it calls an individual's values, beliefs, and experiences into question. Those who better understand their values, beliefs, and experiences are likely to be more in tune with personal adverse reactions to changes that attempt to question their beliefs. This understanding makes shifting from that core easier because they recognize the affective experience, understand their starting point, and are better equipped to navigate to the desired end state. Still, identity is not the only component necessary to create a more authentic self that is more capable of change. Self-awareness is equally important in complementing individual identity and establishing a sense of trust and connection between leader and follower.

Self-Awareness and Authenticity

Self-awareness, a subcomponent of authenticity, deals with perception, emotional intelligence, and feedback, all directly related to trust. The perceptions we hold of ourselves are only one piece of the equation.⁹⁰ Self-awareness is about understanding how others perceive you.⁹¹ It provides a relational reference for authentic interactions with others and manages the social contracts under the leader's purview.⁹² Authenticity must be validated by someone else.⁹³ You can think you are the most approachable person in the world (identity), but if others see you as unapproachable, you lack self-awareness because of your inability to perceive how others see you. If followers do not view someone as authentic, it is because that individual displays actions incongruent with verbalized values or beliefs. For example, leaders who suggest that they value diversity but choose to engage only with people who look and think like them will appear to be inauthentic in their stated values.

Inauthentic behaviors can lead to a breakdown of trust. Conversely, authentic behavior can create a greater sense of trust and connection even when opening oneself to potential vulnerability. In fact, "transparent leaders who admit their weaknesses and expose their vulnerability may encourage followers to behave in a similar manner because trusting others is likely to be reciprocal," thereby creating a high-trust, authentic leader/authentic follower relationship.⁹⁴ However, there must be an appropriate boundary between sharing weaknesses and oversharing. Oversharing creates a sense of projecting one's emotional burdens onto someone else. Combining vulnerability with a specified

path forward is shown to be an effective strategy to combat oversharing.⁹⁵ Research also suggests that the boundary is dependent on the leader understanding how well the team is postured to support the situation.⁹⁶

Self-awareness also has a strong correlation with emotional intelligence. *Emotional intelligence* is “the ability to recognize and understand both how you and how those around you feel.”⁹⁷ Individuals who are self-aware have a greater ability to create an awareness of their own emotions and the emotions of others, which is an essential component of trusting relationships.⁹⁸ Moreover, emotions directly correlate to the creative process. Leaders who can effectively channel emotionally intelligent behavior are more likely to inspire team members and stimulate “idea exchange and idea generation, preventing premature satisfaction and settling on ideas, recognizing points of frustration, and supporting employees through them.”⁹⁹

Self-awareness is directly tied to how we evaluate people and give and receive deliberate feedback.¹⁰⁰ The feedback process can often be uncomfortable and create a sense of vulnerability.¹⁰¹ The more authentic and trusting the relationship, the more likely information will be given and received with the intent of personal development and genuine care and concern for the individual.¹⁰² Feedback is most often associated with going from leader to follower. However, feedback from follower to leader requires a level of trust steeped in authenticity and vulnerability that is much more difficult.¹⁰³ This level of unconditional trust engenders a free and open exchange of ideas, creating a synergistic and adaptable team of superior performance.¹⁰⁴

Self-awareness is developed similarly to identity and is also effective in combating inauthentic behaviors.¹⁰⁵ Life story creation combined with reflection and sharing can be a potent tool in developing self-awareness.¹⁰⁶ At issue is that many military individuals do not take adequate time to reflect and synthesize the meaning of their life experiences. This author contends that many of the emotions honorees experience at promotions or retirement ceremonies are because, for the first time, they are reflecting on their life experiences and realizing the impact. Reflecting provides an opportunity to create and clarify the meaning of life events as seen through the experiencer’s eyes.¹⁰⁷ The process of reflection allows “people [to] learn about their strengths, weaknesses, motives, and values and come in touch with their ‘true’ self in the sense of separating who they are and who they want to be from what the world thinks they are and wants them to be.”¹⁰⁸ This

meaning-making is created through storytelling that provides an opportunity to create an authentic interaction.

When people share their life stories, there is an automatic opportunity for feedback. How individuals react and respond can provide authentication between leaders and followers. The sharing of a leader's life story provides an opportunity for followers to "monitor whether the leader's actions and behaviors are consistent with the traits, values, and convictions implied by his or her life story to judge the authenticity of the leader and find justifications for their followership role."¹⁰⁹ This authentication process creates an opportunity for more trusting relationships and reduces the likeliness of blind followership.¹¹⁰ This sharing pattern can create a more authentic team experience and create psychological safety to generate the most creative and innovative ideas required for true, sustained adaptation. The sharing of life stories is also the antidote to inauthentic hiding because it lowers some of the armor built up over time.

The Consequences of Inauthenticity

The risk of not becoming more authentic individuals puts ingenuity, creativity, and, ultimately, adaptation in jeopardy. Professional and organizational developmental experts Robert Kegan, Lisa Lahey, Andy Fleming, and Matthew Miller state, "Most people at work, even in high-performing organizations, divert considerable energy every day to a second job that no one has hired them to do: preserving their reputation, putting their best selves forward, and hiding their inadequacies from others and themselves." They "believe this is the single biggest cause of wasted resources in nearly every company today."¹¹¹ The DOD currently has over 1.3 million active duty members, 2.8 million including civilians and reserve components. Assuming that only one percent of the DOD population struggles with this idea of a "second job," 28,000 people are wasting precious human capital on secondary priorities, not including the emotional and cognitive toll it can take. This diversion of energy can jeopardize the individual's well-being and potentially the mission. Moreover, the likelihood that secondary priorities are limited to one percent of the DOD is improbable. Although the percentage is unknown, the damage to productivity and morale is deserving of attention from the highest levels.

It takes humans a tremendous amount of energy to consistently work outside their core preferences that are incongruent with their

true selves. If someone is constantly trying to act how they think superiors and followers want them to act versus how they actually are, it can create inauthenticity and a breakdown in trust.¹¹² Lying, hiding, and faking behind a persona can create a person-role mismatch because of the inability to answer basic questions like “Who am I, and why am I here?”¹¹³ This incongruency can lead to a lack of self-confidence, a poor self-concept, and a lack of belonging that breaks down trust.¹¹⁴ Likewise, inauthenticity can cause more concerning, manipulative behaviors that “give the appearance of confidence even when [the leader] is unsure about what they are doing and telling followers to do.”¹¹⁵ The mantra “fake it till you make it” creates dishonesty that undercuts trust in an organization. For the DOD, a profession of arms and the business of managing violence, this mindset is dangerous.¹¹⁶

Situational leadership is not the same as lying, hiding, and faking. It entails being able to read a situation and identify the interplay between “(1) the amount of direction (task behavior) a leader gives, (2) the amount of socio-emotional support (relationship behavior) a leader provides, and (3) the ‘readiness’ level that followers exhibit on a specific task, function, activity or objective that the leader is attempting to accomplish.”¹¹⁷ Situational leadership involves effectively using techniques to adapt one’s leadership to the condition. Conversely, hiding and faking are defensive behaviors that may be effective for the individual for the time being, but they ultimately undercut organizational needs because of the inability to tap into the creativity of the individual or group.

In addition to situational leadership, highly adaptive leaders may also have to adopt specific roles depending on the circumstances. It is important to reiterate that varying a leadership technique to a particular situation or role is not inauthentic. The authentic self does not change with the situation or role. Instead, leaders with clarity on their values, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses better identify how to lead through a situation with confidence and transparency. For example, a leader’s personal preference might be to avoid conflict, yet that individual also thinks it is vital to get to the root cause of any team consternation to include personal conflict. The authentic leader could step into the role of mediator to work through the conflict. Also, by working through their identity and self-awareness, the authentic leader would understand that a particular weakness may hinder effective conflict resolution and therefore choose to bring in someone more effective.

The critical distinction between situational leadership and inauthentic behaviors such as lying, hiding, and faking is intentionality. How the leader authentically moves a team or person through an adaptive change is based on discipline and intent, not intuition and luck. Only when leaders embrace their authentic selves through identity, self-awareness, and life story development can they create one side of the trust relationship necessary for accepting and sustaining adaptive change. The other side of the trust relationship requires acceptance.

Acceptance

Belonging is when employees genuinely buy into the notion that they and others are all welcome to bring their full perspectives and their true selves to the table.

—Alice H. Jones

Much like authenticity, acceptance is an overlooked component of trust and connectedness that drives effective, sustainable change in an organization. When someone is accepted as their authentic self, it crystallizes the affective environment necessary to be truly adaptable. Leaders need to understand what acceptance is, the skills required, what acceptance does in relation to adaptability, and the risk if members of your team do not feel accepted.

If authenticity is tied to self-worth, then acceptance is tied to institutional worth. For this discussion, *acceptance* is viewed as “the ability to see another person as exactly who they are and not try to make them into someone else. It also means accepting that the way they look at the world is real for them. It may not be the way you look at things.”¹¹⁸ Acceptance is how a leader transmits the perceived value of the individual on behalf of the institution.

The term *acceptance* is often confused or used interchangeably with *inclusion*. The subtle difference is essential to highlight. Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy, authors of *No Hard Feelings*, suggest that “diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging [acceptance] is having that voice heard.”¹¹⁹ They posit that acceptance is what a leader extends to make someone feel like they belong. Acceptance and belonging are relational. A leader cannot just say that they accept someone. The individual being accepted must *feel* as such.

Some psychology research suggests using caution when equating belongingness to acceptance because “when belongingness is valued more than the uniqueness aspect of inclusion, individuals who are different are treated as an insider only when they conform to the cultural norm.”¹²⁰ Thus, it is critically important to understand the distinction that acceptance is dependent on the individual being able to feel accepted as their authentic self. Acceptance is irrelevant without authenticity because inauthentic behavior would include lying, hiding, and faking. Such behaviors, in turn, could potentially suppress the very uniqueness of a diverse perspective in the first place. Inauthentic behavior is counterproductive to creating connectedness and a deep sense of trust. Authenticity and acceptance must go hand in hand. Without both, leaders will be unable to create, and followers will be unable to experience the psychological safety required to “enhance organizational adaptability and operational capability” of the DOD.¹²¹

The military’s generally pragmatic approach to problem-solving and hierarchical structure often fails to create the connectedness required for people to feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks.¹²² For example, senior leaders will often ask for inputs from attendees prior to closing out a meeting, and action officers/lower-ranking individuals often fail to speak up even if they have the answer. These types of risks often require individuals to display an unfamiliar level of vulnerability, especially in a generally stoic institution like the military. Interpersonal risk-taking in times of change, uncertainty, and ambiguity requires a tremendous amount of courage and “involves learning behavior, including asking questions, seeking help, experimenting with unproven actions, or seeking feedback. Although these activities are associated with such desired outcomes as innovation and performance, engaging in them carries a risk for the individual of being seen as ignorant, incompetent, or perhaps just disruptive.”¹²³ What would drive someone to participate in these risky behaviors? Research suggests that inclusive, psychologically safe environments that accept people where they are and their authentic selves encourage this type of risk, innovation, and high performance.¹²⁴

Effects of Accepting Environments and How to Create Them

Institutionally, the US military “recognize[s] the importance of fostering inclusive environments, where personnel with diverse attributes, experiences and backgrounds are valued and actively leverage

to meet the challenges associated with increasingly complex operational environments.¹²⁵ However, this institutional value is not clearly shared at the individual level.¹²⁶ The 2020 USAF Inspector General *Independent Racial Disparity Review* highlighted a disturbing disparity in the discipline and career progression of certain minority categories.¹²⁷ This report suggests that institutional policy and values have not been embraced at the lowest leadership levels, and frontline leaders must make more efforts in this area.¹²⁸

Patriotism and service core values create the basis for shared values but may not create a deep enough connection for individuals to feel fully valued by the institution. Leaders must build on institutional values with the soft skills required to forge accepting environments founded on trust and connectedness. Leaders must understand their authentic selves and the ethical connection between authenticity and adaptation and increase their emotional intelligence (specifically empathy) to establish more accepting environments in their organizations. Doing so can lead to the transformation, innovation, and adaptation required in the management of violence.

First and foremost, leaders must understand their authentic selves within the bounds of institutional values. Once leaders have insights into their values, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses, they can identify commonalities with and differences from the person/people they are attempting to connect with. Leaders must recognize that followers are not homogenous but diverse, complicated, emotional human beings who need to feel that their uniqueness is valued. Acceptance has to be individualized, and not everyone connects in the same way. Self-aware leaders can call on their experiences when attempting to connect with someone, especially if they do not seem to have much in common initially.

Connecting with people is easier when they are already aligned with or loyal to the leader or their cause.¹²⁹ The leader must create a connection with those who may have the most to lose in a sizeable adaptive change.¹³⁰ As discussed, adaptation often calls into question someone's deeply held beliefs or general familiarity with the status quo. Leaders trying to implement change—let alone agile, innovative change—may forget that most of their emotional attention needs to be on the people who have the greatest to lose, the opponents to change. By understanding where people are, including one's opponents, the leader can create a better plan to usher the entire team through a change.

Acceptance is about meeting people where they are. When people feel accepted in their organization, they “can more effectively use their energies, formerly given over to resignation, avoidance, or control . . . to act in a way that is congruent with their values.”¹³¹ An opponent’s idea or opinion may be wildly divergent from the direction of change. However, as long as it is within the scope of organizational values, it should not be blocked. When spoken out loud, that idea may spark another with someone else and ultimately lead to a solution for the needed change. The creative, iterative process of brainstorming is only as effective as the ideas allowed to be voiced. Without an accepting environment where everyone feels they belong, this adaptive, creative process will be stifled. With a general understanding of the concept of acceptance, one can examine the ethical connections of acceptance and adaptable organizations.

There are also ethical grounds for acceptance related explicitly to allowing people to voice their opinion. John Stuart Mill’s work *On Liberty* provides excellent insight into the moral responsibility to allow respectful, open discussion and discourse. He argues,

Freedom of opinion, and freedom of the expression of opinion, are needed for the mental well-being of mankind (on which all other kinds of well-being depend). . . . [Firstly,] an opinion that is compelled to silence may, for all we can certainly know, be true. . . . [Secondly,] even when the silenced opinion is an error, it can and very commonly does contain a portion of the truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any topic is rarely if ever the whole truth . . . , it is only through the collision of conflicting opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied. Thirdly, even if the true publicly accepted opinion is not only true but is the whole truth on the subject in question, unless it is vigorously and earnestly disputed most of those who accept it will have it in the manner merely of a prejudice, with little grasp or sense of what its rational grounds are. And also (this being my fourth argument), the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost or weakened and deprived of its vital effect on character and conduct. It will become a mere formal pronouncement, effective not in doing any good but only in cluttering up the ground and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction from reason or personal experience.¹³²

Mill suggests that suppressing opposing opinions or ideas does not make them go away. Additionally, such censorship is counter to establishing a climate of acceptance. Instead, resistance may become dormant and cause the entire team to work against unknown forces, eventually slowing the pace of adaptation. This type of environment can also create emotional reactions in the suppressed individual that counter their feelings of connection and belonging, making any further change even more difficult. Therefore, listening to opposing opinions is essential to creating accepting environments. Doing so does not mean that every idea is implemented but rather creates the sense that individuals are heard even if their ideas are not used. Another skill that allows leaders to create a sense of belonging is high emotional intelligence.

Leaders need to cultivate high levels of EI and empathy to reach these high levels of connection. More importantly, leaders with higher EI can create shared emotional experiences that increase unity and morale and develop better relationships.¹³³ Scientifically, “if leaders can affect follower emotions, they can also significantly affect follower performance.”¹³⁴ Emotional states are also directly linked to stimulating levels of thought. For instance, “positive emotions are more useful in stimulating creative thought, and slightly negative moods are more tuned to solving deductive reasoning tasks.”¹³⁵ Therefore, if leaders focus on developing their level of emotional intelligence, they are more likely to create the connection required for the feeling of belongingness. Although exploring every component of EI is outside the scope of this chapter, empathy is an element that deserves highlighting.

Empathy, a component of EI, is essential in creating a relationship of acceptance and belonging. It is “the ability to enter into another person’s experience and connect with it in such a way that you experience to some degree what the other person is experiencing. It comes from the Greek words meaning ‘in’ and ‘feeling.’ It is as if you are ‘in the feeling’ of another.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, “empathy is one of the linchpins of cultures built on connection and trust.”¹³⁷ Empathy requires specific skills, including the ability to take other perspectives, be nonjudgmental, understand someone else’s feelings and communicate that understanding, and be mindful in a way that ensures negative emotions “are neither suppressed nor exaggerated.”¹³⁸ Leaders must also maintain healthy boundaries and ensure they do not overidentify in being empathetic.¹³⁹ These measures ensure that the leader is not bearing the

burden of the follower's emotion but is instead creating a connection through shared experience.

Similarly, if empathy creates a greater sense of belonging and psychologically safe work environments, then "within a generally inclusive and supportive environment in which team members think differently and strive toward a common goal, team members with different cognitions (and being visibly dissimilar) concentrate more on task execution rather than falling into social disharmony. Thereby, team members are also more motivated to innovate."¹⁴⁰ These behaviors ultimately support more rapid adaptation and sustainable change that can move the DOD at a velocity it has not experienced recently. Nevertheless, authentic leaders who use effective EI, specifically empathy, are more likely to create greater trust, creativity, innovation, and accountability in their organizations.¹⁴¹

Risks Connected with Nonaccepting Organizational Climates

Risks associated with leaders who do not demonstrate accepting all individuals or creating a sense of belonging include continued minority retention issues and a lack of decreased suicide trends. Less extreme but also critical, such leaders risk marginalizing and invalidating employees and thus undermining trust and connection. Marginalization can occur in the form of devaluing or ignoring someone or tokenism, where a single person has to carry the weight of an issue. For example, a minority in the room might be expected to represent the minority voice for all. Tokenism can "feign the virtue of diversity but avoid the challenge diverse views pose to [an organization's] . . . way of doing business."¹⁴² In all cases, it completely flies in the face of authenticity and acceptance and destroys the trust and connectedness required for adaptive teams. Invalidation occurs when employee 1 suggests that employee 2's experience is not valid or relevant. The most significant concern arises with invalidation when the difference between the two experiences is based on fact, not opinion.¹⁴³ The fear is validating something the other person knows to be factually untrue. However, "to empathize and validate what someone is experiencing does not mean that you always agree or even think that the other person is right. It just means that you see it as valid in that it is really their experience, and true for that person and that you show them that you understand what they are thinking and feeling."¹⁴⁴ Thus, genuinely understanding and using empathy is an essential part of validating the other person's

feelings and creating the acceptance and belongingness tied to trust and connection.

Further, acceptance and belongingness should be considered when researching the recruiting and retention rates of minorities, particularly in career fields with the largest shortages, such as pilots. For instance, from 2001 to 2010, women averaged 6.6 percent of active duty pilots, and in 2023, 8.3 percent.¹⁴⁵ Thus, over the course of two decades, the Air Force has made little progress in increasing the percentage of female pilots to better represent the population. Even more troubling, a 2018 RAND study showed that

many [female] participants in male-dominated career fields reported often facing sexism and the existence of an “old boy’s network.” Some also associated male-dominated career fields with experiences of sexual harassment and assault. A few participants also cited cases in which either they or individuals they knew had decided to leave specifically because of a sexual assault. Finally, as already referenced in relation to difficulties managing work demands and family life, 85 percent of our focus groups raised long hours or shift work leading to burnout and work-life balance challenges.¹⁴⁶

The well-documented experiences listed above are incongruent with service in the US military yet seem more prevalent than one would have expected in 2018. Despite all the diversity and inclusion initiatives, something is still amiss in recruiting and retaining women in one of the highest-promoted specialty codes in the Air Force. Perhaps a more holistic view of trust and belongingness as viewed through authenticity and acceptance would provide insight on gender issues that continue to plague the Air Force and DOD.

Moreover, thwarted belongingness is, solemnly, one of the factors that contribute to suicide. What needs to be clearly stated is that the acceptance of some does not mean the alienation of others. Everyone who serves needs to feel that they are accepted and belong. The DOD *Calendar Year [CY] 2020 Annual Suicide Report* shows that the active component suicide rate increased from 20.3 to 28.7 suicides per 100,000 service members from CY 2015 to CY 2020.¹⁴⁷ Although the Reserve and Guard component statistics remained relatively the same over this period, reservists and guardsmen are still taking their lives at a rate of 21.7 and 27 per 100,000 members, respectively.¹⁴⁸ What if an increased sense of belongingness could help slash that number? Clinical psy-

chologist Thomas Joiner, the author of *Why People Die by Suicide*, contends that people most at risk for suicide completion are those “who have acquired the capability to enact lethal self-injury” and “those who perceive that they are a burden to loved ones and that they do not belong to a valued group or relationship” (fig. 4.3).¹⁴⁹

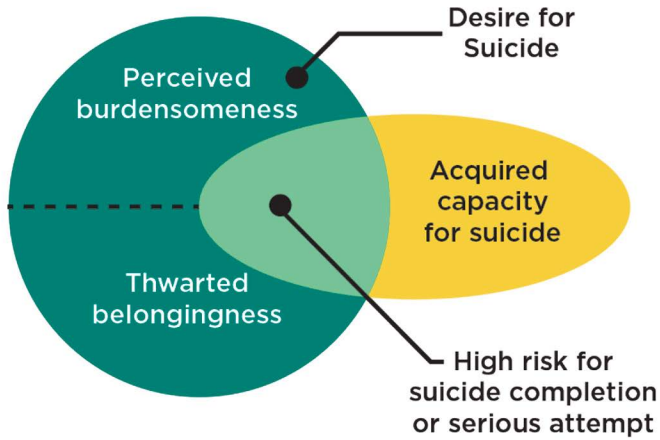


Figure 4.3. Joiner’s theory of suicide. (Reproduced from Thomas Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005], 138. Copyright © 2005 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved. Used by permission.)

He further states that “the need to belong is a fundamental human motive. . . . This need to belong is so powerful that, when satisfied, it can prevent suicide even when perceived burdensomeness and the acquired ability to enact lethal self-injury are in place.”¹⁵⁰ If increased authenticity and acceptance create a better sense of belongingness and save service members, the investment into creating individuals’ sense of belongingness in the workplace would be worthwhile. Although a specific correlation between military suicides and belongingness has not been established, this area deserves further research—especially considering the proven connection between belongingness and suicide in the general population. The DOD has made tremendous strides in prevention efforts and access to care for those struggling with suicidal thoughts. Yet only when leaders and followers at all levels embrace the idea that they could be part of the transformational process of curbing the DOD’s suicide problem through connection and belongingness are the numbers more likely to drop. It is remarkable to think that this

same connection and belongingness will also allow the world's most powerful military to be more adaptable, innovative, and creative.

Conclusion

Adaptability is a military leadership imperative connected to national survival. To meet the demands of a rapidly changing global environment, institutions and leaders alike need to take an active role in making the DOD more adaptable through trust and connection. Cloud states, "In the end, trust is about the heart . . . and if you gain people's trust, their heart, then you also have their desire and passion. . . . How far do you think people will go down the hard road of change for someone who did not connect with their hearts?"¹⁵¹ For organizations to navigate change effectively and rapidly, leaders and followers must take developmental steps to solidify their identities and self-awareness. They will then be more empowered to show up as their authentic selves and allow their true creativity to support a more adaptive organization.

Similarly, leaders need to embrace individual authenticity and create a culture of trust based on acceptance and belongingness. Doing so enables groups to work more creatively and innovatively, ultimately tackling complex problems of national importance. Furthermore, greater trust and belongingness grounded in authenticity and acceptance could help combat some of the department's most dire issues, such as sexual assault, minority retention, and military suicide. Should the military fail to embrace a more trusting, connected, human-centric culture, it risks people engaging in inauthentic behaviors that prevent the adaptability necessary for strategic advantage. Behaviors steeped in hiding and faking waste energy and intellect, obscuring the most creative, innovative ideas because of personal armor and fear of not belonging.

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Chapter 5

Contingency Theory in the Department of the Air Force

Benjamin Bouvy

Introduction

The quality of leadership, more than any other single factor, determines the success or failure of an organization.

—Fred Fiedler

Since the founding of the Air Force in 1947, it has evolved into a broad, complex enterprise. Like many other organizations, the Air Force continues to struggle with underrepresentation of groups based on race and gender due to systemic barriers that have evolved with the service over time but have persisted in their overall detrimental manner. In the current landscape of the world, the need to remove barriers and employ the most talented service members, regardless of demographics, will be critical in maintaining the Air Force's standing as the premiere global airpower. With such a large organization, the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) needs will vary across the differing units.

Specific units may require more attention toward gender equality, while others could potentially have issues with equity for LGBTQ+ service members. Each of their particular needs must be addressed to not only employ but sustain a pipeline of diverse talent to dominate the skies of today and the future. In response to the ongoing social drive for representation and inclusion, the Air Force must make impactful DEIA change at the lowest levels within each leader's scope of responsibility with the practical application of contingency theory (CT). Taking this step will better position commanders and senior

For simplicity and readability, the terms "Airman" and "Airmen" used in a generic sense encompass all Department of the Air Force members, including US Air Force service members, US Space Force Guardians, and civilian and military personnel in all job titles and positions from entry-level to top leadership.

enlisted leaders (SEL) for structuring their unique DEIA needs without a broad stroke action from the Department of the Air Force (DAF).

In the case of this discussion, the recommended level of CT application is the squadron; however, depending on the size and connectedness of the organizational structure, CT may be better suited for units below the squadron level. Geographically separated units are more likely to attain a desired degree of adaptability by understanding their unique group dynamic and employing CT at their level. This chapter begins with an examination of whether applying contingency theory in the context of DEIA efforts in the Air Force is warranted. Next, it outlines the challenges associated with change, followed by four recommendations for future DEIA efforts. Finally, a conclusionary summary recaps the theories and application of CT in DEIA.

Contingency Theory

Organizational management (OM) is critical at every level of leadership but is most effective when conducted properly at the lowest levels with authority to dictate the standard for culture (squadron command and SEL levels). CT was developed in the 1960s and emphasized that no one way of organizational management is definitively the best, especially in a large organization composed of multiple smaller working groups or sections. W. Richard Scott, known for his research on the relation between organizations and their institutional environments, argues that “contingency theory is guided by the general orienting hypothesis that organizations whose internal features best match the demands of their environments will achieve the best adaptation.”¹ Expanding on this tenet, CT dictates that leaders at all levels must employ the correct OM method for their specific segment of the overarching organization’s structure.

Contingency theory differs from all such universalistic theories in that it sees maximum performance resulting from adopting not the maximum but the appropriate level of structural variable that fits the contingency.² As organizations grow in size and expand to new locations with their own unique sub-organizations, similar to the Air Force with its global presence, the necessary actions to obtain maximum results may differ drastically depending on the unique motivators of the individuals within them. A uniform approach serves only to achieve middling results devoid of ingenuity and personalized structure, which

exacerbates the primary concern of DEIA by not fully considering the issue as it pertains to the unit.

Different types of organizations are needed in different types of environments, and many organizations today operate within and around multiple environments. Management must be concerned, above all else, with achieving good alignments and fits.³ Within CT, the principle of equifinality is paramount, being that there is more than one potential path to achieving the desired end state of the organization.

Challenges Faced by DEIA

Change Fatigue

As with any change or initiative, pockets of resistance are certain to arise in the face of another DEIA effort, as there are negative by-products of constant and rapid change. This accelerated pace casts change in a negative light as employees and mid-level managers become overwhelmed and experience change fatigue. Employees can experience these results from repeated change initiatives without a period of recovery or from poorly managed change initiatives.⁴ They have an inherent need for predictability and order,⁵ so constant organizational change can make them lose their sense of identity and understanding.⁶

The most important factor with this challenge is that DEIA in the Air Force must compete with the slew of changes in other areas of concern rapidly reshaping the service. Individuals have only so much bandwidth, and DEIA may not be a top priority for leaders at every level.

Workforce Composition

In certain situations, commanders or SELs may find themselves in a position where minority representation in unit leadership is not possible because of the makeup of the unit's company grade and senior noncommissioned officers. This point was highlighted in the 2021 Air Force Inspector General *Racial Disparity Review*, where top themes were lack of minority representation in senior leadership positions and command, exclusion from events and opportunities, and a feeling that a "good old boy" system exists in the DAF.⁷ Airmen are assigned to units without consideration of DEIA by Air Force Personnel Command assignment functional staffs. Also, the Air Force operates with built-in discrimina-

tors preventing citizens of a certain age and persons with disabilities from serving in an active duty status. Each organization is unique with, for example, different goals, resources, numbers of employees, business locations, product lines, and customer bases. It is difficult to give a sense of priority among policies without knowing the individual circumstances.⁸

The composition of the Air Force is trending in a more diverse direction, with the proportion of White Airmen decreasing from 67.6 percent in 2015 to 63.6 percent in 2020.⁹ Although the force is becoming more diverse, there is no guarantee that each unit will reflect that change. With no practical method of building equally diverse units, the needs of each will vary past the capabilities of a higher entity, such as the DAF, to adequately formulate a policy that fits for each.

Delegation Hesitancy

DEIA is one of many critical concerns for Air Force leadership, with the secretary of the Air Force (SECAF), chief of staff of the Air Force (CSAF), chief master sergeant of the Air Force (CMSAF), and other senior leaders presenting a united front that champions its importance. With an issue on the forefront that is also ever-present in the minds of Airmen and their families, senior leaders may find it difficult to relinquish primary control of the DEIA program to commanders at the squadron level.

Despite this likely need for Air Force senior leaders to retain control, delegating DEIA programs to each squadron for tailoring may prove to be the best course of action. Delegation of discretion for such issues makes sense as long as the organizational benefit of reduced information costs, improved use of local knowledge, and higher employee motivation exceeds the overall costs to an agency, including coordination and efforts to remedy these problems.¹⁰ Squadron commanders and SELs possess the local knowledge and proximity to the intended audience to drastically reduce each of these costs. The highest levels of Air Force leadership could potentially be holding back the best version of the service by resisting delegation.

Credibility

The Air Force has acknowledged and identified its shortcomings with equity, reporting on the disparity in treatment between minority Airmen and their White counterparts. By granting more latitude in DEIA to commanders through CT, there may be concerns among the ranks that issues will persist and that this change may exacerbate the

problem. Buy-in is critical, and members must know that leaders are not only capable but willing to champion DEIA across the full spectrum of personnel decision-making.

Meeting this challenge is paramount to empowering commanders and their SELs to operate independently to synthesize a DEIA policy. While the majority of the work will be completed and designed locally, the DAF should set expectations and outcomes. After an end-state goal is set, it will fall on commanders to model their unique path forward, which is the most fundamental way for leaders to earn and sustain credibility.¹¹ Regardless of the charted course of the unit, credibility will be the most difficult hurdle to overcome.

Recommendations for Applying Contingency Theory to DEIA

I contend that the role of squadron commander uniquely positions individuals with a team of SELs to mine data and gain superior knowledge through surveys and daily interactions to produce a DEIA program that best serves the service member and the Air Force. The Air Force has already empowered commanders to handle a multitude of key issues at the squadron level, and it stands to reason that no issue is better suited to be fully within their purview. Leaders can better address the needs of all members of their organizations through the following four efforts:

1. Understand the Issues

DEIA has been an issue since the inception of the Air Force. Oliver Omanson, a prisoner of war during WWII, wrote in his memoirs that “neither my life experiences nor my education prepared me for what I experienced walking the streets of Fort Jackson. I saw water fountains for whites only, barbershops for blacks only, and separation for most aspects of living.”¹² Addressing deep-seated diversity and equity issues in a meaningful manner is a daunting task that requires adaptability and the willingness to question your own outlook on DEIA. Some common dilemmas of diversity require more attention, such as the backlash against any commitment to multiculturalism, the continuing anger and disappointment of women and minorities, and the systematic institutional resistance within organizations to difference.¹³ Commanders must also consider the weight their members carry with them

from discriminations they may be facing off-duty and how that factors into their perception of the unit's commitment to DEIA.

Organizational leaders can no longer ignore polarizing issues that affect minority groups, which frequently originate outside the organization and organically work their way into the unit. It would be an attack on equity to expect individuals to separate the issues of the day from the full spectrum of their lives, especially in an age where displays of solidarity within minority communities advance equality and the fight for justice in several domains. Commanders and SELs must strive to fundamentally understand and relate to these issues because of their impact on the members of their units.

Understanding these issues can be especially difficult for a leadership core that is predominantly White, as these leaders have not encountered the same challenges or do not view them through the same lens. Likewise, most unit members may not fully understand either. As the Air Force remains mostly White, it can be assumed that there will be an interpretive gap to somewhat divisive issues that resonate differently with each segment of the unit's composition. The issues must be viewed from the standpoint of each demographic to inform the right course of action that addresses concerns without being exclusionary to any group.

2. Be Responsive

After obtaining a foundational understanding of issues in the unit, the commander must respond with clear and decisive action upon assumption of command. Current research has homed in on responsiveness as the active ingredient that underlies many of the primary qualities that define satisfying, healthy relationships.¹⁴ Leaders must actively utilize responsiveness to work toward cultivating these healthy relationships with everyone in their unit, thereby engendering an organic trust.

The operating norm should encourage observing, processing, and responding to concerns in a positive manner that conveys that the commander is a change agent focused on improving organizational culture. Theoretically, doing so should mitigate the credibility issues the Air Force has with minority Airmen after an extended period of unfair treatment and raise morale across all demographics. Several studies show that a positive mood induces subjects to spend more of their time in creative tasks and improves performance.¹⁵

Ideally, establishing a positive, inclusive, and interactive culture will encourage a responsiveness among the workforce that better informs

the commander of concerns among the ranks. The transactional nature of trading information will create a cycle of continuous advancement toward a culture that achieves results and perpetuates an inclusive climate. Cultivating and nurturing this climate will be critical to maintaining the line of communication and trust necessary to forge the responsiveness necessary to truly advocate for DEIA.

3. Develop Diverse Talent

The Air Force is not immune from systemic racism that has held back minorities from achieving success. Soft arguments are made against this notion across social media platforms, often citing the diversity present in Air Force leadership with a Black CSAF and a female CMSAF. The reality is that the service remains an institution where White men are on a different path than their minority counterparts, with a higher likelihood for developmental assignment opportunities and promotions. These men establish criteria for the entry of others into similar positions, defining success, the reward system, the distribution of resources, and the institutional goals and priorities in a way that perpetuates their power.¹⁶

The idea that noticing a person's color is not a good thing to do, even an offensive thing to do, suggests that "color," which here means non-Whiteness, is bad in and of itself.¹⁷ Counter to the idea of being "colorblind," leaders must deliberately observe their units with a focus on color. Using the intimate knowledge of individual performance and potential present within a unit enables the commander to develop the best talent, regardless of which demographic they represent. This perspective also gives the commander the ability to see disparities in performance and conduct local research to determine why one demographic may not be represented in the high-performing group of talent being developed.

Propagating a culture that supports development for all Airmen and assesses why underperforming segments of the unit population are falling behind their workplace contemporaries can only be achieved at the lowest level of leadership. Responding to the concerns of minority Airmen in a meaningful and forthright manner regarding the equity of the process that decides their advancement opportunities will organically solve trust and credibility issues. Such conversations may help dispel the air of mystery surrounding certain decisions regarding

development opportunities without getting leaders mired in justifying every single decision that must be made.

4. Offer Reasoned Dissent

The occurrence of dissent may be a function of organizational history regarding the treatment of dissent. Whether dissent has been suppressed or rewarded in the past influences the extent to which people press their dissenting points of view.¹⁸ It is far from commonplace to advocate for dissent within the military construct, but in the arena of DEIA, we have a duty to dissent when systems are withholding opportunities from minorities. Reasoned dissent is not the act of undermining or publicly disparaging leaders and their decisions due to an unfavorable outcome; it is the informed protest of a decision-making process justified with deliberately negative results affecting minority Airmen.

Many developmental opportunities across all Air Force specialties involve outside entities or an external selection process. While commanders and SELs conduct their own processes internally to nominate individuals for these career-broadening experiences, they must also analyze whether decisions were made with a discriminatory decision matrix or through coercive isomorphism. Coercive isomorphism occurs when organizations adopt acculturated practices and policies because they feel pressured by more powerful organizations or actors in their organizational field.¹⁹

These DEIA-hindering forces may reside at the wing, major command, or even DAF itself in certain selection processes, making advocacy for DEIA a herculean labor when pushing back against a higher authority. It is necessary to create space for candid conversations with methodically formed dissenting opinions that must be had to challenge bad actors in gatekeeper positions. Commanders who feed and shape their dissent with the legitimate concerns from their units are better able to formulate well-prepared dissent to inform senior leaders of issues with decisions and policies as they pertain to the full spectrum of DEIA. Such actions demonstrate a legitimate commitment to achieving a desirable end state for all Airmen.

Conclusion

The Air Force has struggled to deliver a DEIA program that best suits the needs of a diverse force while also fostering an environment that

produces different outcomes for Airmen based solely on their race, gender, or both. Applying contingency theory and empowering the squadron commander to make data-driven decisions shaped by information extrapolated from their unit's unique compositions is the optimal course of action. Proximity to the issue will always uniquely position leaders to synthesize a program that accurately addresses the needs of a unit.

Challenges will present themselves when shifting toward contingency theory for DEIA, with the most likely being change fatigue, workforce composition, delegation hesitancy, and credibility. Each of these are multifaceted and may manifest in an unexpected manner requiring a collaborative approach that involves SELs and representation working groups. Championing the use of contingency theory in this unconventional approach with genuine and transparent intentions is the foundation for overcoming obstacles as they arise.

Four recommendations were proposed for leaders at the appropriate level, ideally squadron commanders, to enact impactful change: understand the issues, be responsive, develop diverse talent, and offer reasoned dissent. Each of these provides a brief applicational framework to apply CT and reappropriate the means to deliver on the promise of a truly inclusive Air Force.

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Notes

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Chapter 6

Air Force Leadership Diversity

G. Hall Sebren, Jr.

Introduction

When Airmen hear the term “diversity,” they have been programmed over time to think about skin color and gender. The Air Force is trying to broaden this thinking by adding other words to describe diversity: “thought,” “background,” and “job specialty” are a few. Adding these descriptors and defining diversity differently are helpful in taking a wider view of the subject, but we still struggle with getting even the “big three of race, gender and ethnicity” correct.¹ We can see the Air Force’s lack of “big three” diversity by looking at the general officer corps, even as senior leaders in the Air Force mistakenly claim that the corps is a microcosm of the country. The Air Force, writ large, is more diverse than it has been in the past, but diversity within senior leadership is lacking in terms of the big three and across Air Force specialty codes (AFSC) and as such lacks diversity of thought as well.

The Air Force has long touted that it selects the right person for the right job at the right time; historically, however, the force seems to have struggled with this. For example, a previous Air Force chief information dominance and chief information officer (CIO) was not a communications or cyber warfare officer but a career tanker and airlift pilot. Their first experience with this work was also in their twenty-sixth year of service as the director, warfighter systems inte-

A note from the editor: This chapter was originally a research paper submitted by the author to the faculty of Air War College, Maxwell AFB, in 2017 in partial fulfillment of the graduation requirements. Some of the statistics and policy discussion represented herein were not revised so as to highlight how policies can be influenced by facts-based research. Also, although below-the-zone promotion boards ceased in 2020, promoting rated versus non-rated officers to the highest ranks remains disproportionate to the makeup of USAF forces. However, the upward trend in recent years of promoting more non-rated career fields in higher numbers is encouraging regarding a diversified and inclusive Air Force and the benefits of such in achieving the Department of the Air Force mission: ensuring our nation’s security.

* For simplicity and readability, the terms “Airman” and “Airmen” used in a generic sense encompass all Department of the Air Force members, including US Air Force service members, US Space Force Guardians, and civilian and military personnel in all job titles and positions from entry-level to top leadership.

gration.² In fact, as of 2016, there has never been a cyber operator, space and missile operator, or special tactics officer as the deputy chief of staff for operations, only pilot officers. Although the Air Force has many logistics and engineering officers fully qualified to serve as the deputy chief of staff for logistics and engineering, the position has been filled by at least two rated officers over the years. Finally, as of 2024, all but one of the thirty-one officers who have filled the role of the United States Air Force Academy's commandant of cadets have been rated officers. I believe this sends a clear message to cadets: if you want to be a general officer, you better be a pilot. The academy has had two non-rated officers as its superintendent since its inception, but this statistic still leaves leadership positions by non-pilots at the premier officer training ground woefully underrepresented.

Boards, Processes, and Policies

Promotion boards, administered by direction of Department of the Air Force Instruction (DAFI) 36-2501, *Officer Promotions and Selective Continuation*, operate under the fairest process possible: there is no overt tolerance for discrimination within the service. In fact, the secretary of the Air Force swears in each board before it begins its work of selecting officers for promotion to the next higher grade. In recent years, in keeping with the theme of fairness and equality, Airmen have been inundated with information regarding discrimination and diversity. In 2013 the Air Force published the *Diversity Strategic Roadmap*, listing five priorities for increasing diversity: “institutionalize diversity as necessary to mission success” and “attract, recruit, develop, and retain a high-quality, talented, and diverse force” (emphasis in original).³ Aside from this roadmap, a partial list of what Airmen have seen since just 2010 follows (with dates of latest publication): AFI 36-2707, *Non-discrimination in Programs and Activities Assisted or Conducted by the Department of the Air Force*, superseded by DAFI 36-2710, *Equal Opportunity Program*, June 18, 2020; AFI 36-7001, *Diversity and Inclusion*, February 19, 2019; Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 36-70, *Diversity and Inclusion*, October 16, 2018; Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 1020.02E, *Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity in the DoD*, June 8, 2015; and Executive Order 13583, *Establishing a Coordinated Government-wide Initiative to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce*, August 18, 2011.

Scanning the Air Force's policies will give a sense that the Air Force prioritizes diversity and inclusion. DAFI 36-2710 presented the normal rhetoric of nondiscrimination in such areas as race, religion, and gender—demographics we have all heard about for years. AFPD 36-70 speaks directly to diversity, defining it as “personal life experiences, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural knowledge, educational background, work experience, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical and spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity and gender.”⁴ Finally, AFI 36-7001, which implements AFPD 36-70, states that the Air Force's goal is “to attract, recruit, develop and retain a high-quality, diverse Total Force, ensuring a culture of inclusion in order to leverage the diversity of the nation for strategic advantage in Air Force, joint and coalition operations.” The Total Force refers to the combination of active duty, Air National Guard, and Air Force Reserve forces. Further, the AFI's guidance is intended to enable “leaders to leverage diverse organizational talent and an inclusive culture to enhance mission effectiveness.”⁵

While the Air Force is willing to create policy, tradition is not allowing the system to address the problem of diversity within its most senior positions. The Air Force is not doing as well with diversity as it believes. For instance, in 2016, the Air Force's general officer corps, comprising officer ranks O-7 through O-10, is 94 percent White and 7 percent female.⁶ Since officer accessions have a much different demographic, these percentages indicate there is some level of discrimination that happens as officers move up in rank from second lieutenant (O-1) through lieutenant colonel (O-5) and beyond.

Congress has expressed concern with these dismal statistics, as have some entities within the Air Force. House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) spoke to the diversity of senior officers in the Department of Defense (DOD): “Just as our military looks like America, so too must our general officers. If minorities are asked to go into harm's way, they must be allowed to lead as well.”⁷ He is right, but he is only looking at race. He should also be looking at gender, diversity of thought, and the rest of the list included in AFPD 36-70, described previously, which can be played out through promoting officers of many different Air Force specialties.

As the subsequent sections of this chapter will show, the below-the-promotion zone (BPZ) process is a tool historically used to identify potential senior leaders starting at the O-5 promotion board. Although the early promotion system actively ceased in 2020, the data provided

in this chapter substantiates the propensity to promote pilots to the highest ranks. While the BPZ system is no longer used, pilot officers are nonetheless promoted at a greater rate than mission support officers. Thus, the promotion system in whatever form it takes fails to maintain diversity in the AFSCs of our senior leader pool. The pilot officer career field is the least diverse in terms of “the big three” as opposed to the mission support officer career fields, which are far more varied. The promotion system creates this bias by creating a shift in “majority rule” as officers move from the O-5 and O-6 ranks toward general officer ranks. As an example, 58 percent of the general officer corps are pilot officers. Yet, from 2012 through 2016, pilot officers comprised only 30 percent of the eligible pool for promotion to colonel in the below-the-promotion zone category. Mission support officers comprised 37 percent of the same promotion boards.⁸

Makeup and Organization of the Air Force

Demographics

According to the Census Bureau, there are roughly 335 million people in the United States. Females comprise 50.4 percent of the population. In terms of race, the United States is 75.5 percent White, 13.6 percent Black, and 6.3 percent Asian, with the rest of the population either Native American or declaring mixed race status.⁹ The Hispanic/Latino label is an ethnicity, not a race (see chap. 8 for further discussion on ethnicity versus race); however, the US Census lists Hispanic as approximately 19.1 percent of the US population.¹⁰ By comparison, the Air and Space Forces are over 21 percent female and, in terms of race, are 70 percent White, 15 percent Black, and about 5 percent Asian, with the remaining population indicating Native American, Hawaiian, mixed race, or declining to respond.¹¹ According to these statistics, females are vastly underrepresented in the DAF; however, it is a little less White, a little more Black, and little less Asian than the general population.

Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC) 2023 statistics show that the Department of the Air Force comprises 64,618 active duty officers. USAF ranks captain through lieutenant colonel consisted of 16,450 rated flying officers (11,908 pilots, 3,181 navigators, and 1,361 air battle managers) and 27,096 non-rated officers compose the remaining

AFSCs.¹² In 2017, while the pilot officer cohort is the largest specialty within the general officer corps, it was also the least diverse group, with only 7 percent of the cohort being either female ($n = 4$) or non-White ($n = 7$).¹³ The next lowest cohort is the navigator specialty at 14 percent diverse; female ($n = 0$) or non-White ($n = 2$). The mission support cohort contains 68 general officers and is 26 percent female ($n = 12$) or non-White ($n = 6$). Before diving deeper into the details, it is appropriate to look at some other demographics.

All officers are required to have a four-year college degree and earn their commission through one of four methods: the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), Officer Training School (OTS), or through a direct appointment. According to 2023 AFPC data, ROTC produced 42.7 percent of the officer corps, while 21.9 percent earned commissions through the USAFA, 19.2 percent through OTS, and 16.1 percent through direct commission.¹⁴ In 2017 the commissioning source breakout for the general officer cohort showed 48 percent commissioned through ROTC, 44 percent through the USAFA, and 7 percent through OTS. This data may indicate that increasing diversity in the commissioning sources, especially the USAFA, would eventually translate to increased diversity in the general officer cohort. These officers, regardless of their commissioning source, comprise the leadership of the Air Force.

Air Force Structure and Command Time Disparity

Operationally, the Air Force is organized—from largest organization to smallest—in the wing, group, squadron, and flight structure. Using a typical wing as an example, the Air Force generally has company grade officers (lieutenants and captains) or senior noncommissioned officers running flights. Field grade officers (majors and lieutenant colonels) command squadrons, and colonels command groups. More senior colonels or junior brigadier generals command wings. Figure 6.1 depicts the Air Force structure and leadership ranks associated with its components.

Using the 35th Fighter Wing as an example, the wing is commanded by a pilot officer who is a colonel and consists of four groups (Maintenance Group, Medical Group, Mission Support Group, and Operations Group) and sixteen squadrons within those groups. The Maintenance Group, commanded by a maintenance officer colonel, consists of two squadrons, each commanded by a major or lieutenant

colonel maintenance officer. The Medical Group, commanded by a medical officer, consists of five squadrons commanded by lieutenant colonels in the Medical Service Corps or Biomedical Sciences Corps. The Mission Support Group, commanded by a support officer, has six squadrons commanded by either majors or lieutenant colonels across a number of career fields. Lastly, the Operations Group, commanded by a pilot officer, is made up of three squadrons commanded by lieutenant colonel pilot officers.¹⁵



Figure 6.1. Notional Air Force wing organizational chart showing wing-to-flight levels. (Adapted by author from Department of Air Force Instruction 38-101, *Manpower and Organization*, August 29, 2019, 85, fig. 26.3, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>.)

Officers who operate in the structure laid out above have an advantage over officers who do not since they will have the opportunity to command, a critical prerequisite for promotion and especially for early promotion. The Army places a premium on command starting at the O-3 level, which it calls company command and which is required “before being considered a branch-qualified company grade officer.”¹⁶ The equivalent level in the Air Force is called flight command.

It is at this flight command level where the difference in leadership experience between rated and non-rated officers starts to accrue. According to the general officer data collected for this research, just over half of the pilot officers have led a flight, averaging ten months in command. Conversely, the average A4/7 officer (maintenance, logistics readiness, civil engineer, and security forces officer compilation) led two flights for an average total time in command of twenty-nine months. At the squadron level, the data indicates pilot officers commanded one squadron for twenty months’ time in command. The A4/7 officers commanded at the squadron level an average of 1.5 times with thirty months’ time in command. At the group level, just over half of pilot

officers have commanded a group and did so for eleven months, whereas the A4/7 officers averaged one group for 18.5 months. Finally, at the wing level, pilot officers averaged 1.5 wings for thirty months and A4/7 officers 1.3 wings for twenty-eight months. All told, through wing command, the pilot officer will have accumulated roughly six years of command compared to almost nine years for the A4/7 officer. The data indicate the A4/7 officer meets the test of ability to serve in the higher grade, as discussed previously.

Not only is the amount of time in leadership a distinctive contrast between pilots and other officers but there is also a distinction in the depth of leadership experiences. In then-colonel Russell Mack's work, he lists six prerequisites for promotions. On top of the Goldwater-Nichols-directed joint qualifications, which are outside the scope of my work, he identifies the most critical prerequisite as BPZ promotion but also includes command time. He goes on to say that for pilots "limited command opportunities occur later in an officer's development—typically as a lieutenant colonel, squadron commander—their first true test of leadership."¹⁷ This is an interesting distinction because for the support officer, particularly the A4/7 officer, command at the flight level is a true test of leadership, and it happens as early as second lieutenant. For the A4/7 officer, squadron command usually occurs first as a major with a second, larger squadron as a lieutenant colonel. Challenges at the squadron level are also not equivalent. The average F-16 squadron has fewer than fifty members (generously estimated), officers and Airmen, with the vast majority being other pilot officers. The average maintenance squadron has 450 Airmen, officers, and civilians, with most being young, enlisted Airmen. Based on total numbers of Airmen, diversity of career fields, and a much lower manning percentage compared to a fighter squadron, non-rated officers have more challenges, in my experience. This is not to say leading a fighter squadron is easy or unimportant, but the complexity is not equivalent; certainly, the age at which officers are exposed to leadership opportunities is vastly different and better prepares support officers for the challenge of leadership at the next higher level.

Misawa's 35th Fighter Wing provides a real-world example illustrating how this time and depth of leadership would benefit the day-to-day operations and overall mission success. About 3,500 people are assigned to this wing, only about 100 of whom are pilots. The rest of the wing comprises various Air Force specialties and performs a number of functions, so leading this type of wing is more like running a small

city. The maintenance and support groups are usually about two-thirds of the wing in terms of its population and functions. Officers within those groups deal with the challenges of the flying mission in addition to the other challenges of running the rest of the wing. Pilot officers are not afforded this opportunity, as they are focused on learning their craft and honing their combat skills. Again, they have a critical task, indispensable to completing the mission of our Air Force. However, those skills do not necessarily transfer to being able to run a city. Recall that the promotion system seeks to “select officers through a fair and competitive selection process, advancing the best and fully qualified officers to positions of increased responsibility and authority.”¹⁸ If the Air Force is looking for an officer to serve in the next higher grade, it might make more sense to promote an officer who has dealt with far more wing functions than only the flying mission. Yet we see the pilot officer promoted early to O-5 at a rate slightly over twice the rate of a support officer, even though the pilot officer has not had an opportunity to command at the squadron level and may not have been a flight commander.

The Breakdown

The Air Force preaches zero tolerance for discrimination, and AFI 36-2501 states, “Promotion is not a reward for past service. It is advancement to a position of greater responsibility based on the requirements of the Department of the Air Force (DAF) and the officer’s future potential. The promotion board objective is to select officers through a fair and competitive selection process, advancing the best and fully qualified officers to positions of increased responsibility and authority.”¹⁹ Nowhere in that directive is there an indication that a particular AFSC should be promoted at a higher rate than another, but it is happening. Since the promotion boards are set up with the same diversity as that of the records they are scoring, I will assume that the system as it stands is as neutral and unbiased as it can be.

In this case, discrimination must occur prior to the boards, most likely in the form of wing commanders granting higher stratifications to pilots than to mission support officers on their yearly officer performance reports. The Air Force selects only a small percentage of officers for early promotion at any one board, and the board sees only what is written on an officer’s performance report or promotion recommendation form. Consequently, a wing commander has tremendous

power that can determine whether an officer is promoted and unquestionably influences whether that officer is promoted early. Stratification levels of less than the top 5 percent of a pool of officers would easily keep an officer from being selected early to a particular grade/rank.

As Mack indicated, BPZ promotions are *required* for eventual selection to general officer grades. Officers have two BPZ opportunities: one in-the-promotion zone (IPZ) opportunity and unlimited above-the-promotion zone (APZ) opportunities for promotion to O-5 and O-6. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the BPZ statistics, as the Air Force general officer corps is essentially 100 percent composed of BPZ officers. In a 2016 briefing to the Air War College, Mr. Greg Lowrimore from the Air Force Colonels Group (also known as DPO) indicated that for the 2014 promotion board for brigadier general, “79% are 2 grades BPZ, 21% are 1 grade BPZ, and 0% never BPZ.”²⁰ We can look to then-colonel Mack’s research report, “Creating Joint Leaders Today for a Successful Air Force Tomorrow,” for how the other services value BPZ promotion. Army statistics show that 37 percent of its one-stars were not BPZ, Marine Corps data shows that none were promoted to any grade early, and for the Navy, 55 percent of its one-stars had never been promoted early. This data is in stark contrast to that of the Air Force, which “by comparison, has not selected an on-time colonel for promotion to brigadier general. . . . Every one of them has been promoted at least one year early.”²¹ Promoting in this manner comes at a cost to diversity at the Air Force general officer level. A senior leader who briefed at a Commander’s Leadership Seminar (CLS) agrees with me. He stated, “Some of you will be promoted to general officer and should not be, and some of you will not be promoted to general officer but should be. It’s just the way it is.”²²

The Air Force limits the number of people it promotes early by nearly 7 percentage points per year.²³ Authority for promotion boards and BPZ opportunities are initially laid out in AFI 36-2501, stating that “BPZ promotions provide an opportunity for accelerated promotion of officers who are exceptionally well qualified as specified by 10 U.S.C. 616(b).”²⁴ This section of the code does not specify the qualifications officers must have to be promoted BPZ. It only tells the secretary of defense and the service secretary the percentage of officers that may be promoted early. A service secretary has the authority to authorize up to a 10 percent early selection rate on a given board, and the secretary of defense cannot authorize more than 15 percent.²⁵ Air Force promotion board statistics from 1989 to 2016 show BPZ selec-

tion on average for O-5 and O-6 was only 3.3 and 3.0 percent, respectively. The 2012 to 2016 promotion boards had a 3.4 percent BTZ promotion rate to O-5 and 3 percent to O-6.²⁶

In terms of total numbers, the Air Force promoted 468 pilot officers and just 190 support officers as candidates for potential general officer grades from 2012 to 2016.²⁷ For the O-5 selection boards, pilot officers were promoted BPZ at an average rate of 4.9 percent, whereas for mission support officers, it was 2.4 percent. For the O-6 boards, pilot officers were selected at an average rate of 4.3 percent and support officers, 2.1 percent. Figure 6.2 compares pilot with mission support promotion rates.²⁸

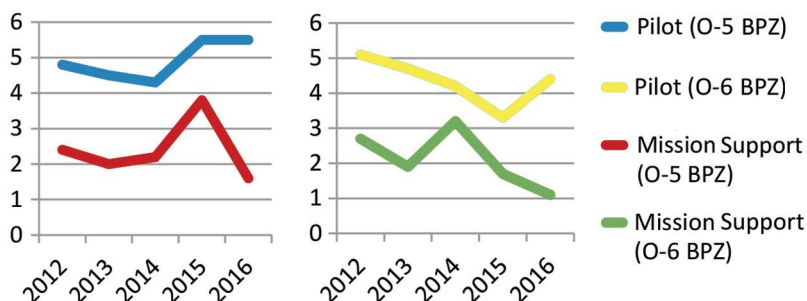


Figure 6.2. BPZ selection rates 2012–16: pilot versus mission support at the O-5 (left) and O-6 (right) ranks

These statistics are significant because by promoting pilots—who comprise a smaller percentage of officers compared to mission support officers—at a rate twice that of support officers, the Air Force changed the dynamic of the available pool of officers eligible for promotion to O-7. Mathematically speaking, this effect all but assures that the general officer corps will be primarily filled with pilot officers—and therefore White males—given that the most likely case for becoming a general officer is early promotion to multiple grades.

General Officer Data

Since the Air Force Manpower, Personnel, and Services (AF/A1) office would not provide statistical data on the general officers, all information was derived from the Air Force home page biographies section. There is some inherent bias when collecting data in this way, as not all officers operate in the wing, group, and squadron structure

common to most of the Air Force. However, general officer data gathered using a 2016 general officer roster provided by the Air War College shows that of the 266 active duty, line-of-the-Air Force general officers, 94 percent ($n = 250$) are White and 7 percent ($n = 19$) are female. As indicated, the general officer corps is 58 percent ($n = 156$) pilot officers, with the next highest number of general officers in the collective coming from the A4/7 community, comprising 7.8 percent ($n = 21$) of the general officer cohort.

Not all officers operate in the wing, group, and squadron construct, including acquisition officers, so comparing time in command across different career fields is difficult. Trying to account for command-like time for those officers would not provide an appropriate comparison mechanism to other line officers. The Air Force combines acquisitions, A4/7, and support officers in a category called the mission support officer. For the purpose of this research, I grouped officers into the following categories: pilot, navigator, air battle manager, space and missile operator, acquisitions (maintenance, civil engineer, logistics readiness, security forces), support (communications, comptroller, contracting, personnel, and public affairs), and other (Office of Special Investigations [OSI] and special tactics/combat rescue officer).

Diversity and Why Air Force Senior Leadership Is Not as Diverse as It Could Be

During a CLS briefing at the Air War College, a senior officer stated that diversity was one of the main problems the Air Force has to solve. Further, it needs to “reduce unconscious bias” and recognize that “not like us’ isn’t just skin color.”²⁹ These statements are a refreshing stance on where the Air Force might be heading in the future. We can look to Jeff Smith’s *Tomorrow’s Air Force: Tracing the Past, Shaping the Future* to get a glimpse of how the composition of our most senior leadership cohort has changed over time. In his work, he reviewed the career backgrounds of Air Force three- and four-star officers from 1960 through 2010 to determine what caused the shift from a focus on bomber pilot generals to fighter pilot generals. He then sought to predict what our future three- and four-star general officer corps might look like. In his work, he also shows the changes in this period with reference to non-rated generals. I group his work differently and com-

bine bomber, fighter, and airlift pilots into a single “pilot” group (table 6.1).

Table 6.1. Percentage of pilot versus non-rated three- and four-star Air Force general officers, 1960–2010

	1960	1975	1990	1992	2001	2010
Pilot	89%	89%	75%	75%	87%	97%
Non-rated	11%	11%	25%	25%	13%	3%

Developed from Jeffery J. Smith, *Tomorrow's Air Force: Tracing the Past, Shaping the Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 95, 97, 99, 150–53.

As of 2024, there were forty-four four-star generals in the DOD. Of the thirteen USAF four-stars, 69 percent are pilots (rated). Of the four who are not pilots, one is an air battle manager (also rated), one an intelligence and cyber officer, one a missileer, and one an acquisitions officer.³⁰ This composition is a drastic change from the 2010 numbers in the above table. Also of note, in 2016 only two female officers in the Air Force’s history had achieved four stars.³¹ Having females in the four-star rank is comparatively new and a step in the correct direction. Interestingly, of the two female four-stars serving in 2016, one was an air battle manager and the other an acquisitions officer. As of 2024, this number has grown by two, both pilots, with only one serving on active duty, Gen Jacqueline D. Van Ovost, commander of US Transportation Command.³² I believe that this diversity demonstrates the Air Force is on the right path, at least regarding selecting more female officers for promotion to its senior levels. Since females are a smaller percentage of the overall Air Force makeup, it is not enough to promote just non-rated females to truly address the diversity issue. The Air Force must look at the problem holistically.

Bias remains. During another CLS lecture, I asked an Air Force senior leader, who was a pilot, whether an Air Force logistics officer could lead the J-4 (DOD’s joint logistics function) or US Transportation Command since both positions are exclusively about logistics. His answer surprised me, as he said, “Could a logistics officer make better decisions than I did? Sure. Would a logistics officer make a different decision than I did? Sure. But you’d have to find a logistics officer with an operational mindset.”³³ I found this response somewhat disheartening, as he indicated that a logistics officer, whose sole purpose is thinking in an operational mindset, might not think operationally. This bias is not a unique issue when speaking with pilot officers.

Smith, a former Air Force pilot, surveyed officers across a multitude of AFSCs and grades/ranks. For the statement “Within the Air Force Officer corps, there is an unwritten ‘culture’ that places more importance and prestige on some AFSCs over others,” the response was a unanimous yes, with pilot officers ranked number 1 of 5 and support officers ranked number 5 of 5. This result can be contrasted with his findings that most officers believed unconventional war was more likely to occur in the future, which would require different leadership skills than presently emphasized. Although there was recognition that the nature of war was likely to change, Smith found that 62 percent of fighter pilot officers still believed “fighter pilots are best qualified to hold senior leadership positions.”³⁴

This bias that pilot officers, regardless of the leadership requirements and their depth and breadth of leadership experiences, are the best choice for future leadership positions is something that the Air Force’s diversity program should be trying to overcome. In her work, Air Force colonel Sirena Morris (who conducted her research as a major states that “an inclusive organization recognizes and capitalizes from the varied perspectives and approaches each individual within the organization provides.”³⁵ Colonel Morris refers to “cognitive diversity,” commonly called diversity of thought. In this regard, in his book *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Scott Page makes the case that training markedly influences how we see things, and our experiences shape the things we want or need to learn. Further, he indicates we can expect that “identity differences lead to experiential differences that in turn create tool differences.”³⁶ We can apply this idea to the varied identities in the Air Force. We already know that the pilot officer group largely believes that regardless of the situation, the pilot officer is the most capable leader to solve a problem or achieve a goal. Knowing this, it is not difficult to see why a wing commander who is a pilot would then rank their pilot squadron commanders 1, 2, and 3 over other equally capable mission support officers, thereby giving them a much greater chance of promotion to the general officer corps. This cycle, in turn, creates the lack of diversity and, likely, available tools our most senior leaders need to address the ever-changing mission.

Recommendations

Institutionally, the Air Force is not using its talent pool to its full potential. It is choosing the officers with the least amount of time in command for the most senior positions. Consequently, it is no wonder the Air Force has difficulty changing its culture or making large shifts in how it does business since learning how to effect such change takes time and practice, beginning at the flight level. The future pilot officers destined to be general officers are moved so quickly through the squadron and group levels (if even given an opportunity to command a group), they have not developed the skill sets to effectively lead large organizations; further, most have not gained the skills necessary to lead a large organization through change.

Based on the demonstrated desire of the Air Force to primarily promote rated versus mission support officers to the general officer corps, the Air Force could instead increase the percentage of officers promoted early. As indicated by the roughly 3 percent early promotion rate from 1989 to 2020, the Air Force had limited the pool of officers from which to choose general officers for advancement to about 7 percent each year. Promoting more total officers early would increase early promotion opportunities by enabling greater numbers of mission support officers to join the pool of high-potential officers competing for the general officer corps. Expanding early promotion opportunities would increase not only the total pool of officers but also the diversity of the pool since most minority and female officers are in the support categories, as defined by the Air Force. For example, in 2016 the Air Force selected 118 majors for promotion from a pool of 3,497 for early promotion to lieutenant colonel.³⁷ Considering the pool of candidates in 2016, the Air Force could have promoted nearly 350 officers early, expanding the pool of potential general officers by nearly 230 officers in a single year.

While not covered in this study, I recommend that AF/A1 reviews officer performance reports to see how often pilot officers are stratified higher than mission support officers. Anecdotally, in the two wings where I have been privy to see the stratification layout, the wing commander ranked the pilot officer squadron commanders 1, 2, and 3, followed by the mission support officers at 4 and lower. I found this ranking most interesting when one of the support officer commanders had exceeded all mission goals, had the best administrative statistics, and was selected for a major command-level award for his superior

work—yet was given the fourth stratification behind a pilot officer commander whose command was not meeting mission requirements and had some of the lowest administrative statistics. This situation occurred over a three-year period across two different wings in two different major commands.

To counter this phenomenon, another method the Air Force could use to increase the diversity of the pool of potential general officers is to create a different stratification technique more similar to how the Air Force constructs the reduction-in-force boards. For those boards, a form equivalent to the promotion recommendation form (PRF) has a block where the officer is compared only against other officers in their specific AFSC and promotion year group. Although the officers are stovepiped into competitive bins, this method allows a true apples-to-apples comparison.

None of these recommendations are likely to be implemented, though, until the Air Force decides that pilot officers—while talented leaders in their own right—are not the only skilled leaders. Gen Larry Spencer, USAF, retired, former Air Force vice chief of staff, commented, “Who says that senior positions need to be held by those that are operators? Obviously, a lot of them do, but why do so many of them need to be? That’s always been a little bit controversial.”³⁸ When the Air Force recognizes that there are talented leaders across the entire spectrum of the officer corps and the operational wings adopt that mindset, then I think we will see some change. The Air Force will then have leadership that brings more and diverse ideas to approaching and solving its problems. In the end, I conclude that promotion boards are not the issue: it is the wing commanders and other senior raters who cannot get past the idea that someone other than a pilot officer can be the number one officer at a base or in a pool of officers contending for promotion to the next higher grade.

Col G. Hall Sebren, Jr., USAF

Colonel Sebren is a career aircraft maintenance officer who has commanded two squadrons, two maintenance groups, and the 72nd Air Base Wing. He is currently the vice commander of the Air Force Sustainment Center. He has a passion for education and received a master’s degree in counseling and leadership from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. He is the recipient of the 2017 Senior Leadership Award for the most original paper at Air War College, where he looked at leadership diversity across the active duty Air Force general officer corps.

Notes

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22. Senior Leader, Commandant’s Lecture Series speaker (Air War College, Maxwell AFB, AL, August 12, 2016).

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PART 2
HARD DISCUSSIONS
RACE

Chapter 7

Racism IS a National Security Issue

Christopher M. Rein

In mid-2021, major news outlets highlighted testimony from Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm Michael Gilday, who asserted that the US military is not “weak” or “woke,” which is certainly not news to anyone serving today. But the real news from the congressional hearing that sparked the CNO’s testimony is that sitting members of Congress apparently do not understand that racism within the ranks undermines the military’s ability to accomplish its mission. According to transcriptions of the hearing, one member speciously and mockingly asked the CNO how reading a book that highlights the nation’s long and tortuous history with racism would “improve our Navy’s readiness and lethality for great power competition.”¹ Most historians would argue that we must understand where we have come from to figure out where we are going, and I would offer the following to help facilitate that journey.

First, let me categorically reject the assertion that working to overcome the nation’s history of racism is an attempt to tear the country down or instill a sense of “White guilt” that would constitute a reverse form of racism. The US military, which I was proud to serve for twenty-two years on active duty, works hard every day to overcome shortfalls and get better. Every training sortie, field exercise, and ship-board drill attempts to identify and overcome flaws to make the individual or team better and stronger. Eradicating racism in the ranks is exactly the same. We don’t point out flaws in our children in an attempt to tear them down; we do it because we love them and want them to reach their full potential. Confronting and eradicating racism in our nation’s military is an act of patriotism that makes our country better and stronger.

As strong as the US military is, it can’t accomplish its mission alone and never has. The country could not have won its independence without French assistance. Allies from around the globe united to defeat the twin menaces of fascism in Europe and race-based imperialism in Asia. Every day, the US military relies on partners and allies

¹ This chapter was published as an article in Wild Blue Yonder, Air University Press, November 5, 2021, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>.

of many different races, faiths, and cultures for additional capability, support, and basing. In a recent article published in the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Lt Gen Jon Thomas, deputy commander of the Pacific Air Forces, highlighted the vital importance of the many “faces” we work with in the theater. Through “direct, frequent, and persistent personal interaction[,]” these partners provide the “trust, understanding of the operating environment, [and] interoperability” that “enable operational maneuver and sustainment by contributing to reliable and consistent access to airspace, facilities, and equipment necessary to successfully conduct dispersed operations.”² The same is true throughout the globe, from the mountains of Afghanistan to the plains of Sub-Saharan Africa and jungles of South America. In some places, we are entirely reliant on local expertise and capabilities to accomplish our mission.

In the Pacific theater of World War II, for example, the US military could not have even begun to fight back against Japan without a secure base area in Australia. In New Guinea, inhabitants that some Soldiers initially disregarded as “savages” and “pickaninnies” risked their lives to carry supplies into the jungle and wounded Allied servicemen back out, eventually winning the affection and respect of their comrades in arms, leading many to refer to the New Guineans as “Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.”³ Without the support and assistance of indigenous porters, organized under the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU), the US military could never have successfully prosecuted the defense along the Driniumor River.⁴

Upon reaching the Philippines, the US Army again relied heavily on indigenous forces to help liberate the island of Mindanao. An annex to the 31st Infantry Division’s official operations order attempted to classify and rank the various ethnic groups on the island: the Moros were “among the finest individual fighting men in the world” as a result of forty years of only partially successful combat to “pacify” the American colony, while the “Negritos” of the Surigao Peninsula were “physically and intellectually the lowest people on the island . . . small of stature” with “curly hair, flat noses, broad heads, and thick lips.”⁵ But guerrillas drawn from all of these groups, led by US military personnel working as civilians on the island during the Japanese conquest and aided by escaped POWs from the Davao Penal Colony, had liberated an estimated 95 percent of the island by the time Eighth Army landed in April 1945.⁶ Their collective efforts considerably accelerated the campaign and reduced casualties, keeping the 24th and 31st In-

fantry Divisions ready for the follow-on invasion of the Japanese home islands.⁷

Many service members modified racial views after long experience with the various peoples of the Pacific Rim, overcoming racial biases. But the next conflict may not afford an opportunity for the gradual erosion of racial stereotypes prevalent in American society today, highlighted by the senseless and brutal attacks on Asian-American citizens that harken back to the internment of Americans with Japanese ancestry during World War II.⁸ We have to be ready to fight on day one, alongside allies of different races, ethnicities, and faiths. And we can't waste time while we figure out that our innate prejudices and convictions that we grew up with are simply wrong.

My favorite historical example of the power of diversity in military operations comes from my hometown of New Orleans, where a polyglot American force under the command of Andrew Jackson defeated a more homogeneous force of British regulars under the command of Sir Edward Packenham on January 8, 1815.⁹ This event, more than any other, fueled Jackson's subsequent political career and eventual ascension to the presidency, making him such an icon of some on the right that his portrait hung on the wall of President Trump's Oval Office.¹⁰ Jackson was no saint and was a lifetime slaveholder as well as the architect of the Indian removal later known as the "Trail of Tears," but he was an astute enough military commander to recognize the power of diversity in his ranks. Packenham's force, many of whom were veterans of the armies that had defeated Napoleon on the Iberian Peninsula, proved unable to penetrate a defensive line Jackson erected to block access to the city.

Jackson was hopelessly outnumbered, having only two regiments of regulars, the 7th and 44th, plus detachments of regulars and dragoons. He bolstered them with militia from Tennessee and Kentucky, the legendary Tennessee "Volunteers" immortalized in song and that state's athletic teams, who made up with numbers what they lacked in training. Joining them were two battalions of free Blacks from New Orleans, under Majors Pierre Lacoste and Louis Daquin, building on a tradition of Black military service that dated back to the French colonial period in Louisiana. Jackson placed them all behind a strong barricade to bolster the discipline they needed to face their enemy in the most successful combination of regular and militia forces since the Battle of Cowpens thirty-four years earlier.

However, Jackson was not satisfied with his “total force” of regulars and reserves. He also accepted the services of Jean Lafitte’s Baratarians, privateers who had preyed on American commerce shipping but who added their expertise as artilleryists and, most importantly, their weapons and gunpowder to stud the line with cannon.¹¹ Finally, Jackson anchored his flanks with additional support by positioning naval forces in the Mississippi River to prevent Pakenham from outflanking his right by crossing to the West Bank, while Choctaw Indians guarded the swamps on his left flank. Jackson had proven the futility of Indian forces fighting in a conventional style behind a barricade a year earlier at Horseshoe Bend, but the Choctaws proved to be expert irregular forces and prevented British incursions through the swamp. Left with no other option except to charge across an open field and into the teeth of Jackson’s guns, Pakenham lost the battle—and his life—to Jackson’s diverse force. By leveraging the strengths and compensating for the weaknesses of each element of his command, Jackson created a combined arms force that was far greater than the sum of its parts and saved the Crescent City from British occupation and potential destruction.¹²

Thus, diversity is not just an abstract concept; it has produced, and will continue to produce, victory on the battlefield. And racism, which creates fault lines and drives wedges within the force, weakens the line and leaves it susceptible to breaking. Eradicating racism and violent extremism in our ranks strengthens our forces and makes us a better ally for our partners around the globe. Those who question and attempt to thwart our military’s efforts to eliminate racism and eradicate extremism in our ranks weaken our forces, ultimately serving our adversaries’ ends rather than our own.

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Notes

(In lieu of a bibliography, all references are fully cited the first time they appear in each chapter.)

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Chapter 8

Privilege and Its Potential Impact on Readiness

Richard A. Greenlee, Jr.

Introduction

To be privileged in the world is to experience advantage. Privilege includes the ability to move freely through one's life in pursuit of education, housing, healthcare, and happiness without prejudice or exploitation.¹ Its construction has been built and maintained throughout America's history—including through science, law, religion, politics, and even violence. This discussion explores the origins of privilege and its influence on many of the foundational pillars of modern democratic society.

While the concept of privilege may be inflammatory to some, it is examined in light of the retrospective of history and its lingering impacts. It is also presented in the context of having a military that maximizes the potential of each person. This topic is not intended to be divisive but is discussed with the purpose of promoting a mutual respect for and acceptance of one another. The Air Force's stated core values for each Airman are "integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do."² The US Space Force's four core values for Guardians are "character, connection, courage, and commitment."³ In today's military, these values are fundamental and establish the benchmark for all service members.

We examine the power of historical precedence in shaping modern society. How has privilege affected economic development and fiscal law in ways that have shaped the socioeconomic landscape even today? How did privilege grow large branches of pseudoscience whose claims still resonate in some people's minds despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary? Writings from distinguished scholars also illuminate that privilege is not just an issue regarding those of European and African descent but a universal one. The discussion rounds out with examinations of the development of legal prescience and the perversion of religion to sanctify the means to obtain privilege.

The Origins of Privilege

Perhaps one of the most extensive examinations of privilege is portrayed in UCLA law professor Cheryl Harris's article "Whiteness as Property," published by the *Harvard Law Review*. Writing from a legal perspective, she chose to define "property" as "a right, not a thing, characterized as metaphysical, not physical." This view is critical to establishing privilege in any context. While one can easily recognize the privilege of being able to buy a ticket and sit in the nice section of a theater to enjoy a play, it is not as tactile to acknowledge the privilege of not falling victim to the implicit bias of some lenders on the basis of whether one selects White, Black, Asian, or Hispanic on a mortgage or loan application. Harris states, "The fact that whiteness is not a 'physical' entity does not remove it from the realm of property."⁴

Harris expands on the historical notion of property by citing President James Madison's conception of property during the era of America's founding, quoting from *The Writings of James Madison*. Madison asserted that property "included not only external objects and people's relationships to them, but also all those human rights, liberties, powers, and immunities that are important for human well-being, including: freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom from bodily harm, and free and equal opportunities to use personal faculties."⁵ Expounding on the definition of "property" as being beyond tangible items that can be touched, held, and measured by quantifiable means, the concept of privilege can also be seen as property. For example, the products of any "labor, time, and creativity, such as intellectual property, business goodwill, and enhanced earning potential from graduate degrees" could be considered property.⁶ Harris further highlights Charles Reich's argument that "property is not a natural right but a construction of society."⁷ The formation of social benefit is the formation of privilege because it creates an advantage for those who have it or can position themselves into its parameters.

In his essay "On Being White . . . and Other Lies," writer and activist James Baldwin maintains that the ideation of "White" in America emerged as a means of gaining status in society. He asserts that Europeans identified with their particular cultures but that in coming to America, "the price was to become 'white.'" Thus, he argues that because there are no "White" people, using this attribute to elevate oneself in society is "an absolutely moral choice."⁸ There is a direct connection between one's choice to accept or deny privilege and the resulting

benefit or detriment to other social groups.⁹ Despite the perhaps adverse reaction to the idea that race-based privilege may occur, there is sufficient evidence that the phenomenon exists.¹⁰ Furthermore, the public taboo surrounding the mere mention of the term “White privilege” is strong enough to alter simple conversations and social participation.¹¹ However, being unconscious or avoidant of a phenomenon, idea, or entity does not substantiate its nonexistence.

How can expectant behavior or ideology based on a trait or status hinder readiness? What expectant behaviors exist within our ranks and forces?

Economic “Necessity”

Privilege is a social construct with an origin embedded in the idea of race. Pertaining to the establishment of race in the US, the year 1619 is noteworthy; it marked the arrival of the first Africans in Virginia, then a part of British America.¹² Barbara Fields, a Columbia University history professor, states in her essay “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America” that race was a key building block in the transatlantic migration of Europeans to North America. There, the Europeans built a burgeoning economy on the serial labor of indentured Europeans, indigenous North Americans, and the enslaved peoples of African descent.¹³

The Virginia economy based on tobacco cultivation—and the later Southern states’ capitalism based on the European demand for cotton—would not have existed without a ready pool of labor. Indebted Europeans could not supply a sufficient labor force because they could not be counted on after their indebtedness was fulfilled, and there was a sheer dearth of available people in that group.¹⁴ The demand for labor also could not be met by the indigenous Americans, who experienced high mortality rates from the diseases passed on by the settlers.¹⁵ As Jenny Bourne states, “The value of slaves arose in part from the value of labor generally in the antebellum U.S. Scarce factors of production command economic rent, and labor was by far the scarcest available input in America.”¹⁶ The requirement for a totally subservient class with no right of redress was satisfied by the complete domination of a group of people with little in common other than visibly different biological features, and Africa was their place of origin.¹⁷

Fields states succinctly in her essay that “Virginia was a profit-seeking venture, and no one stood to make a profit growing tobacco by democratic means.”¹⁸ In succession, Africans brought to the Colonies were enslaved for life. They were prohibited from learning to read and subjected to pseudoscientific-defined racism and faced a damaging judicial complicity by state and federal legal systems stacked against them.¹⁹ The new nation was built within a paradox of liberty and equality for some constituents, while the enslaved were reduced to three-fifths human to avoid their inclusion as citizens.

The satirical play *Day of Absence* illustrates the dependence of early America’s economy and day-to-day life on the subjugation of those of African descent. In the play, the Black population in a small town mysteriously vanishes one day, and a flustered industrialist cries out in despair, “With the Nigra absent, men are waiting for machines to be cleaned, floors to be swept, crates lifted, equipment delivered and bathrooms to be deodorized. Why, restrooms and toilets are so filthy until they not only cannot be sat in, but it’s virtually impossible to get within hailing distance because of the stench!”²⁰ The presence of people of African descent and other minorities was requisite in much of American society to the point where there was often a reliance on that labor to maintain essential functions within the society.

The import of slave labor to the Southern cotton agricultural economy cannot be denied.²¹ This foundational, socially constructed arrangement of racial hierarchy evolved into a reality that can still be observed in America today.²²

How much progress can be claimed when these same tasks are coined as “unskilled labor” or reserved for those immigrants willing to accept substandard pay and unsafe working conditions? What does this mindset do to the morale and readiness of our Airmen who have to perform such tasks? How is privilege intertwined with paying one’s dues and undesirable tasks?

The Sciences

The sciences played a crucial role in supporting early claims of differences between members belonging to various race constructs in attempts to define differences specifically between those of European and African descent. Audrey and Brian Smedley’s *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* cites unsubstantiated

and outright false assertions about those of African descent from as far back as the 1680s: “In some circles, it was held that ape males and black females in the wilds of Africa sometimes copulated,” and persistent comparisons were made about “the physical resemblance of Negroes to apes to diminish the humanness of the slave.”²³ An additional example comes from the American Anthropological Association:

In the United States both scholars and the general public have been conditioned to viewing human races as natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences. With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century, however, it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups. Evidence from the analysis of genetics (e.g., DNA) indicates that most physical variation, about 94%, lies within so-called racial groups. Conventional geographic “racial” groupings differ from one another only in about 6% of their genes. This means that there is greater variation within “racial” groups than between them. In neighboring populations there is much overlapping of genes and their phenotypic (physical) expressions. Throughout history whenever different groups have come into contact, they have interbred. The continued sharing of genetic materials has maintained all of humankind as a single species.²⁴

Employing what is accepted today as pseudoscience, the social construct of race was established in the collective minds of Americans and set the foundation for those of European descent to effectively marginalize those of African descent. The above attempt to genetically categorize those of African heritage as another species—altogether distinct from the *Homo sapiens*—is perhaps the most glaring example of establishing privilege of race, but it is not the only one.

Various writings were published on the perceived inferiority of the African population. For example, Edward Long’s eighteenth-century *History of Jamaica* and Thomas Jefferson’s observations in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, both with many readers, especially in the Southern states, were used as a justification for slavery. Another example can be found in Smedley and Smedley’s quote from Winthrop Jordan’s 1968 *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812*. It states, “A few men . . . were so intent over distinguishing Negroes from whites that they proceeded to invent the facts they were unable to discover; they claimed variously that the Negro’s blood, brains and

skull were black. . . . Cornelius de Pauw announced in 1770 that the Negro had dark brains, blood and semen.”²⁵ Despite these now completely refuted claims, the disinformation was imbedded in the minds of many and persist in the twenty-first century. To this day, many Americans cannot successfully apply for a job, home loan, or scholarship or escape newscasts referencing race when, in fact, “race” is an invented ideology, which this chapter examines later.²⁶

Furthermore, it is not well known where the antiquated term “Caucasian” has its genesis, but there was more than a fair amount of pseudo-scientific research surrounding it. German professor Johann Blumenbach’s debunked racial spectrum unfortunately placed the skull of an Ethiopian on one end of his sketch and, on the opposite end, that of a Caucasian.²⁷ His works were subsequently cherry-picked for information and deliberately mistranslated to found the underpinning of race-based pseudoscience underscoring a false inferiority of all races not Caucasian.²⁸ It is from this penalized position that many races have then had to strive, live, and breathe.

How would it affect mission readiness if any member of your unit or their family were denied equal housing or education as mandated by law?

Thought Leaders

Influential Americans have written extensively on the idea of privilege. For example, author Toni Morrison, commenting on the treatment of an African American character in the film *America, America*, noted, “It is the act of racial contempt that transforms this charming Greek into an entitled white. Without it, Stavros’ future as an American is not at all assured. This is race talk, the explicit insertion into everyday life of racial signs and symbols that have no meaning other than pressing African Americans to the lowest level of the racial hierarchy.”²⁹

Morrison observed in her 1993 *Time* article that “as American blacks occupy more and more groups no longer formed along racial lines, the pressure accelerates to figure out what white interests really are. The enlisted military is almost one-quarter black; police forces are blackening in large urban areas. But welfare is nearly two-thirds white; affirmative action beneficiaries are overwhelmingly white women; dysfunctional white families jam the talk shows and court

TV. . . . The old stereotypes fail to connote, and race talk is forced to invent new, increasingly mindless ones.”³⁰ Her remarks highlight a shifting narrative from those of the Jim Crow era and leave readers with the following question to ponder:

*As the historically defined cultural stereotypes and markers across ethnic and sociocultural attitudinal functions continue to dissolve, will attempts to maintain the privileges afforded by defunct historical ideology continue?*³¹

Baldwin further argues that privilege in America was promulgated and maintained by any and all means necessary. Those means have historically included the slaughtering, poisoning, torching, massacring, and raping by those in pursuit of power, whether toward Native Americans, Asians, Latinos, or Africans.³² He states, “America became white—the people who, as they claim, ‘settled’ the country became white—because of the necessity of denying the Black presence and justifying the Black subjugation.”³³ He proceeds to demonstrate that the maintenance of such privilege was part of the self-preservation mechanism that elects political representation in favor of preserving such power.³⁴ Baldwin concludes, “It is the Black condition, and only that, which informs us concerning white people.”³⁵ Stated another way, it is the removal of privilege from “others” that personifies privilege for the “rest,” which is the case in any in-out group comparison.

*What privileges are granted within an organization and why?
What purpose do they serve? How are we sure they are serving
that purpose?*

Not Being Just Black or White

The mark of inferiority, while heavily applied to those of African descent, was not solely reserved for them. Native Americans and Asians also suffered under the social construct of race. Smedley and Smedley, citing Robert Berkhofer, state that “the Indian” was an invention of European settlers: “In literature, art, science, and philosophy, every variation of ‘the Indian,’ whether ignoble, noble, or degraded, was contrived in the minds of European settlers and continues to influence the way we think about Native Americans.”³⁶ Although indigenous Americans were not a permanently enslaved population, they collectively experienced state-sponsored trauma, such as massacre, the removal

from their land, the forceful removal of their children to attend boarding schools, and the repression of their native languages. Included in these offenses were the attempts to compel Native Americans to work in America, but the population was simply not large enough to supply the required labor. Additionally, diseases brought from Europe proved debilitating to the Native American population.³⁷

Beginning in the late 1700s, Presidents Washington and Jefferson and the entire Virginia House of Burgesses petitioned England for assistance in the further annexation of native lands.³⁸ In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the US government, long independent from England's direction, continued to appropriate land from the native peoples without their informed consent. This is evidenced by the 1823 Supreme Court ruling that the indigenous peoples' "right to occupancy" was subordinate to the United States' "right of discovery" and that "while they could occupy lands within the United States, they could not hold title to those lands."³⁹

Even for populations with lighter-pigmented skin, privilege was not universal. Many immigrants of European descent who entered the United States—including those from Poland, Italy, and Ireland—were not on equal social footing with those hailing from England. However, they occupied a more beneficial social ranking than those of African descent. The Connecticut Colonization Society noted in 1828 that a "line of demarcation [exists] between every man who has one drop of African blood in his veins, and every other class in the community." The Society further stated, "The African in this country belongs by birth to the lowest station in society; and from that station he can never rise, be his talents, his enterprise, his virtues what they may."⁴⁰ While the Irish fell lower in this contrived social hierarchy created by the social privilege construct, they still received some of its benefits.

Noel Ignatiev, who has exhaustively examined the Irish, observed that "America was well set up to teach new arrivals the overriding value of white skin" and English lineage.⁴¹ The evolving sentiment of several colonies incentivized a move toward "Whiteness" and its co-evolving privilege. For the Irish, this meant jobs in a markedly competitive labor market. Additionally, a 1790 vote of the first United States Congress determined that "only 'white' persons could be naturalized as citizens."⁴² Though this law was a solid impediment of inclusive citizenship, it allowed the Irish to assimilate into the social hierarchy of the early 1700s and to socially relocate themselves.⁴³ Referring to Theodore William Allen's 1975 article, "Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial

Slavery: The Invention of the White Race,” Ignatiev remarked, “Slavery in the United States was part of a bipolar system of color caste, in which even the lowliest of ‘whites’ enjoyed a status superior in the crucial respects to that of the most exalted of ‘blacks.’”⁴⁴

Ignatiev also astutely noted that “race becomes a social fact at the moment ‘racial’ identification begins to impose barriers to free competition among atomized and otherwise interchangeable individuals.”⁴⁵ A modern parallel can be drawn between the Afghanistan asylum seekers who flew en masse aboard US military aircraft to the United States during the 2021 withdrawal and the Ukrainian asylum seekers following Russia’s 2022 invasion. The former of these two groups’ legal standing and fate are still in limbo. And those who were allies to the US mission and did not make it aboard one of the life flights face far graver prospects within Afghanistan with little hope of ever even setting foot in the nation they risked their lives for. Further, the disparate US immigration policy toward Central American, Caribbean, African, and Afghan immigrants is notable.⁴⁶

Although the maintenance of “privilege” taxed less desirable populations, who happened to also have lighter skin tones at one time or another in America’s history (e.g., Poles, Italians, and Greeks), the demarcation of Africans and their descendants was greater in intensity and duration.⁴⁷ Civil War and antebellum writings are replete with the call to save the fair Southern woman from the savagery of the African male, who would have his way with her and dilute the European purity.⁴⁸ This type of racially oriented disinformation and diffusion of distrust is a type of psychological warfare methodology that can be observed in other nations today to divide them and the peoples within them.

Privilege is not a synonym for race. What other attributes can endow a person or group with privilege?

The Legal System

As described above by Harris, privilege is an asset and possession—and the legal protection of that expectation (to protect it) is warranted.⁴⁹ Maryland’s history provides an example of the 1664 law that forced those of African descent into inescapable repression—the legal status of slave for life.⁵⁰ Fields notes that abolitionist, US diplomat, and orator Fredrick Douglass was “speaking the simple truth when he said

that the first anti-slavery lecture he ever heard was delivered by his master in the course of explaining to his mistress why slaves must not be taught to read.”⁵¹ Making it illegal for those enslaved to read (or teaching them to read) was perhaps the most successful attempt at maintaining privilege.

The new American nation of the late 1700s was intent on setting forth a constitution to unite and guide its citizenry. Federalist Paper No. 54, penned by either Alexander Hamilton or James Madison, considered the Southern states’ contradictory attempt to define slaves as less than human. That is, those states wanted to benefit from said definition when it came to paying lower taxes per capita while also claiming that slaves were indeed “fully” human when it came to obtaining additional legislative representation.⁵²

Also complicit in legislating oppression was the United States Supreme Court. One of the most damaging opinions rendered was that of Justice Roger B. Taney in the well-known *Dred Scott* case of 1857. Taney stated that regarding enslaved people and citizenship, “people of the United States’ and ‘citizens’ are synonymous terms that apply only to those (whites) who were citizens of the several states when the Constitution was adopted.” Further, slaves were seen only as property—a subordinate and inferior class of beings.⁵³ Once the sovereign court had ruled, all appeals ceased, and the perpetual descent into racial subordination continued. Fields observed that the Supreme Court was “unable to promote or even define justice except by enhancing the authority and prestige of race.”⁵⁴

Subsequent to legalized slavery, post-Civil War emancipation proclamations, and Reconstruction acts—including giving former male slaves the right to vote and hold public office—a backlash occurred in the form of Jim Crow laws, aimed at further repression. These laws, primarily in the Southern states, ensured that African descendants were segregated in all manner of life and could not hold office or vote to improve their lot. These efforts extended to Western states; though “prevented by federal law from expelling existing black residents, . . . [Oregon’s] constitution banned any further blacks from entering, living, voting, or owning property in Oregon (the only state to do this), to be enforced by lashings for violators.”⁵⁵ The Jim Crow laws confined what were categorized as “Colored” persons to being the leftovers of society under an often repeated but rarely accurate tagline of “separate but equal.”⁵⁶

Jim Crow laws were also supported and enforced by the terrorist ideology of the Ku Klux Klan. On the heels of filmmaker D. W. Griffith's 1915 movie *Birth of a Nation*, aired by President Woodrow Wilson at the White House among other places, the KKK was revived.⁵⁷ Author Linda Gordon explains that Klan agitation dominated the Oregon political scene, legislatively attacking numerous religious, ethnic, and racial minorities and threatening even local sheriffs and newspaper owners, as one example.⁵⁸ Even today, the Ku Klux Klan and other supremacist or defaming organizations can exercise privilege by walking freely in the streets while denouncing humanity and inclusivity in an apparent backlash to the ideas of equality for those who may look and live differently. Violence has been demonstrably and consistently one of the means by which privilege and its benefits were preserved.

In short, "privilege" is further defined by the ability to operate in convenience. That is, because of the positional power of those who possess it, the landscapes (whether political, economic, religious, etc.) can indiscriminately be created, edited, and reinvented to fit what is most beneficial at a given time and for a given purpose. As noted by Harris, citing Vilhelm Aubert's *Introduction to Sociology of Law*, "The law is seen as a weapon in the hands of those who possess the power to use it for their own ends."⁵⁹

What message does a law that is unfair or favors others in an unjust way send to our service members who place their lives at risk in defense of the nation? How are we as leaders able to balance the scales of justice to be fair and impartial?

Religion

Not even religion was off-limits as an assurance of positional dominance and privilege. Like Thomas Jefferson's eloquent ideals and writings, which contradicted his day-to-day plantation operations, the Church of England found itself similarly perplexed. The formation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Lands in 1701, for example, seemed noble if in nothing but name alone. However well-intended, eventually, "it found itself the heir of a large plantation with four or five hundred slaves and soon succumbed to the lure of profits."⁶⁰ As part of the daily atrocities of operating a plantation, those enslaved were branded with a red-hot iron on their backs with the word "Society."⁶¹

The Bible itself was used as a justification for slavery in many instances, with some ministers noting that Israelites owned slaves or that Africans, as descendants of Noah's son Ham, were cursed.⁶² Jacob Olupona, a Harvard Divinity School professor, concluded that, indeed, Christianity was "deeply culpable in the African slave trade, inasmuch as it consistently provided a moral cloak for the buying and selling of human beings."⁶³

As the privileged ascended the social hierarchy, *all* others descended in it. The assurance of the former was perpetuated by pseudoscience, legal and political action, violence, and religion. What, then, may be said to the proposition that privilege is synonymous with discrimination?

Toni Morrison titled a *Time* magazine article "On the Backs of Blacks," referring to how America was built.⁶⁴ In it, she states, "When virtually the whole of a society, including supposedly thoughtful, educated, intelligent persons, commits itself to belief in propositions that collapse into absurdity upon the slightest examination, the reason is not hallucination or delusion or even simple hypocrisy; rather, it is ideology. And ideology is impossible for anyone to analyze rationally who remains trapped on its terrain."⁶⁵ This chosen belief exists for one reason: benefit maintenance.

Privilege is a two-way street: when it is granted to some, others will inherit some form of burden. What burdens have been created through privilege in an organization?

Conclusion

American and world history offer abundant examples of how certain groups attained privilege through the marginalization and oppression of others. While privilege supplies benefits to those who have it, there is also an associated expense—the opportunity cost that America will never reach its full potential domestically or internationally if the full talents, contributions, and creative genius of every citizen cannot be fully realized and brought to bear. Even today, privilege is still experienced based on race, gender, social class, heritage, religion, and other social constructs. Organizations at every level must consciously decide to recognize such incongruities and to challenge underlying assumptions and biases that seemingly justify their existence. Doing so will

undoubtedly require deep personal introspection and analysis at the societal level.

What are the takeaways for the US Air Force, US Space Force, and the military at large? The first step in addressing an issue is acknowledging that it exists. Our services have inherited these roots of inequities; examining unvarnished histories to understand their origins and influences provides context. Most importantly, doing so can help us to move forward and create a force that embraces all its members, regardless of societal privilege.

At the September 2021 Air Force Association Conference, Gen Mark Kelly, commander of the USAF Air Combat Command, stated that China is an “apex peer adversary.”⁶⁶ Given the technological advantage the Department of the Air Force has enjoyed over the past several decades, it is imperative that every Airman and Guardian (and potential recruit) be allowed to fly, fight, and win against such pacing challenges. All must be able to serve on equal ground with their colleagues at every level. No matter how advanced Air Force and Space Force weapons are, people are the critical components that make those systems lethal and, thus, a deterrent to China and other adversaries. No vestiges of any type of exclusive privilege can persist because the talent of every qualified American will be crucial if the DAF is to maintain its premier position of delivering airpower, anywhere, anytime, at its discretion.

Today’s recruits have grown up in a significantly different period than any other in our history. Their experiences will provide commanders of young Airmen and Guardians challenges unlike any who have served before. Commanders can draw upon these unique qualities and backgrounds to strengthen the Department of the Air Force and position it to meet the global threats that continue to evolve and emerge.

Frederick Douglass famously said, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground.”⁶⁷ Doing the work to move society to a more equitable, just, and prosperous America that more closely resembles Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Beloved Community” for all citizens is worth the effort.⁶⁸

Space Force Handbook 1-1 helps us to tie together some of the concepts we have discussed and their application to today’s force. It states the following in speaking to the Space Force’s value of connectedness: “Because diverse perspectives generate creativity and innovative solutions,

and we are routinely faced with situations requiring complex problem-solving, connection allows us to embrace diversity and engage inclusively. Connection uses different perspectives to fuel innovation and find better solutions. Connected teams treat everyone with dignity, empathy, and respect. Connectedness allows us to tap into the best that each person has to offer and allows us to outthink and outperform potential adversaries.”⁶⁹

It is fitting to end with part of the Airmen’s Creed. It is “our promise to country and colleagues.”⁷⁰

I AM AN AMERICAN AIRMAN.

WINGMAN, LEADER, WARRIOR.

I WILL NEVER LEAVE AN AIRMAN BEHIND,

I WILL NEVER FALTER,

*AND I WILL NOT FAIL.*⁷¹

Lt Col Richard A. Greenlee, ANG, Retired, MEd, MDiv

Lieutenant Colonel Greenlee served as the co-editor in chief for this book. Before his retirement in December 2023, he served as chief, Data Analytics and Reporting Directorate, Department of the Air Force Office of Diversity and Inclusion. (For his full biography, see the front matter.)

Notes

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PART 3

HARD DISCUSSIONS

GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Chapter 9

Building a Culture of Inclusion in the Modern Military Acceptance and “Outness” Post-LGBT Bans

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Introduction

The United States Department of Defense (DOD) is one of the largest employers in the world, with over three million employees.¹ It can be argued that with such broad reach, the DOD has a defining role in the field of workplace leadership. Over the past century, the US military has opened its ranks to Black Americans, women, and those with minoritized sexual and gender orientations and identities. In such an increasingly diverse military, the question of acceptance and integration of previously marginalized groups is of interest to military leadership and social science researchers alike.² For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals were barred from serving in the military in various capacities throughout the military’s history.³ The extent to which military leaders have fostered an inclusive environment that communicates social support and a cohesive unit for this vulnerable group remains uncertain. The current study aimed to shed light on this topic using a diverse sample of LGBT and non-LGBT active-duty service members in the US recruited as part of a DOD-funded study. This research assessed for disparities in perceived unit cohesion, social support, and LGBT workplace climate by sexual orientation and gender identity and tested for relationships between LGBT service member “outness” to unit leaders and co-workers by perceived LGBT inclusion/exclusion unit climate measures.

An extensive review of workplace diversity and inclusion literature found that working in a diverse environment is not necessarily associated with perceiving an inclusive workplace.⁴ Rather, intentional inclu-

sive leadership behaviors were found to lead to perceiving an inclusive workplace, associated with positive work outcomes.⁵ A meta-analysis found that a perceived supportive workplace environment, by way of leadership or social support, consistently explained variance in burnout, work engagement, and safety outcomes across employment industries.⁶ Thus, as the existence of diversity in the workplace does not imply the presence of inclusion, and leadership support is related to various workplace outcomes, whether military leaders foster an inclusive environment for newly integrated LGBT service members must be assessed.

Terminology in this area is fluidly evolving, with the following terms used most commonly in the US lexicon and academic literature at the time of the study. The term *cisgender* refers to people whose gender identity corresponds with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth, while *transgender* refers to those whose gender identity differs from their sex and gender assigned at birth. Both cisgender and transgender people can experience attraction to those of their same gender or a different gender; for example, a transgender individual can identify their sexual orientation as heterosexual. The “LGBT” terminology combines those with a minoritized sexual orientation (lesbian, gay, and bisexual are the most common nonheterosexual orientations) and those with a minoritized gender identity (transgender is the most common non-cisgender identity).

LGBT Service Members

Personnel and Policies

Using the statistic that those identifying as LGB comprise 16 percent of active duty servicewomen and 5 percent of active duty servicemen, it can be calculated that in a 1.3M strong force there are approximately 273,000 LGB servicewomen and men in uniform today. Unfortunately, the services do not officially report LGBT statistics on their forces.⁷ Policies impacting this community have shifted over the years. Until 1994, nonheterosexual people could not serve in the US military without threat of discharge; from 1994 until 2011, these individuals could serve as long as they did not disclose their “propensity or intent” to engage in intimate acts with people of the same sex.⁸ In 2011, this “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” policy was repealed, and LGBT individuals were able to serve openly. The ban on transgender individuals serving was repealed in 2016, reversed in 2017,

contested in the court system for several years, and repealed again in 2021.⁹ As of this publication, transgender individuals are permitted to serve openly in the US military and undergo gender-affirming care as needed while serving.

LGBT Service Member Well-Being

Announcements made by the US president and secretary of defense, corresponding with the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell in 2010 and the transgender ban in 2016 and again in 2021, spoke to the assumption that the repeal of the bans meant LGBT service members would no longer have reason to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity from military coworkers.¹⁰ However, studies have found that many LGBT service members continue to conceal their sexual and gender minority identities despite repeals.¹¹ Some LGBT service members report strategically concealing to avoid negative career repercussions, poor medical care, and social stigmatization.¹² Further, LGBT service members have been found to be at higher risk for sexual violence and harassment than non-LGBT service members, with sexual minority women in the military at the highest risk.¹³ A review of the literature on the health and well-being of serving and ex-serving LGBT military personnel, primarily in the United States but also in Switzerland and Canada, found that this population is at risk for several mental and physical problems and that many have concerns about accessing available healthcare because of experienced and anticipated stigma.¹⁴ Unit climate has thus far not been assessed as it relates to actively serving LGBT service members' well-being and outness; this study aims to fill these gaps.

The experience of transgender members varies across branches, career fields, bases, and commands, and there is evidence that the administrative and emotional burden is unnecessarily convoluted and tiresome and puts members at heightened risk for violence. For example, these challenges can include necessitating disclosure to one's commander regardless of perceived support; routing numerous Exceptions to Policy and memorandums that must be signed, in some cases, by general officers; compulsory interaction with the mental health clinic; and mandatory real-life experience (RLE) in which the member must "test" their ability to live in the affirmed gender for one year or more prior to leadership approving medical intervention.¹⁵ While members are now permitted to serve as openly transgender, such barriers exist.

LGBT Disclosure in the Workplace

Disclosure of concealable stigmatized identities in the workplace has been found to be associated with perceived social support and an LGBT-inclusive climate.¹⁶ In civilian settings, research has found that social support mediates the relationship between LGBT disclosure and well-being.¹⁷ Further, higher anticipated support for LGBT disclosure has been found to result in higher LGBT disclosure in the workplace.¹⁸ A meta-analysis found that social support in the workplace was associated with better work attitudes, LGBT disclosure, and several measures of well-being among LGBT workers (e.g., work attitudes, psychological strain).¹⁹ The same meta-analysis found that LGBT-supportive workplace policies were the weakest predictor of experiences of LGBT workers.²⁰ Of note, greater social supports in the workplace have also been found to result in better overall well-being for non-LGBT workers.²¹ Further, unit cohesion, a concept often discussed in military literature, was named as a prime concern among those who speculated that open LGBT service would lead to deterioration of unit performance.²² While not explicitly assessed in civilian LGBT disclosure literature, the present study explores the relationship of outness and unit cohesion due to this historical linkage. Taken together, prior literature suggests that LGBT disclosure in a military workplace may be associated with interpersonal and institutional support for LGBT inclusion and non-LGBT-related social inclusion. The current study will be the first to assess the perceived LGBT climate in a military setting and LGBT service members' outness in their military unit as it relates to unit climate measures.

In a military environment, where uniformity is valued, it may be the case that those with a potentially stigmatizing trait may choose concealment strategies. Indeed, in the foremost theory of LGBT well-being, minority stress theory, concealment of one's LGBT identity is understood to protect from harmful attention that can lead to social exclusion, harassment, discrimination, and (sometimes) violence.²³ Paradoxically, concealment can foreclose the possibility of connecting with other LGBT individuals and building social support, which may protect against the harm associated with having a stigmatized identity.²⁴ Thus, LGBT disclosure and concealment in the military workplace may consist of repeated nuanced and deliberate decisions. The current study addresses these gaps in the literature by testing for disparities in unit cohesion, social support, and perceived LGBT workplace climate between LGBT and non-LGBT service members as well as possible associations between these unit climate constructs and outness to unit leaders and coworkers.

Methods

This study uses survey data collected between August 2017 and March 2018 through the DOD-supported Military Acceptance Project, an initiative aimed at assessing the acceptance, integration, and health of LGBT service members.²⁵ Methods were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at the University of California–Los Angeles and the University of Southern California. To participate in the survey, service members were required to (1) be at least 18 years of age; (2) speak English; (3) be on active duty in the Air Force, Marines, Army, or Navy; and (4) be willing and able to provide consent. To recruit sufficient LGBT service members to power analyses, an expert advisory panel was formed using military and LGBT networks known to the research team. Respondent-driven and digitally purposive sampling methods were used to reach LGBT and non-LGBT service members. Participants were given a twenty-five dollar gift card for completing the survey and up to six ten-dollar incentives for referring additional military members. Demographics of the sample are shown in table 9.1.

Table 9.1. Demographics and military-related variables of the sample: LGBT compared to non-LGBT service members (*n* = 544)

Demographics	LGBT sample <i>n</i> = 248		Non-LGBT sample <i>n</i> = 296		Total sample <i>n</i> = 544	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender Identity						
Cis men	116	47%	208	70%	324	60%
Cis women	74	30%	88	30%	162	30%
Transgender men	32	13%	0	0%	32	6%
Transgender women	26	11%	0	0%	26	5%
Sexual Orientation						
Gay men	113	46%	0	0%	113	21%
Bisexual men	19	8%	0	0%	19	3%
Lesbian women	61	25%	0	0%	61	11%
Bisexual women	35	14%	0	0%	35	6%
Heterosexual or straight	20	8%	296	100%	316	58%

Table 9.1 (continued)

Demographics	LGBT sample <i>n</i> = 248		Non-LGBT sample <i>n</i> = 296		Total sample <i>n</i> = 544	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Avg. (min.-max.)	29 (18–54)		27 (19–53)		28 (18–54)	
Race/Ethnicity						
White/Caucasian	164	66%	152	51%	316	58%
Latino/Hispanic	33	13%	40	14%	73	13%
Black/African American	20	8%	71	24%	91	17%
Other ^b	30	12%	31	10%	61	11%
Marital Status						
Single/Divorced/ Separated	115	51%	143	51%	258	51%
Married/Domestic partnership	111	49%	136	49%	247	49%
Education						
Associate’s degree or lower	102	45%	159	57%	261	51%
Bachelor’s degree or higher	127	55%	121	43%	248	49%
Rank						
E1–E4	70	28%	152	51%	222	41%
E5–E9	78	31%	59	20%	137	25%
<i>Total Enlisted</i>	148	60%	211	71%	359	66%
O1–O3	78	31%	73	25%	151	28%
O4–O6	22	9%	12	4%	34	6%
<i>Total Officer</i>	100	40%	85	29%	185	34%
Branch						
Air Force	71	29%	111	38%	182	33%
Army	105	42%	121	41%	226	42%
Marine Corps	22	9%	30	10%	52	10%
Navy	50	20%	34	11%	84	15%

^aSexual orientation sums cisgender and transgender participants.

^bOther = Native American, Alaskan Native, Asian Pacific Islander, Multiracial, or Other

Measures

Unit Cohesion

Horizontal or peer-to-peer cohesion was measured using Bartone and colleagues' four-item adaptation of the twenty-item unit Platoon Cohesion Index by Siebold and Kelly. The shortened scale has shown good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$).²⁶ This item included the following prompts: Members of my unit have trust in each other; Members of my unit care for each other; Members of my unit work well together to get the job done; Members of my unit support each other as a team. Response options used a Likert-style scale with these options: 1 = Not at all true, 2 = A little true, 3 = Moderately true, 4 = Mostly true, 5 = Completely true. Participants could also decline to answer any item. Scores on individual items were summed to create a single variable with a total range between four and twenty, with a higher score indicating greater unit cohesion.

Social Support in Unit

Social support in the workplace was measured using a three-item scale shown to have good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$). This item included the following prompts: I feel close to the people at work; I have people at work who could always take the time to talk over my problems, should I want to; I often feel really appreciated by the people I work with. Response options used a Likert-style scale: 1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly agree. Participants could also decline to answer any item. Scores on individual items were summed to create a single variable with a total range between three and twelve, with higher scores indicating greater support in the unit.

LGBT Workplace Climate

Perception of LGBT inclusion in the workplace was measured using the twenty-item LGBT Climate Inventory, which has been shown to have high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$) and good test-retest reliability ($r = .87$). The scale states, "Please rate the following items according to how well they describe the atmosphere for LGBT employees in your workplace" with these response options: Doesn't describe

at all; Describes somewhat/a little; Describes pretty well; Describes extremely well; Decline to answer. Eight items are reverse scored; scores on individual items were summed to create a single variable with a range of twenty-five to eighty, with higher scores indicating greater LGBT inclusion.

LGBT Outness to Unit Coworkers

Outness to military friends and leaders was assessed by asking respondents, “Do the following people know that you are LGBT?” with the options Yes, No, Not applicable, Do not have this person in my life, and Decline to answer. This measure included thirteen items, three of which related to unit coworkers: Unit leaders; Straight friends in your unit; and Friends in your unit who are LGBT. Each response was assessed as a dichotomous variable Yes or No.

Analyses

Data cleaning (checking for validity of variables) and analyses were completed in the statistical software STATA/IC version 15.1. Due to 8 percent missing data in the LGBT Workplace Climate measure, multiple imputation was used to impute mean scores for observations missing this measure.²⁷ Missing data in this measure was likely due to its placement as the final measure in the survey. A correlation matrix, using Bonferroni correction, was run to assess for correlation between independent variables in both the LGBT and non-LGBT samples (see table 9.2). Z-tests for difference in means were used to test the hypotheses that mean scores for (1) unit cohesion, (2) social support, and (3) LGBT workplace climate would differ between LGBT and non-LGBT service members. Simple linear regression models tested for differences in unit cohesion, social support, and LGBT workplace climate between non-LGBT, cisgender LGB, and transgender service members. Binomial bivariate logistic regression models were built to test for significance between outness to (1) unit leaders, (2) non-LGBT unit friends, and (3) LGBT unit friends with demographics, military-related traits, and unit climate measures. While the authors acknowledge that sexual orientation varies among transgender individuals, to explore potential disparities by gender identity specifically, this study combines all transgender respondents regardless of sexual orientation (table 9.2).

Table 9.2. Correlation matrix of unit climate measures: LGBT and non-LGBT samples

Unit Climate Measure	LGBT sample			Non-LGBT sample		
	1	2	3	1	2	3
1. Social support	1.00	-	-	1.00	-	-
2. Unit cohesion	.49*	1.00	-	.45*	1.00	-
3. LGBT workplace climate	.51*	.45*	1.00	.08	-.04	1.00

Bonferroni correction was used

* $p < .001$

Independent and control variables were assessed for their association with dependent variables in a series of bivariate regressions. As recommended by Hosmer and colleagues, all variables significant at the $p < .25$ level were included in final models.²⁸ The final model for outness to unit leaders included covariates of marital status, education level, and the interaction between gender and rank. The final model for outness to non-LGBT unit friends included covariates of social support in the unit and marital status. The final model for outness to LGBT unit friends included covariates of gender and rank (see table 9.3).

Results

Most of the total sample consisted of cisgender men (60 percent), making up 70 percent of the non-LGBT sample and half (47 percent) of the LGBT sample. The transgender sample was approximately evenly split by men and women, making up 10 percent of the total sample. The average age of the total sample was 27.7 years (standard deviation or SD = 6.12), with no significant age difference between the LGBT and non-LGBT samples. Half of the LGBT sample identified as gay men, one-fourth as lesbian women, one-fifth as bisexual, and one-tenth as heterosexual (all transgender). Non-Whites made up a larger portion of the non-LGBT group (48 percent) than the LGBT group (34 percent). Half of both LGBT and non-LGBT groups were married or in a partnership. The LGBT group was more likely to have a bachelor’s degree or higher and be an officer than the non-LGBT group. The non-LGBT group had a slightly higher percentage of Air Force members, and the LGBT group had a slightly higher percentage of Navy members (see table 9.1).

Table 9.3. Odds ratios of outness to leaders and unit friends by unit climate variables, demographics, and military-level traits

Variable	Out to Unit Leaders <i>n</i> = 225				Out to Non-LGBT Unit Friends <i>n</i> = 247				Out to LGBT Unit Friends <i>n</i> = 212			
	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI
LGBT workplace climate	1.07***	1.04–1.10	1.08***	1.05–1.12	1.08***	1.04–1.12	1.08***	1.04–1.13	1.04	.99–1.09	1.03	.98–1.11
Unit cohesion	1.04	.96–1.13		<i>n</i> /s	1.03	.93–1.14		<i>n</i> /s	.95	.81–1.12		<i>n</i> /s
Social support in unit	1.04	.91–1.19		<i>n</i> /s	1.19*	1.01–1.40	.98	.80–1.20	1.00	.79–1.27		<i>n</i> /s
SOGI Cis men gay/bi (ref)	1.00		1.00	1.00	1.00	--		<i>n</i> /s	1.00	1.00		1.00
Cis women lesbian/bi	.28	.68–2.41	.26*	.08–.84	1.10	.47–2.55		--	5.45	.66–44.68	4.82	.58–40.13
Transgender	3.62**	1.50–8.72	1.60	.45–5.63	.92	.38–2.20		--	.79	.24–2.56	.52	.13–2.09
Age	.99	.95–1.03		<i>n</i> /s	.99	.94–1.04		<i>n</i> /s	.97	.90–1.04		<i>n</i> /s
Race White (ref)	1.00			<i>n</i> /s	1.00	1.00		<i>n</i> /s	1.00	1.00		--
Non-White ^a	.80	.44–1.43		--	.78	.38–1.62		--	1.34	.40–4.42		--

Table 9.1 (continued)

Variable	Out to Unit Leaders <i>n</i> = 225			Out to Non-LGBT Unit Friends <i>n</i> = 247			Out to LGBT Unit Friends <i>n</i> = 212			
	OR	95% CI	aOR	OR	95% CI	aOR	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI
Marital Status Single/separated/ divorced (ref)	--	--	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	n/s	n/s
Married or partnered	3.37***	1.80– 6.32	2.73**	1.67	.79– 3.52	1.33	1.84	.59– 5.71	--	--
Education Associate's degree or lower (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	n/s	1.00	1.00	n/s	n/s
Bachelor's degree or higher	.47*	.26– .87	.61	.86	.41– 1.80	--	.61	.20– 1.91	--	--
Rank Enlisted (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	n/s	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Officer	.46**	.26– .82	.34	.72	.36– 1.47	--	.42	.14– 1.26	.30	.08– 1.08
Branch Army (ref)	1.00	1.00	n/s	1.00	1.00	n/s	1.00	1.00	n/s	n/s
Non-Army (USAF, Marines, Navy)	.88	.50– 1.56	--	1.25	.62– 2.54	--	1.25	.42– 3.70	--	--
Gender x Rank Interaction Enlisted GB cismen (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Enlisted LB ciswomen	.53	.21– 1.33	.26*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Table 9.1 (continued)

Variable	Out to Unit Leaders <i>n</i> = 225				Out to Non-LGBT Unit Friends <i>n</i> = 247				Out to LGBT Unit Friends <i>n</i> = 212			
	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI
Enlisted transmen or transwomen	1.92	.65–5.64	1.60	.45–5.63	n/a	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Officer cismen	.31**	.14–.71	.34	.09–1.27	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Officer LB cismen	.88	.30–2.56	.74	.17–3.31	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Officer transmen or transwomen	1.28	.14–12	2.94	.18–47	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
--	--	--	pseudo R ² = .22	--	--	--	pseudo R ² = .10	--	--	--	--	pseudo R ² = .10

a Non-White = Black or African American, Latino or Hispanic, Native American or Alaskan Native, Asian Pacific Islander, Multiracial, Other
 *** *p* < .001; ** *p* < .01; * *p* < .05

Legend

- aOR – adjusted odds ratio
- CI – confidence interval
- GB – gay or bisexual
- LB – lesbian or bisexual
- n* – sample size
- n/s – not significant at *p* < .25 in bivariate analyses, thus not included in final model
- OR – odds ratio
- ref – reference group
- R² – coefficient of determination
- SOG1 – sexual orientation and gender identity

LGBT Outness to Unit Coworkers

Unit leaders. LGBT service members reported moderate to high levels of outness to unit leaders. Among cisgender respondents, 69 percent of gay men, 72 percent of lesbian women, and 58 percent of bisexual respondents were out to their unit leaders. Eight-seven percent of transgender respondents of any sexual orientation were out to their unit leaders. Higher LGBT workplace climate score (adjusted odds ratio or AOR = 1.08; confidence interval or CI = 1.05–1.12; probability and measures or $p < .001$), being a lesbian or bisexual ciswoman (AOR = .26; CI = .08–.84; $p = 0.024$), and being married or in a domestic partnership (AOR = 2.73, CI = 1.31–5.68; $p = 0.007$) were found to be associated with statistically significantly higher odds of being out to unit leaders when controlling for covariates (see table 9.3).

Non-LGBT unit friends. LGBT service members reported high levels of outness to non-LGBT unit friends. Among cisgender respondents, 87 percent of gay men, 88 percent of lesbian women, and 80 percent of bisexual respondents were out to their non-LGBT unit friends. Eighty-three percent of transgender respondents of any sexual orientation were out to non-LGBT unit friends. A higher percentage of transgender respondents reported being out to military leaders than non-LGBT friends, the only group for whom that is true, which likely stems from the administrative requirements for gender transition. LGBT workplace climate was found to be significantly associated with outness to non-LGBT unit friends when controlling for covariates (AOR = 1.08; CI = 1.04–1.13; $p < .001$; see table 9.3).

LGBT unit friends. LGBT service members reported high levels of outness to LGBT unit friends, with 91 percent of transgender ($n = 53$), 96 percent of gay cismen ($n = 90$), 100 percent of lesbian ciswomen ($n = 49$), and 76 percent of bisexual cismen and ciswomen ($n = 21$) out to LGBT unit friends. Unit climate measures, demographic traits, and military-related traits were not found to be associated with outness to LGBT unit friends (see table 9.3).

Unit Cohesion

The average unit cohesion score for the whole sample was 16.4 (min. 4; max. 20; SD = 3.4), indicating high levels of unit cohesion. Non-LGBT service members reported significantly higher unit cohesion ($M = 17.2$, SD = 3.1) than LGBT service members ($M = 15.4$, SD = 3.4; $z = 6.13$, $p = .000$, two-tailed).²⁹ In the simple linear regres-

sion model, cisgender LGB service members perceived significantly lower unit cohesion than non-LGBT service members ($B = -1.37$, $SE = .30$, $t = -4.55$, $p = 0.000$, $CI = -1.97, -.78$), and transgender service members scored significantly lower on unit cohesion than both cisgender LGB service members ($B = -1.57$, $SE = .49$, $t = -3.23$, $p = 0.001$, $CI = -2.53, -.62$) and non-LGBT service members ($B = -2.95$, $SE = .47$, $t = -6.33$, $p = 0.000$, $CI = -3.86, -2.03$). Unit cohesion was not found to be statistically significantly associated with outness to unit leaders, non-LGBT unit friends, or LGBT unit friends (see table 9.3).

Social Support in Unit

The average social support score for the whole sample was 8.9 (min. 3; max. 12; $SD = 2.0$), indicating a moderate to high level of social support in one's unit. Non-LGBT service members reported significantly higher social support ($M = 9.3$, $SD = 1.8$) than LGBT service members ($M = 8.4$, $SD = 2.2$; $z = 4.8$, $p = .000$). In the simple linear regression model, cisgender LGB service members had statistically significantly lower social support scores than non-LGBT service members ($B = -.72$, $SE = .19$, $t = -3.71$, $p = 0.000$, $CI = -1.10, -.34$), and transgender service members had lower social support than both cisgender LGB service members ($B = -.64$, $SE = .31$, $t = -2.09$, $p = 0.037$, $CI = -1.24, -.04$) and non-LGBT service members ($B = -1.36$, $SE = .29$, $t = -4.68$, $p = 0.000$, $CI = -1.93, -.79$). Social support in the unit was found to be associated with outness to non-LGBT unit friends in bivariate analyses, but not in the adjusted model; social support in the unit was not associated with outness to unit leaders or LGBT unit friends in bivariate analyses (see table 9.3).

LGBT Workplace Climate

The average LGBT workplace climate score for the whole sample was 57.4 (min. 25; max. 80; $SD = 10.6$), indicating a moderate level of LGBT acceptance. While not significantly different, non-LGBT service members reported higher LGBT workplace climate ($M = 58.6$, $SD = 9.9$) than LGBT service members ($M = 56.5$, $SD = 11.3$; $z = 1.84$, $p = .06$, two-tailed). Transgender service members were found to score significantly lower on LGBT workplace climate than non-LGBT service members ($B = -4.76$, $SE = 1.51$, $t = -3.16$, $p = 0.002$, $CI = -7.72, -1.80$). LGBT workplace climate was found to be statistically

significantly associated with outness to unit leaders when controlling for covariates; for every one (1) unit increase in LGBT workplace climate score, respondents' odds of being out to unit leaders and non-LGBT unit friends increased by 8 percent (see table 9.3). LGBT workplace climate was not found to be statistically significantly associated with outness to LGBT unit friends (see table 9.3). LGBT workplace climate was found to be strongly positively correlated with both unit cohesion and social support in the unit for the LGBT sample only (see table 9.2).

Discussion

This first-of-its-kind, exploratory analysis found that LGBT service members perceive significantly lower unit cohesion and social support than non-LGBT service members, with transgender service members scoring significantly lower than cisgender LGB service members on these measures. No difference in LGBT workplace climate was found between non-LGBT and cisgender LGB service members; however, transgender service members perceived a less-affirming LGBT workplace climate than both cisgender and non-LGBT samples. Both LGBT and non-LGBT groups reported an overall high level of unit cohesion and a moderate level of social support. A higher perceived LGBT-affirming workplace climate was associated with higher odds of being out to one's unit leader as well as non-LGBT unit friends. Being a lesbian or bisexual ciswoman and married or in a domestic partnership were also associated with higher odds of being out to unit leaders in adjusted models. As expected, unit cohesion and social support in the unit were strongly positively correlated for both LGBT and non-LGBT groups, and LGBT workplace climate was strongly positively correlated with both unit cohesion and social support in the unit in the LGBT group only.

The current study's findings are in line with a meta-analysis that found that an LGBT-supportive climate was strongly associated with disclosure in the civilian workplace.³⁰ Prior research has also found that disclosing in "low autonomy support" environments (in which people are given limited options regarding permitted behaviors), such as a military workplace, is associated with poor coming-out experiences in which coming out does not confer the psychological benefits availed of those in high autonomy support environments.³¹ This

conditional nature of outness and its association with well-being may help explain the current study's finding that one in five LGBT service members choose not to disclose to unit coworkers. As predicted by the National Defense Research Institute in its report on the prospect of open LGBT service—but in contrast to predictions from those opposed to repeal of the bans—the present study found that unit cohesion was not associated with outness.³² These findings indicate that the argument asserting that open LGBT service would compromise unit cohesion was unfounded.

The findings are also in line with a study comparing LGBT to non-LGBT veterans' feelings about their military experiences as well as their self-reported reasons for separating. While differences by subgroup existed, LGBT veterans overall reported more negative feelings about their military service, were more likely to report being unimpressed by military leadership, felt less supported and less camaraderie with their unit, and had a greater sense of incompatibility with military service compared to their heterosexual peers.³³ Similarly, a review of military career intentions of LGBT versus non-LGBT active duty members found that LGBT members are twice as likely to be undecided in whether to remain or attrit from the military upon completion of their service committment. Transgender members were found to be at over twice the risk of planning to leave than non-LGBT members.³⁴

Diversity and inclusion researcher Mor Barak defines *workplace inclusion* as an interplay of both belongingness and uniqueness.³⁵ It may be the case that LGBT acceptance infers integration or assimilation in which LGBT service members highlight the similar aspects of themselves to coworkers, such as being married or having children, and de-emphasize uniqueness. Life experiences or worldviews that may be related to one's LGBT identity, such as political opinions, family-of-origin relationships, trauma history, and romantic relationships, for example, may be concealed from coworkers if LGBT service members perceive such information may situate them outside the norm. If this were the case, members may perceive an LGBT-accepting climate while LGBT individuals themselves feel socially unsupported by coworkers. Future research should explore social support in military units among all personnel, with special consideration to factors leading to LGBT personnel feeling less supported.

Recommendations for Military Leaders

Given the disparity between cisgender and transgender respondents' perception of an LGBT-affirming workplace climate, military leaders may seek to better understand and close that gap. One way to consider this perception would be for military leaders to ask themselves the question, Would I willingly trade places with a transgender service member? If not, what are the areas identified for improvement? This self-reflection can use the skill of empathy to illustrate likely hurdles that their transgender colleagues are facing. These might include a patchwork military medical system wherein available healthcare varies based on military branch, geographical location, and competency of medical providers. Barriers to care might include the requirement to receive a mental health diagnosis to access medical treatments and limited access to mental health services and trans-affirming providers. Other difficulties could involve administrative challenges with a gender marker change; safety on base, specifically in military barracks; completing RLE while living on base; the financial burden of purchasing one's own replacement uniforms corresponding with the affirmed gender; accessibility of safe and appropriate restrooms and locker rooms; Exceptions to Policy for fitness testing; and fears of rejection after disclosure. Reversing problematic policies and streamlining these convoluted processes are critical first steps toward building a culture of inclusion in the military.

Leaders can certainly be forgiven for not intuitively understanding the challenges that transgender members often face. To further their understanding of the needs of this population, leaders may read literature such as Mael Embser-Herbert and Bree Fram's *With Honor and Integrity: Transgender Troops in Their Own Words*, an anthology of real-world experiences of transgender members.³⁶ Both individual leader support and common-sense policies are likely needed to fully integrate transgender troops. The most recent report authored by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission acknowledges a gap between policies of inclusion and translation into service members' sense of being included.³⁷ The report calls on leaders to "personally" and "visibly" commit to including diverse members in their unit.³⁸ Interpreting this call to action in the present day may comprise putting one's pronoun(s) in email signatures; wearing pronoun pins and badges; recognizing LGBT Pride Month, Transgender Day of Remembrance, and Transgender Day of Visibility; and including visibly or openly

transgender service members in unit outreach. Systemic challenges require systemic solutions, and individual leaders should be aware that no amount of diversity representation or personal accountability will resolve the excess burden on transgender service members in the current system.

To summarize, these authors recommend the following for integrating transgender service members specifically:

- Ensure transgender members are consulted and “at the table” as policies about their career and well-being are decided.
- Remove the RLE requirement.
- Encourage member engagement with mental healthcare as needed but remove the gender dysphoria diagnosis requirement.
- Increase the number of trans-affirming healthcare providers across branches and duty stations.
- Allow members to handle their gender transition at the lowest level possible, and limit “gatekeeping” from leadership.
- Standardize the mobility effect for members undergoing trans-affirming care across branches.
- Be a visible advocate for this population.

Limitations

The current study contributes novel research to the fields of leadership, LGBT well-being, and military functioning; however, some limitations should be considered. The current study uses a single item query regarding outness to each unit coworker; future research may use validated outness inventories and assess the quality and reception of disclosure to these entities. As is often the case in sexual and gender minority research, large enough sample sizes to test for differences by sexual orientation subgroup were not collected; bisexuals as a whole, separated by gender, may have different outness and perceptions of unit climate. For example, the present study does not account for the length of time participants served; future studies should explore a possible link between serving before and after the repeal of LGBT bans. Although transgender individuals have been able to serve openly for brief periods, this policy has been changed several times, and findings may not reflect the current landscape for transgender service members.

Continued monitoring of transgender service member well-being is critical during this time of policy transition.

Conclusion

The US military comprises the largest workplace in the modern world and has a profound responsibility to model acceptance of diverse groups to service members. Systemic problems require systemic solutions, and while no individual leader will resolve the full burden of the challenges of serving for LGBT military members, it is clear that unit leaders bridge the divide between official policies of inclusion and the daily experience of unit members. Effective leadership considers the sense of inclusion of workers, acknowledging that social support, unit cohesion, and work performance are inextricably linked. The ability to bring one's authentic self into the workplace without fear of reprisal benefits employees and their ability to accomplish the mission. Military leaders can set a tone of openness and support, with explicit acknowledgment of the added burden LGBT service members experience, as these individuals determine the level of outness to bring to the workplace. As current military leaders model supportive and affirming workplace climates, they train future leaders to do the same.

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Notes

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Chapter 10

Obligatory Discrimination and Implicit Bias

A Longitudinal Study of Implicit Racial and Sexual Orientation Bias in the US Military

M. Carter Matherly

Introduction

Metrics calculated by the organization Protect Our Defenders from service records of court-martials and nonjudicial punishments from 2006 to 2015 highlight a severe incongruity in the rates of military justice and punishment along racial lines in the US military. Over these ten years, the Air Force shows the highest rates of disparity; Black Airmen were 71 percent more likely to receive court-martials or non-judicial punishment than their White colleagues.¹ Rates of Air Force military justice per thousand Airmen along racial lines for this period were 19.2 for White Airmen, 32.5 for Black Airmen, and 22.9 for all others.²

Exact comparison across the services is difficult owing to how each branch manages its disciplinary action records. However, what is known about military justice in the Army is that from 2006 to 2015, the breakdown for court-martials by race for every thousand Soldiers is White, 1.7; Black, 2.7; Asian, 1; Hispanic, 1.2; American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.8; and Other, 3.5.³ Thus, Black Soldiers were 61 percent more likely to face a court-martial than nearly all other demographics comparatively. Black Marines received guilty verdicts at a 1.2 times higher rate than their White counterparts.⁴ Hispanic Marines received guilty verdicts at a 0.1 times lower rate than their White counterparts, and those in the “other” category received guilty verdicts at the same rate as their White counterparts.⁵ For the US Navy, which provided data only for 2014 and 2015, the breakdown of court-martials by race for every thousand Sailors is White, 2.2; Black, 3; Asian, 1.3; and Native American, 0.25.⁶ The human rights group Protect Our Defenders published two reports with this data, which may only scratch the

surface on a deeper problem potentially stemming from long overturned discriminatory racial regulations in the US military.

These numbers have not gone unnoticed by top US military leaders. Race relations training has been a part of military education since the 1970s.⁷ The original training involved eighteen- to twenty-hour courses focused on intergroup relations at the unit level.⁸ This training employed intergroup relations practices known at the time. Many of these were built on contact theory, which showed promise for positive intergroup relations following WWII, Korea, and Vietnam.⁹ As a large organization, the US military has been considered a model for positive racial integrative and relations efforts.¹⁰ Research indicates that racial disparities seen in the areas of enlistment, promotion, justice, and health-care were not a result of policy or practices.¹¹ However, the same research noted disparities in the areas of promotions, justice, and healthcare. A US Air Force tiger team noted in predecisional working papers that implicit bias is an unaddressed aspect of race relations training within the force.¹² However, there is no evidence that these recommendations were ever presented or considered. Additionally, most available research focuses on racial disparities even though recent legislation across numerous states have potentially placed another minority population, the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community,¹³ at a similar risk of discrimination.

Staying aligned with the research dates from Protect our Defenders, from 2006 to 2015, the general US public has shown a decline in implicit bias toward race and sexual orientation. However, a review of available literature reveals scant details regarding the occurrence or intensity of implicit bias in the US military for these two major demographics.¹⁴ Understanding how the US military's implicit bias compares to that of the general population over this period can give insights into the lasting effects of obligatory discrimination and the actions of those who primarily carry out military justice.¹⁵

The US military has undergone significant changes throughout its history. Many regulation revisions attempt to better the services and their members. Racial segregation was ended by executive order in 1948, yet it took six years for the final all-Black service unit to be dismantled.¹⁶ More recently, the ban on gay and lesbian service members has been lifted, ending another facet of obligatory discrimination in the services.¹⁷

The ban on transgender personnel was first removed by President Obama, only to be reinstated by President Trump and subsequently

removed once again by President Biden in 2021. Conditional service in the military can be described as obligatory discrimination. A few cases require discrimination for the safety of fellow service members and the success of the mission. An example is the current medical standard preventing those with specific color vision deficiencies from entering pilot and aircrew training.¹⁸

In response to the 2017 report bringing the disparagement of racial justice to light, the Air Force convened a working group. The group confirmed that the data was accurate and drew up several recommendations, one of which included training Air Force leaders on implicit racial bias.¹⁹ Past research warned of the effects of implicit racial bias. One such study demonstrated a correlation of “Black” stimuli to “guilty” verdicts in mock trials.²⁰ Unfortunately, there is no evidence the finding was ever briefed to senior leadership or that action was taken to address the problem.²¹ Commanders, leaders, and supervisors share the responsibility for this judicial disparagement, as they administer most military justice.

Despite Executive Order 9981, issued on July 26, 1948, by President Harry S. Truman, ending segregation and racially biased treatment of service members, unchecked judicial disparagement persists.²² Obligatory discrimination in the military is not unique to racial segregation. Only recently were LGB service members allowed to serve without fear of the punishment of dismissal, a fate many transgender service members still face today as legislation yo-yos to political whims. The relatively recent repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT) may have left additional unchecked implicit bias against LGB service members by those influenced by past policies of obligatory discrimination.

Theoretical Foundation

Implicit bias is an insidious enemy that can affect the judgment of an individual without their conscious knowledge.²³ Implicit associations are a fundamental part of the human cognitive process, providing mental shortcuts in decision-making.²⁴ These shortcuts, however, can lead to unintentional bias across any number of observable demographics, such as race, sexual orientation, age, and sex. Recent sociology research suggests that implicit biases are not an exclusive reflection of the individual but of the values of their identified in-group in

a larger sociocultural context.²⁵ This factor may be one reason for the demonstrated disparity in military justice along racial lines.

The US military can be characterized as a unique in-group with distinctive values compared to the general public.²⁶ Many of these values are reflected in policy and attributed to concepts surrounding the profession of arms and the requirements of fulfilling missions. Policies are created to ensure that the best force possible is retained for the nation's defense. As discussed earlier, the policies form instances of obligated discrimination. The policies and resultant obligated discrimination create a definable in-group versus out-group conflict, wherein those who do not meet the legal or stated standards of the in-group are punished, removed from service, or barred from entry. As the rank of the individual levying punishment increases, so does the impact of the action, up to removal from service, fiscal repudiation, or even incarceration.²⁷ Enforcing these standards forces individuals in some instances to carry out acts of obligatory discrimination.

The thoroughly researched and well-documented influences of implicit bias offer a theoretical foundation to better understand and ground the theory of obligatory discrimination in the US military. A detailed discussion of implicit bias, obligatory discrimination, and how implicit bias can be measured is presented in the literature review.

To address the gap in knowledge about the effects of implicit bias on the US military specifically and provide insights beneficial to the services, this research asked the following questions: *How does implicit racial and sexual orientation bias of members of the US military statistically differ from that of the general US population over the past ten years? How does rank exacerbate or lessen the effect?*

This research hypothesized the following: A variance in Implicit Association Test (IAT) scores between the US military and the general population over the ten-year period from 2006 to 2015 is attributable to policies of obligatory discrimination. Research has unquestionably demonstrated the fallibility of judicial and jury verdicts when variables such as race and sexual orientation are introduced to mock court cases.²⁸ Critics of implicit bias have argued that experiments have demonstrated low correlations between IAT scores and behavior.²⁹ Such arguments have been refuted by variations in experimental design that conceal the intent of the research at hand.³⁰ Despite executive orders banning racial discrimination in 1948, research has shown systemic failures along racial divides in military justice as of at least seventy years after the orders were issued.³¹

Literature Review

The research available on implicit bias in the US military sector is limited, hence the need for this research. This research relies heavily on peer-reviewed studies detailing the effects and behavior of implicit bias in the general US population. Findings offer a theoretical foundation for implicit bias and a comparative perspective of the research results. Executive orders and records of service policy relating to elements of obligatory discrimination in the US military comprise supporting documentation for the concept of obligatory discrimination. The data analyzed in this research is sourced from Harvard University's Project Implicit, a publicly available repository of data from the IAT.

Obligatory Discrimination in the US Military

The US military has a mission to protect the United States of America and its allies from threats.³² The military is a means by which a government can use controlled force through violence and other coercive means to defeat such threats.³³ The employment of controlled force requires individuals capable of executing a mission physically and psychologically. As a result, certain medical conditions can prevent individuals from joining, performing specific jobs in, or remaining in the service. Army Regulation 40-501 outlines several disqualifying conditions, including blindness, paralysis, immunodeficiency disorders, and even certain speech defects.³⁴ The Air Force follows Department of the Air Force Manual (DAFM) 48-123, *Medical Examinations and Standards*, to determine fitness for flight duty. This regulation further restricts the ability to serve in certain jobs in the Air Force. Individuals who have conditions including asthma, color blindness, migraines, and some forms of sleep apnea are not eligible for particular jobs in the Air Force.³⁵

Medical conditions are not the only areas that have resulted in discrimination; some social standards are, and have been, tied to US military service. Where medical standards are designed to ensure the fittest force and protect individuals from the rigors of service, socially based discriminatory policies only reflect larger societal standards or expectations.

For example, at one time the US military discriminated based on a person's sex. Not until 1948 were women permitted to serve in the US

military outside of the temporary Women's Army Corps.³⁶ On June 12, 1948, President Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act into law, allowing women to serve in regular permanent positions across all service branches. It took another sixty-seven years before women could serve indiscriminately within the services. Regardless of a service member's personal beliefs surrounding a medical or socially based policy, supervisors and leaders are required by law to uphold it. The Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) is a special set of federal laws uniquely written for and enforced by the US military.³⁷ It outlines the resultant actions for violating a standard of military service. The compulsory nature of the UCMJ does not allow leaders to pick and choose which standards they wish to enforce. Leaders must uphold the standards of service in the manners dictated by the UCMJ regardless of their personal views of the subject at hand. Thus, individuals handing down justice as outlined in the UCMJ may be implementing obligatory discrimination.

The sociocultural environment of the US military is unique. The *Handbook of the Sociology of the Military* highlights numerous facets of this characteristic, with several chapters on diversity and inclusion directly contributing to this research. Service members and their supervisors are accountable to uphold the Uniform Code of Military Justice. As such, the social dynamics in the US military differ from those in the civilian workplace. Nevertheless, as highlighted by the primary sources listed above, obligatory discrimination has long been a part of military justice.³⁸ The need for increased diversity is critical to meeting the evolving nature of warfare; however, the traditional culture of military service has been exclusionary.³⁹ Research has shown this ethos of noninclusion through the implicit, derogatory attitudes of the US population—from which individuals volunteer to serve—toward race and sexual orientation and the occurrence rates of discrimination toward these two groups.

Racial Discrimination

Until the Army Reorganization Act of 1866, Black citizens could not regularly enlist in the service. When they were able to join, many served in menial labor jobs and were segregated in subpar conditions.⁴⁰ Racial segregation and discrimination were lawful in the US military until the 1940s. Units were lawfully segregated by race. Particular jobs,

including aircrew, were unavailable to Black service members.⁴¹ Promotions were even harder to obtain, and leadership opportunities were unheard of.⁴²

When laws and regulations began to change, the evolution was slow and difficult owing to over a hundred years of discriminatory practices dating back to the American Revolution.⁴³ Army Regulation 210-10 dated 1940 prohibited the racial segregation of any post, camp, or station recreational facilities.⁴⁴ A year later, in 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 ending racial discrimination in the US defense industry.⁴⁵ Roosevelt's order, however, was largely overlooked and argued away by much of the military leadership at the time. In 1944 Col William Boyd,⁴⁶ backed by Maj Gen Frank O'Driscoll Hunter, US Army Air Service, refused to allow Black officers into the only officers' club on Selfridge Field.⁴⁷ Boyd, willfully or not, is quoted as stating at a commanders call, "I recognize no racial difficulty at Selfridge field," among other racially questionable perceptions.⁴⁸ A year later, 101 Black officers were arrested entering an officers' club at Freeman Field.⁴⁹ It would take a year and Thurgood Marshall's urging Theodore Berry to take the case before the case would be thrown out and the men released.

When Truman issued an unambiguous stance on military racial segregation in 1948 with Executive Order 9981, racial disparity in the US military began to be addressed in mass.⁵⁰ This order ended obligatory racial discrimination in the US military. As part of the official order, Truman established a special committee to evaluate and report directly to the president's office on policies and practices in the US military. These observations would also be accompanied by policy recommendations, which would become binding amendments and additions to service policy. These two executive orders, seven years apart, highlighted the systemic, embedded racial discrimination in the history of US armed forces.⁵¹ It would take another five years for the last segregated unit to be disbanded in 1954, with military leaders and congressional representatives resisting and challenging the policies the entire way.⁵²

Despite the repeal of obligatory segregation in the US military in 1948, a 2017 study, *Racial Disparities in Military Justice*, highlighted a disproportionate exercise of military justice toward Black members of the military when compared to other races. A follow-up study was released in 2020 titled *Federal Lawsuit Reveals Air Force Cover Up: Racial Disparities in Military Justice, Part II*. The findings of both stud-

ies are harsh. The original 2017 report highlighted the Air Force as the worst of the four services, stating that Black Airmen had a 71 percent higher risk of severe punishment than White Airmen.⁵³ This statistic was more than double the Marine Corps' at 32 percent, the lowest incident rate for all the services.⁵⁴ These findings suggest some form of racial bias among individuals who preside over punishment.⁵⁵ Three years later, an Air Force task force talking paper prepared in response to the 2017 report surfaced via court order and noted the potential existence of implicit (unconscious) bias as at least a covariate in the equation.⁵⁶ The report went on to recommend training on implicit bias and offered a four-slide training sample.

Cognitive racial resentment in the US military has been found to exist in rates higher than in the normal civilian populace across three major time frames: WWII and Korea (1930–53), Vietnam (1954–76), and the All-Volunteer Force (1976–2001).⁵⁷ The study found that for WWII/Korea and Vietnam era veterans, racial resentment was four points higher than for the civilian populace (.71 and .67, respectively). However, the most recent time frame held a dramatic increase in scores across the board. The civilian to military split was twelve points (.69 and .81, respectively), meaning that today's US military, as does the civilian populace, holds higher racial resentment than previous generations. The results of this study are in stark contrast to other research on racial perceptions in the civilian arena that report dramatic reductions since the 1960s.⁵⁸

Obligatory discrimination against Black service members was so ingrained in the culture and leadership of the services at the time of the repeal that it took two presidential orders and an oversight committee to effectively end the practices.

Sexual Orientation Discrimination

Discrimination against sexual orientation, specifically gay men, in the US military can be traced as far back as the Revolutionary War.⁵⁹ On March 10, 1778, Lt Gotthold Frederick Enslin became the first member of the US military to be dismissed with infamy (a dishonorable discharge of the time) for same-sex acts.⁶⁰ The punishment, handed down from Gen George Washington, was considered lenient for the time since imprisonment or death was permitted by convention.⁶¹ Despite capital punishment being authorized, no evidence exists that

it was ever carried out by the military. Discharges were the standard punishment. More recently, discharges for sexual orientation accounted for the removal of 30,823 servicemen and women between 1980 and 2008.⁶²

The DADT policy, enacted by President Bill Clinton on February 28, 1994, was the first step in ending obligatory sexual orientation discrimination in the US military.⁶³ The policy prevented recruiters and commanders from asking recruits and service members to make statements about their sexuality and individuals from making such statements voluntarily. The policy effectively allowed homosexual service members to serve so long as their sexuality was a secret or covered up. The legislation did little to curb obligatory discrimination of sexuality.⁶⁴

Sixteen years later, President Obama signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010. This single act removed all service policies and laws against gay and lesbian service members, allowing them to serve openly without fear of reprisal.⁶⁵ Unlike President Roosevelt's and Truman's executive orders regarding segregation, the new policy on sexual orientations was enacted universally.

However, until 2010, military culture had evolved around heterosexism, positively reinforcing heterosexual ideology and simultaneously amplifying negative associations of same-sex concepts or stereotypes.⁶⁶ The official stances and legal precedents that preceded the repeal act reinforced these negative associations. Indicators of social dominance orientation have been identified by previous studies, highlighting an increase in stigmatization and discrimination of LGB groups following military training.⁶⁷ Such deeply embedded cultural ideologies are difficult to overcome and impossible to eradicate rapidly. Thus, those openly or suspected of being LGB ultimately have a heightened risk of suffering discriminatory behavior in the US military.

A study on sexual orientation discrimination in the US military found that seven years after the repeal of DADT, LGB individuals were more likely to encounter unwanted sexual attention than their non-LGB counterparts.⁶⁸ In numbers eerily similar to racial discrimination, 77 percent of the participants ($n = 195$ of 253) said they had experienced some form of discrimination based on their sexual orientation.⁶⁹ Females were more likely than males (83 percent versus 74 percent) to experience some form of sexual orientation discrimination while at work. The report also found that 23 percent of men versus 44 percent of females said they would report an incident.⁷⁰ Further, of the

77 percent ($n = 195$) who had experienced discrimination, only 26 percent had chosen to report it.

As discussed above, since the American Revolution, the US military has enforced policies of obligatory discrimination specifically in the areas of race and sexual orientation. Since that time, these two major policies have been overturned.

Recent research has raised concerns that despite the ending of these two policies, discrimination may still exist in some form despite significant investments in integrative training. An Air Force tiger team suggested that such training be expanded to include concepts on implicit bias.

Implicit Bias and Testing

The influence of implicit bias on individuals participating in the handling of justice is well documented in academic research. Jurors, judges, prosecutors, and bystanders have all been shown susceptible to making wrong conclusions based on the influence of implicit bias.⁷¹ As a result of the conclusions of numerous studies on implicit bias, judges, police officers, and even medical professionals routinely receive training on how these attitudes are formed, their effects on behavior, and techniques to overcome their influence.⁷²

Implicit Bias

Human behavior derives from a series of cognitive processes as a response to a stimulus. The two main cognitive processes that occur prior to a behavior are, in order of general occurrence, implicit and explicit thought. Implicit processes occur subconsciously while explicit processes occur via conscious thought.⁷³ Although implicit processes generally precede explicit processes, recent research has demonstrated that portions of these processes may overlap and even happen concurrently.⁷⁴ Implicit thought sets the stage for explicit reasoning and ultimately behavior.

An individual's behavior is initiated by implicit processes occurring predominantly before an individual is aware of them.⁷⁵ Implicit processes are especially strong in shaping and priming emotions in socially and culturally based situations. A result of implicit thought is implicit attitudes, which influence how an individual perceives a given situation.⁷⁶ Implicit attitudes are impressions or appraisals of a given stimuli that

further inform the holder's perceptions of a situation, person, or object. Implicit attitudes have been demonstrated for nearly all categorical demographics including class, age, religion, cultural roles, national origin, and even perceived disabilities.⁷⁷ When an individual is influenced by an implicit attitude to prefer a specific demographic over another, it then becomes an implicit bias.⁷⁸ Just like implicit attitudes, implicit biases have been demonstrated to exist between nearly any two objects or representable concepts. One of the first studies on implicit bias demonstrated subconscious preferences for flowers over insects.⁷⁹ Since then, numerous studies have been conducted on implicit bias, with some of the most researched categories being race and sexual orientation.

Implicit Racial Bias

Implicit racial bias arises when an individual has implicit preferences associated with race. Via the processes noted above, an individual with implicit racial bias will form a subconscious preference in a situation where race is salient prior to any explicit thought. Such predisposition occurs automatically and is similar to a human reflex in that the individual experiencing the stimuli has no control over the initiation of the reflex. The influence of implicit racial bias to sway decisions has been demonstrated across a variety of topics and disciplines. The area of study most relevant to the research at hand is the demonstrated effects implicit bias has on the judicial process.

For members of the military, justice is handled slightly differently than in the civilian world. A trial by jury is referred to as a court-martial; most other forms of justice are considered nonjudicial since they do not involve a court. In a court-martial, the judge and jurors are all members of the military. The judge is a commissioned officer, and the jury comprises the defendant's peers. Much of the justice dispensed in the military can be administered outside of a court-martial at the command level by individuals on G-series orders. In these instances, commanders play the role of judge and jury. While there is no current research available on the implicit bias of these specific military entities, there are several studies regarding the civilian judicial process.

In a study of prospective jurors, researchers devised an instrument to determine implicit pairings of "guilty" and "innocent" perceptions based on the defendant's race.⁸⁰ In addition to the implicit assessment, participants completed the racial thermometer scale, a measure of

explicit racial feelings. The results demonstrated a divergence of explicit and implicit feelings among the participants at a statistically significant level ($p = .01$).

However, most of the justice decided in the US military is done at the command level and never involves a jury. Even though commanders and trial judges differ widely in numerous ways, both are expected to be fair in their handling of justice. Judges do have an advantage; they practice law as a profession. In most jurisdictions, judges are required to be practicing lawyers who are either appointed or voted as a judge.

A study covered 128 judges (White $n = 85$; Black $n = 43$) from across the US who participated in a two-part study consisting of an IAT and a judicial decision-making exercise.⁸¹ Results of the implicit assessment showed that 69 percent of the judges held a stronger than average implicit bias favoring Whites. Along racial lines of the justices, 87 percent of the White judges ($n = 74$) and 44 percent of the Black judges ($n = 14$) demonstrated implicit racial bias. The decision-making exercise consisted of three scenarios; in the first two, the race of the defendant was not explicitly stated, though implied, while in the third, race was explicitly stated. The first two scenarios produced trends akin to the implicit assessments. However, in the third scenario, where race was explicit, the judges performed similarly for all defendants. The results of this study demonstrate how implicit associations are automatic mental shortcuts that can cause bias in decision-making.

When deliberating cases and punishments, judges, jurors, and commanders will consider the facts presented to them. Research shows that implicit bias also has the ability to negatively affect recalled information that may be important to decision-making. This study asked participants ($n = 153$, 71 percent female, 72 percent of mixed racial background, none Black) to read two separate stories with varying racial compositions of the characters, one about a fistfight and the other about an employee termination.

Following the reading, participants completed a series of distraction tasks for ten minutes to reduce immediate recall of details presented, followed by a questionnaire about the stories. Participants were more likely to recall specific details about an aggressive African American (80 percent of the details) than an aggressive Hawaiian person (72 percent) or an aggressive White person (68 percent).⁸² The results of this study are unique when considering the population tested but are similar to other trends shown in research on racial bias. The findings

are profound, noting that in as little as fifteen minutes, significant fact-related bias can occur. The effects seen were independent of results for explicit racial bias.

Implicit racial bias can negatively affect an individual's perceptions, preferences, and even memory. These effects have been demonstrated by judges, lawyers, jurors, and college students regardless of race, sex, or nationality. The pervasiveness of implicit racial bias and its many impacts on an individual casts a different light on the 2017 and 2020 reports from the advocacy group Protect Our Defenders detailing research on military justice and racial demographics.⁸³ The initial study indicates that Black service members were 2.61 times more likely to face punitive (judicial or nonjudicial) actions than their White peers. The statistic varied by year and service, with the Air Force having the highest disproportionality at 71 percent more likely, followed by the Army at 61 percent, the Navy at 40 percent, and the Marines at 32 percent. The report also notes that for higher levels of punishment, such as a general court-martial, Black service members were more likely to receive guilty verdicts than their White counterparts.⁸⁴ These findings suggest that each of the four services discussed in the report suffers from some form of racial bias.

Implicit Sexual Orientation Bias

Implicit sexuality bias is like implicit racial bias. Rather than having an automatic preference for a specific race, individuals will have an implicit preference for a specific sexuality.⁸⁵ In a construct similar to the current study, researchers used archival data from the sexual attitude IAT hosted by Project Implicit. Like the race IAT, the sexual attitude IAT contains data on participants' implicit and explicit perceptions of LGB individuals. Researchers have found that both men and women have stronger positive explicit and implicit preferences for heterosexual orientations than LGB ones.⁸⁶ Except for the female perception of lesbians, none of the participants' explicit and implicit measures were similar. This research is important because it uses the same databases the proposed research will use and demonstrates expected biases across sexual orientation.

In further research, it has been shown that when coupled with low levels of attractiveness, lesbian and gay defendants often received harsher judicial punishments or rulings than their straight counterparts.⁸⁷ The principles of adverse racism and adverse heterosexism

theories note occurrences of bias may become stronger if additional unfavorable variables, such as low attractiveness, were present in a given situation.

Large-scale longitudinal studies have investigated how the implicit and explicit attitudes of the general US population have shifted over time. One such study, *Patterns of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes: I. Long-Term Change and Stability from 2007 to 2016*, covers almost ten years of data. After examining millions of scores from Project Implicit, researchers noted a 37 percent decrease in explicit negative racial attitudes and a 17 percent decrease in implicit ones during this period.⁸⁸ The study noted that from 2007 to about 2012, there was minimal change in racial attitudes. The significant change post-2012 was attributed to participants whose birthday characterized them as millennials. This result was in contrast to a relatively steady state of implicit attitudes in the Baby Boomer and Generation X participants.⁸⁹ Attitudes toward sexuality saw stronger trends toward neutrality. The data showed a 49 percent and 34 percent decrease in negative explicit and implicit attitudes toward sexuality, respectively.⁹⁰ The significant shifts toward neutrality are in stark contrast to the 71 percent of Black Airmen and 77 percent of LGBT service members who experienced discrimination.

The Implicit Association Test

Owing to the subconscious nature of implicit bias, individuals are unaware of their existence unless they have been tested for specific biases previously. Even then, an individual's implicit attitudes are fluid, vulnerable to the environment and explicit thought. Traditional psychometric methods predominantly rely on explicit thinking.

Common tools used to test individuals are multiple-choice, short or open answer, Likert scales, and interviews. Unfortunately, all these methods are incapable of examining an individual's implicit thoughts. No matter how they are constructed or how crafty the questions are organized, all of the above-mentioned methods test an individual's explicit thoughts. Moreover, when the results of these methods were compared against naturalistic settings or micro-behaviors, the results often conflicted.⁹¹

An instrument that tests for strength of implicit bias must be able to tap into the participant's subconscious without allowing the participant to actively think about the true nature of the test. The Implicit

Association Test is one such test that accomplishes this feat by asking participants to make associations between words and pictures or words and other words.

The IAT uses individual response latencies to calculate preferential pairings of good/good and good/bad.⁹² These pairings are accomplished between two words, a word and a picture, or even two pictures. Participants are asked to associate the two items based on a predominant theme of good or bad. One specific iteration of the IAT, the race-weapons test, sought to assess threat perceptions of participants. The test asked participants to categorize a scene as “safe” or “dangerous” as quickly as possible. The scene showed distinguishably Black or White individuals in varying poses holding either a gun or an innocuous object. For this study, the race IAT and Sexual Orientation IAT were used.

The race IAT asks participants to pair either good or bad terms with the face of a Black or White individual. Figure 10.1 displays the faces and terms used in the race IAT. This process occurs over several trials and intermixes the tasks. One trial will ask participants to pair good terms with a Black face followed by another trial that will switch the pairing methodology, with a total of 220 different pairings of words and images.⁹³


Category	Items
Good	Adore, Delight, Friend, Glad, Fantastic, Joyful, Fabulous, Triumph
Bad	Abuse, Hate, Gross, Sadness, Negative, Sickening, Poison, Humiliate
Black people	
White people	

Figure 10.1. Race IAT descriptive words and stimuli images. (Source: Project Implicit, “Race IAT,” accessed September 14, 2020.)

The sexual attitude IAT follows the same structure as the race IAT but uses a combination of descriptive words in conjunction with symbols rather than pictures (fig. 10.2). The two tests used in this research along with numerous other versions are available via Project Implicit.⁹⁴

Category	Items
Good	Glad, Lovely, Triumph, Love, Fantastic, Pleasing, Excitement, Cheerful
Bad	Despise, Detest, Ugly, Hate, Bothersome, Abuse, Hatred, Negative
Gay people	 Gay People, Homosexual, Gay
Straight people	 Straight, Straight People, Heterosexual

Figure 10.2. Sexual attitude IAT descriptive words and stimuli images. (Source: Project Implicit “sexual attitude IAT,” accessed September 14, 2020.)

The IAT and implicit bias theory are not without criticism. The impressionability of implicit bias has been used by some researchers to refute its legitimacy.⁹⁵ Tests have shown that implicit bias is susceptible to a number of stimuli, including sleep deprivation.⁹⁶ As a result, how an individual scores on an implicit measure today, at this very moment, may differ a few days, or even hours, later. However, recent research suggests that implicit attitudes, without cognitive intervention, are stable over a longer period of time. This finding means that while an individual’s perception of an immediate situation may vary in the short term, over longer periods of time, stable trends will be more recognizable.⁹⁷ Like many other psychometric instruments, the IAT is not intended to be taken once in a person’s lifetime. It offers a snapshot at that moment of the participant’s implicit bias. Scores dispersed over time or a larger population have the most meaning and impact.

The algorithms behind the IAT are tuned to detect and reject any attempt to thwart the test. The latency of each pairing task is measured to the millisecond (ms) and will eliminate responses less than 400 ms and exceeding 10,000 ms.⁹⁸ The result is a calculated score ranging from -2 to 2, where 0 is the center point indicating no bias. All participants who complete a trial will receive a score. Only scores meeting the above criteria for reliability are assigned an IAT-D score indicating a low occurrence of rejected or improperly paired stimuli, a low rate of responses eliminated for time, and no anomalies in the session.

Primary Analysis by *t*-Test

The primary analysis was conducted using year-by-year *t*-tests for each IAT test. The use of a *t*-test was chosen based on two critical factors. Firstly, the independent variable comprised two levels: participants were either a member of the general US population or a member of the US military. Secondly, the primary audience for this research is members of the US military, not specifically the academic community. To reach the broadest range of individuals in this population, the use of individual *t*-tests to examine a ten-year period offers an additional level of transparency, thereby increasing the potential audience for the final results. For this latter reason, a time series autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) model was not conducted.

The primary analysis independent variable was constructed by group membership. The two-level independent variable for the IAT data comparison was constructed based on participant response to their type of work in the demographics section. Individuals who selected occupational codes 55-1000 (military – officer and tactical leaders/managers), 55-2000 (military first-line enlisted supervisor/manager), or 55-3000 (military – enlisted tactical, air/weapons, crew, other) were placed in the US military level and all others in the general US population level. The two dependent variables were treated independently of one another. The first test group used overall IAT-D scores from the sexual orientation IAT. The second test group used overall IAT-D scores from the race IAT.

The two-level independent variable will identify what group participated in the IAT being tested, either sexual orientation or race. Despite participants not being randomly assigned to each group, the participant pool can be considered an *as-if* by random selection to each group since participation was not affected by intervening events.⁹⁹ The design took advantage of the naturalistic environment of Project Implicit.

Participants were assigned to groups based on their natural group membership. This assignment strategy along with participants' independent participation in the IAT outside the influence of this research further reinforced the *as-if* randomization of the participant pool.¹⁰⁰ Online hosting of the selected IAT tests and a detailed repository of collected data made uninterrupted access to the instrument possible.

Archival data from Harvard University's Project Implicit (HUPI) was used.¹⁰¹ HUPI offers education and access to learning more about

an individual's implicit attitudes and bias. A variety of tests and subsequent archival databases are available through HUPI's website. Data from the sexual orientation and race IAT datasets over the past ten years were selected. The sexual orientation and race IAT datasets included participants' overall IAT score, known as the IAT-D, cognitive measures, and general demographic information. This research used the IAT-D scores and select demographic information from each IAT instrument.

ANOVA by Rank (Secondary Analysis)

For years with a significant *t*-test result indicating a variance in implicit sexual orientation or racial bias, a follow-up analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted. This approach may be counterintuitive to traditional statistical analysis that generally investigates a phenomenon using a multivariate analysis, such as an ANOVA, first, and follow-up *t*-tests to determine significance. However, the follow-up ANOVAs in this research are investigating a different independent variable, rank, which meets the minimum of three levels needed for an ANOVA.

For the follow-up ANOVAs, the independent variable will be constructed by a three-level designation of rank. Participants identified their primary work when completing the demographics section of the IAT. Three codes asked the members to designate their rank, 55-1000, 55-2000, and 55-3000, as described previously. The ANOVAs sought to determine if rank in general affected implicit bias for either sexual orientation or race among participants.

Population and Data Collection

This study used select demographic variables and the IAT-D section to define the study sample. Twenty different datasets were used, one for each of the IAT tests and one for each calendar year. Each dataset contained data from all global participants over the course of the calendar year, including incomplete datasets. The data was narrowed to meet the dimensions and demographics of this research.

The target population for the research was the general US population as well as members of the US military who completed either the sexual orientation or race IAT in the given year. The data was first

narrowed to include only participants with US citizenship or residency or both. Participants were asked to identify their citizenship and residency in two separate questions in the demographics section. There were 240 different options for participants to choose from, including a null option. Participants who selected the null option or any option other than “US” were excluded from the study. The narrowing of the data is reflected in table 10.1.

Table 10.1. Data cleaning and narrowing for IAT datasets. Numbers reflect total data cleaning over the entire ten-year period. Cases removed appear in parenthesis.

IAT Cases	Initial	Incomplete	Non-US Citizen/ Resident	Null Occupation	Retained
Race	6,759,881	(2,993,696)	(1,021,455)	(886,769)	1,821,550
Sexuality	2,780,600	(1,074,145)	(598,896)	(137,828)	836,343

As part of the demographics collected, participants were asked to indicate their current primary occupation out of over one hundred options. Individuals currently serving in the military as their primary occupation selected the 55-1000, 55-2000, or 55-3000 categories and could not select more than one occupation code. Type of service, primary job, or specific branch of service was not collected. Cases retained and eliminated based on citizenship/residency and occupation criteria are reflected in table 10.1, above.

The sample included participants meeting these criteria with completed IAT-D scores. After the data was cleaned, a total of 2,657,893 participants met the above criteria and were included in this research. All data was collected from Harvard University’s Project Implicit repository and required no special access to download.

The sexual orientation and race IATs are available at HUPI’s website. Individuals may participate for a litany of reasons, from self-improvement to education or “just because.” None of the participants were asked to take either assessment for the purposes of this research. Participants do not receive any compensation for completing an assessment.

As noted, the data used in this research was retrieved from HUPI. Datasets are posted by year for each instrument to a repository on Open Science Framework’s (OSF) hosting platform. The data used in

this research can be retrieved from OSF's website by searching for the specific year and test desired.¹⁰²

Instrumentation and Scoring

This research was based on two versions of the IAT. These are the sexual orientation IAT, which measures implicit bias regarding an individual's sexual orientation, and the race IAT, which measures an individual's implicit racial bias. The analysis used an individual's job code to determine their grouping for the independent variable and their overall IAT-D score for the dependent variable.

For the primary analysis, participants were grouped by one of two conditions, either a general US citizen or a US military member. These variables were dummy coded using Microsoft SPSS to identify the populations (military members were coded as "1" and citizens as "0"). Once the groups were established, IAT-D scores were used as dependent variables in subsequent *t*-tests using Microsoft SPSS. The secondary analysis focused on only those members who were coded as being part of the US military. These participants received an additional dummy code designating their general rank as indicated by the selected occupational code. The same IAT-D scores used in the primary analysis were used in the ANOVAs.

The IAT-D score used in all the statistical models is only assigned to participants who completed all components of the respective IAT assessment without anomalies. The scoring takes several factors into account when calculating an IAT-D score. The algorithms consider scores from trial phases and eliminate excessively fast or slow responses, those slower than 10,000 ms or faster than 400 ms.¹⁰³ The system also computes standard deviations for respondents and removes identified latencies above two deviations for that trial.¹⁰⁴ As a result, participants will receive a computed IAT-D score on a scale from -2 to 2. A score of 0 indicates no bias, and the closer to -2 or 2 a score is, the higher the participant's implicit bias.¹⁰⁵

Results

The analysis of racial IAT data contained ten initial *t*-tests to determine the significance between the military and US citizen samples for each of the ten years. This analysis was followed up with ten ANOVAs

for all significant results. The ANOVAs were to determine if there was a significant relationship between IAT scores and rank for military members. ANOVAs with significant results were then followed up with three individual *t*-tests each to identify which rank groups held significance. At the end of the racial IAT analysis, a total of forty *t*-tests and ten ANOVAs had been conducted. This process was repeated for the sexual orientation dataset, with another forty *t*-tests and ten ANOVAs being executed. In total, this research used eighty independent sample *t*-tests and twenty ANOVAs.

A discussion on generalizability and sample versus population demographics will lead this section. Results of the racial IAT and sexual orientation IAT will follow under separate headings. The analysis will be presented with descriptive statistics up front followed by a discussion of the initial *t*-tests covering the ten-year period. This discussion will be followed by a presentation of the ANOVA and supplemental *t*-test results over the ten-year period. Interpretation and discussion of the limitations and results beyond stated statistical significance and trends will be saved for the discussion and conclusion.

Sample and Population Comparisons

With the use of archival data, researchers are unable to extend or tailor data collection to ensure a representative sample is achieved with specific confidence levels. Consequently, the cases from the available sample can be difficult to generalize to a larger population. Population data for the general US population was derived from US government census statistics.¹⁰⁶ The demographics data on the US military population were derived from multiple DOD demographics reports.¹⁰⁷

Sample size effects were calculated based on the given population and sample sizes. Using a 95 percent confidence level, the results calculated from the race portion of the research for the US military samples had margins of error ranging from 1.41 percent to 2.43 percent. The sexual orientation samples ranged from 1.93 percent to 4.67 percent. Table 10.2 offers a year-to-year look at the margin of error for sample sizes. These numbers indicate that with 95 percent confidence the results obtained in this research are true within the +/- range of the margin of error.

Table 10.2. Margin of error for military samples. A confidence interval of 95 percent was used.

Year	Population	Race Sample		Sexuality Sample	
		<i>n</i>	Margin of error	<i>n</i>	Margin of error
2010	1,567,417	3,141	1.75%	651	3.84%
2011	1,520,100	2,588	1.91%	440	4.67%
2012	1,492,200	1,626	2.43%	596	4.01%
2013	1,433,150	1,618	2.43%	706	3.69%
2014	1,381,250	2,268	2.06%	721	3.65%
2015	1,347,300	2,273	2.05%	750	3.58%
2016	1,348,400	1,501	2.53%	1,040	3.04%
2017	1,359,000	3,687	1.61%	1,195	2.83%
2018	1,345,550	3,492	1.66%	1,383	2.63%
2019	1,417,370	4,786	1.41%	2,577	1.93%

Table 10.3 offers the confidence intervals for the US civilian population samples. The samples for race ranged from 0.18 percent to 0.28 percent and 0.27 percent to 0.43 percent for sexual orientation. The margins of error noted are directly attributable to the sample sizes. The US citizen samples had high levels of participation, the race IAT being the most popular of the two. The military sample sizes were a smaller portion of the targeted population, resulting in higher margins of error. Again, the race IAT was more popular and had higher participation rates.

Delineating racial demographics across all samples in comparison to the population for significance testing proved difficult. Racial categories varied between the dataset used in this research and demographic records consulted to establish population levels. Therefore, Chi-squared tests for racial generalizability could not be modeled in an accurate manner. The Chi square test requires specific similarities between datasets to assess their generalizability. A direct comparison of accumulative racial demographics was attempted to give some context to the results. The direct comparison of military samples to population revealed that the military racial sample may have underrepresented the Black population at a rate of 4.6 percent and the sexual orientation sample by a rate of 2.5 percent. Given the same limitations and comparative process, the civilian samples followed a similar trend, underrepresenting the Black population in the race sample at a rate of

4.4 percent and of 4.6 percent for the sexual orientation sample. The comparison on race is given only for the purposes of discussion, and the impact on the results cannot be accurately assessed.

Table 10.3. Margin of error for US population samples. A confidence interval of 95 percent was used.

Year	Population	Race Sample		Sexuality Sample	
		<i>n</i>	Margin of error	<i>n</i>	Margin of error
2010	309,330,000	167,475	0.24%	61,537	0.40%
2011	311,580,000	149,717	0.25%	45,177	0.40%
2012	313,870,000	116,256	0.29%	52,875	0.43%
2013	316,060,000	126,275	0.28%	65,817	0.38%
2014	318,390,000	179,103	0.23%	65,236	0.38%
2015	320,740,000	134,575	0.27%	90,832	0.33%
2016	323,070,000	128,730	0.27%	88,942	0.33%
2017	325,150,000	238,295	0.20%	114,546	0.29%
2018	327,170,000	250,557	0.20%	134,410	0.27%
2019	329,130,000	303,587	0.18%	106,912	0.30%

Formal demographics on the incidence of sexual identities in the general and military populations are not available. Gallup research from 2018 offers a snapshot, with generational breakouts of sexual identities in the US. Gallup data suggests that individuals identifying as members of the LGBT community represent approximately 4.5 percent of the US population in 2018, and 7.2 percent in 2022.¹⁰⁸ When considering generational differences, this figure was highest for millennials (1980–99) at 8.1 percent and lowest for traditionalists (1913–45) at 1.4 percent. However, the mean age of all the samples used in this study more closely coincides with the younger millennial generation. Based on the data available, again, the study is unable to precisely assess the generalizability of the samples' sexual orientation to that of the general and military populations.

The inability to generalize along demographic lines in this study is critical to note, as previous research indicates that implicit preferences vary by demographic. Past research shows that on average, an individual's implicit preference will be for their own race and orientation.¹⁰⁹ Given the inability to accurately test racial and sexual orientation demographics and the calculated margin of error, the samples

collected may reflect accurate conclusions for the population, but generalizability at the demographic level cannot be assumed.

Race IAT Analysis

The race sample was comprised of 1,821,550 participants, of which 37.8 percent were male ($n = 687,762$) and 62.2 percent were female ($n = 1,133,273$). Table 10.4 shows the frequencies and percentages by race. Approximately 76 percent were White and 9 percent were Black. The remaining participants were distributed across American Indian/Alaska Native (0.5 percent), East Asian (1.6 percent), South Asian (1.2 percent), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.4 percent), biracial (3.9 percent), mixed (5.6 percent), or other (1.5 percent). The sample was mostly young adults, with 49 percent at or under 26 and 75 percent under 38; the mean age was 31.46 ($SD = 12.875$).

Table 10.4. Descriptive statistics for racial IAT samples

Descriptor	Total Sample		US Military Sample	
	<i>n</i>	Percentage	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Male	687,762	37.8	20,769	77.0
Female	1,133,273	62.2	6,202	23.0
Other Sex	515	0.0	9	0.0
White	1,385,074	76.0	19,446	72.1
Black	164,829	9.0	3,290	12.2
American Indian/ Alaska Native	8,987	0.5	166	0.6
East Asian	29,054	1.6	321	1.2
South Asian	20,982	1.2	152	0.6
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	7,171	0.4	211	0.8
Biracial	7,1495	3.9	1,009	3.7
Mixed	102,724	5.6	1,911	7.1
Other	31,234	1.7	474	1.8

Members of the US military were broken out, and their demographics are also displayed in table 10.4, above ($n = 26,980$). Notably, the US military sample was composed of 77 percent males ($n = 20,769$) and 23 percent females ($n = 6,202$). The racial breakout included 72.1 percent

White and 12.2 percent Black participants. The remaining participants were distributed across American Indian/Alaska Native (0.6 percent), East Asian (1.2 percent), South Asian (0.6 percent), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.8 percent), biracial (3.7 percent), mixed (7.1 percent), or other (1.8 percent). The military sample was only slightly younger than the US civilian sample, with 52 percent at or under age 27 and 75 percent under age 34; the mean age was 29.57 ($SD = 9.477$).

Independent Samples *t*-Tests

The first round of *t*-tests placed racial IAT scores as the dependent variable with a dummy variable to represent membership in the military as the independent variable. Participants with an occupation code series of 55-XXXX were coded as a “1” and all others, a “0.” The test was then run once each year from 2010 to 2019. The results of these tests are reported in table 10.5.

Table 10.5. Independent samples *t*-test results for 2010–19

Year	Civilian IAT		Military IAT		Delta	Percent	Sig (2-tailed) Equal Var.	Sig (2-tailed) Non- Equal Var.
	Mean	SD	iMean	SD				
2010	.32015	.4436	.33646	.4566	0.01631	4.8	.041	.047
2011	.32390	.4456	.35083	.4489	0.02693	7.7	.002	.002
2012	.33541	.4522	.35670	.4671	0.02129	6.0	.060	.068
2013	.32604	.4662	.37260	.4518	0.04656	12.5	.000	.000
2014	.30233	.4557	.33870	.4532	0.03637	10.7	.000	.000
2015	.27877	.4687	.32328	.4598	0.04451	13.8	.000	.000
2016	.31317	.4378	.32570	.4453	0.01253	3.8	.270	.279
2017	.33650	.4277	.37471	.4232	0.03821	10.2	.000	.000
2018	.32411	.4286	.35339	.4278	0.02928	8.3	.000	.000
2019	.27203	.4445	.25314	.4496	(0.01889)	(7.5)	.004	.004
2010–19	.31107	.4433	.33234	.4498	0.02127	6.4	.000	.000

Apart from the results from 2012 and 2016, all results were statistically significant ($p < .05$; 2012 $p = .06$; 2016 $p = .270$).¹¹⁰ Every year but 2019 showed a higher IAT score for the US military sample versus the civilian sample. In 2019 the mean IAT score of the civilian populace was .27203 while the US military’s mean was .01889 lower at .25314, a difference of

7.5 percent. The largest point delta was noted in 2013 with a difference of .04656 (12.5 percent), while the largest percent difference was in 2015 with the military mean 13.5 percent higher (delta = .04451).

The mean scores are portrayed in figure 10.3 as a plot over time. Despite a brief spike in 2017, both samples demonstrate a downward trend toward zero. Exponential trend lines (dotted) superimposed over the main plots illustrate this downward trend. Due to the general uniformity and proximity of means of the trended data, ANOVA models were constructed for each year.

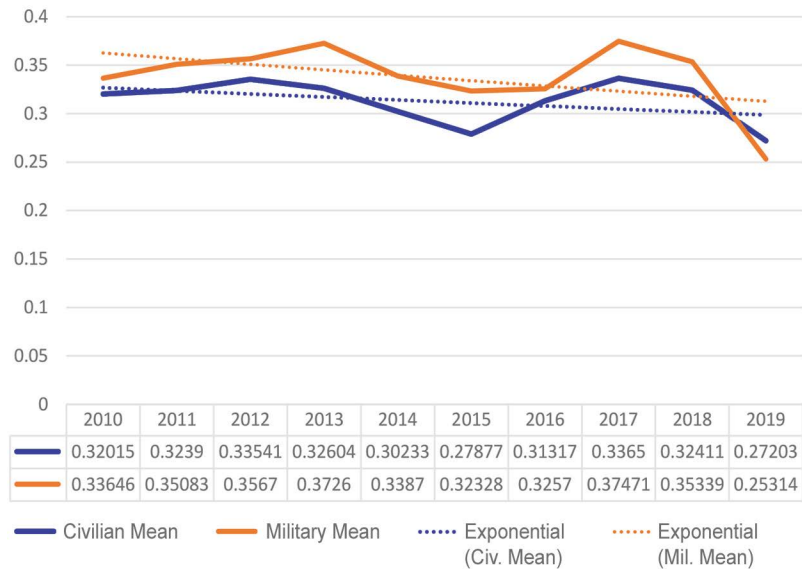


Figure 10.3. IAT civilian versus military means and deltas 2010–19

ANOVAs and Subsequent *t*-Tests

Due to the high rate of statistical significance, follow-up ANOVAs were conducted for each year from 2010 to 2019, including both years with nonsignificant results. This method was used in favor of creating transparent plottable data. The ANOVA models were constructed with racial IAT as the dependent variable with a three-level coded independent variable. The independent variable was constructed of only military members, occupation code 55-XXXX. The independent variable was constructed of three levels, each representing a different rank/

supervisory status in the military. A code of 55-1000 was given a code of “1,” representing officers and senior enlisted leaders. A code of 55-2000 was given a code of “2,” representing first-line supervisors in the noncommissioned officer corps (NCO). The final level was based on occupation code 55-3000 and assigned a code of “3,” representing all junior enlisted. The ANOVA test only informs the user if a significant relationship exists between the variables within its model. Follow-up *t*-tests for each level of the independent variable are required to understand which interactions within the model are significant.¹¹¹ As a result, each ANOVA with a significant result has three independent sample *t*-tests associated with it.

The results of the ANOVA tests can be found in table 10.6 along with their associated *t*-tests. Note that the model for each *t*-test was the civilian sample compared to a specific rank grouping. The significance is placed against the appropriate rank grouping and should be read as the significance of the model when compared to the civilian sample for that year. Despite a few lower *F* statistics, every ANOVA model was significant to the .000 level. This finding reinforces the results of the initial *t*-tests by year.

Table 10.6. ANOVAs and associated independent samples *t*-test results for 2010–2019

Year	ANOVA		<i>t</i> -Test			Delta Percent	
	F	Sig	Group	Mean IAT	SD		Sig
2010	16.939	.000	Civ	.32015	.4257	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.42440	.4436	.000	24.6
			First Line Sup/NCO	.2924	.4739	.056	(9.5)
			Jr. Enlisted	.31449	.4538	.656	(1.8)
2011	12.248	.000	Civ	.3239	.4456	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4297	.4140	.000	24.6
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3217	.4586	.887	(0.7)
			Jr. Enlisted	.3261	.4560	.869	0.7
2012	6.945	.000	Civ	.33541	.4326	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4250	.4522	.000	21.1
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3261	.4967	.662	(2.9)
			Jr. Enlisted	.3238	.4668	.518	(3.6)

Table 10.6 (continued)

Year	ANOVA		t -Test				Delta Percent
	F	Sig	Group	Mean IAT	SD	Sig	
2013	9.081	.000	Civ	.3260	.4518	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4203	.4636	.000	22.4
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3399	.4630	.511	(4.1)
			Jr. Enlisted	.3503	.4681	.197	(6.9)
2014	9.859	.000	Civ	.3023	.4532	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3802	.4561	.000	20.5
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3255	.4450	.206	7.1
			Jr. Enlisted	.2947	.4600	.655	(2.6)
2015	9.68	.000	Civ	.2787	.4598	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3672	.4746	.000	24.1
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3046	.4659	.140	(8.5)
			Jr. Enlisted	.3071	.4654	.058	(9.2)
2016	3.454	.016	Civ	.3131	.4379	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3536	.4310	.026	11.5
			First Line Sup/NCO	.2676	.4380	.058	(17)
			Jr. Enlisted	.3384	.4563	.177	7.5
2017	12.461	.000	Civ	.3365	.4277	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4013	.4256	.000	16.1
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3566	.4362	.177	5.6
			Jr. Enlisted	.3604	.4127	.031	6.6
2018	6.411	.000	Civ	.3241	.4218	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3678	.4286	.000	11.9
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3353	.4344	.468	3.3
			Jr. Enlisted	.3484	.4301	.041	7
2019	16.931	.000	Civ	.2720	.4445	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3143	.4388	.001	13.5
			First Line Sup/NCO	.2038	.4463	.000	(33.3)
			Jr. Enlisted	.2493	.4543	.021	(9.1)
2010–2019	78.276	.000	Civ	.3110	.4433	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3823	.4378	.000	18.7
			First Line Sup/NCO	.2979	.4576	.011	(4.4)
			Jr. Enlisted	.3154	.4503	.307	1.4

Unlike most of the assessments to this point, not all subsequent *t*-tests assessing the levels of the ANOVA model were significant. This result was likely due to comparatively small sample sizes and smaller effect sizes between the military and civilian samples. One of the major notable trends is that all the models including the rank grouping of officer and senior enlisted were statistically significant to the .000 level; the only exception was in 2016, which was at the .021 level. Additionally, of the twenty models integrating first-line supervisors or junior enlisted, only four met the .05 or lower threshold of significance. Lastly, all three levels were significant for the 2019 year group.

Keeping the implications of the level of significance in mind, the mean IAT scores by the rank group were plotted in figure 10.4 to articulate any linear patterns that may exist. Exponential trend lines were also calculated to offer a statistical representation of score trends over the time frame of the study. Figure 10.4 demonstrates the same overall increase of scores in the 2016–17 time frame, followed by a rapid decline for all groups. Unlike figure 10.3, which demonstrates nearly parallel exponential trend lines declining over the ten-year period, figure 10.4 shows a steady decline for all three military rank groupings and a slight leveling out of the civilian group in 2016.

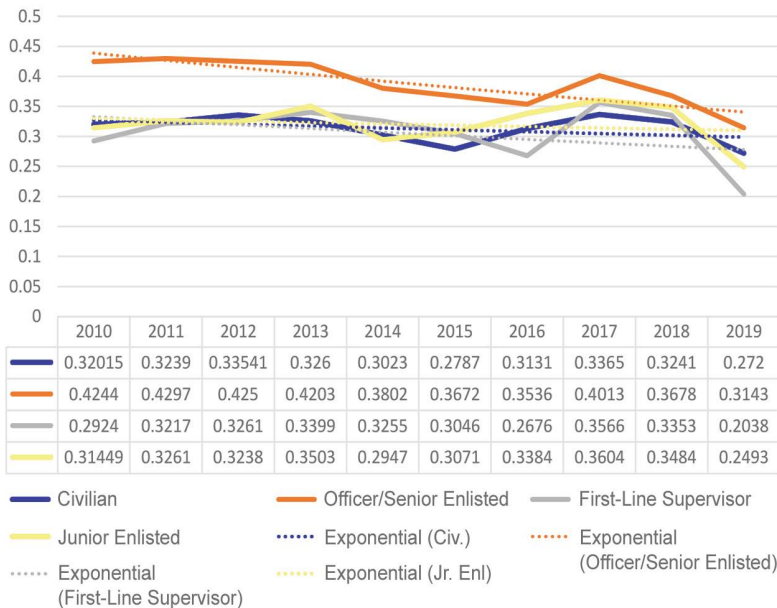


Figure 10.4. IAT civilian versus military by rank means and deltas plot for 2010–19

Sexual Orientation IAT Analysis

The sexual orientation sample comprised 836,343 participants, 33 percent male ($n = 275,611$) and 67.0 percent female ($n = 560,732$). Table 10.7 shows the frequencies and percentages by race. Approximately 75.4 percent were White and 8.8 percent were Black. The remaining participants were distributed across American Indian/Alaska Native (0.8 percent), East Asian (2.3 percent), South Asian (1.5 percent), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.6 percent), biracial (3.3 percent), mixed (5.2 percent), or other (2.1 percent). The sample was mostly young adults, with 51 percent at or under age 25 and 75 percent under 33.

Table 10.7. Descriptive statistics for sexual orientation IAT samples

Descriptor	Total Sample		US Military Sample	
	<i>n</i>	Percentage	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Male	27,5611	33.0	6,690	66.5
Female	56,0732	67.0	3,369	33.5
White	63,0704	75.4	6,938	69.0
Black	73,815	8.8	1,435	14.3
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	6,668	0.8	100	1.0
East Asian	19,236	2.3	150	1.5
South Asian	12,757	1.5	86	0.9
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	5,123	0.6	144	1.4
Biracial	2,727	3.3	390	3.9
Mixed	43,185	5.2	638	6.3
Other	17,584	2.1	178	1.8

Given the nature of this portion of the study, participant-identified sexuality was also recorded if provided and is displayed in table 10.8. The majority of the sample identified as heterosexual (72.1 percent, $n = 603,416$). The remaining sample identified as a mix of 10.5 percent homosexual ($n = 88,210$), 11.9 percent bisexual ($n = 99,532$), 2.3 percent asexual ($n = 19,621$), and 1.1 percent questioning ($n = 9,425$). Approximately 1.9 percent ($n = 16,139$) of the sample did not complete this question.

Table 10.8. Sexuality for sexual orientation IAT samples

Descriptor	Total Sample		US Military Sample	
	<i>n</i>	Percentage	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Heterosexual	603,416	72.1	7,931	78.8
Homosexual	88,210	10.5	950	9.0
Bisexual	99,532	11.9	830	8.3
Asexual	19,621	2.3	91	0.9
Questioning	9,425	1.1	81	0.8
Missing	16,139	1.9	221	2.2

Members of the US military were broken out, and their demographics are displayed in table 10.9 ($n = 10,059$). Notably the US military sample was composed of 66.5 percent male ($n = 6,690$) and 33.5 percent female ($n = 3,369$). The racial breakout included 69.0 percent White and 14.3 percent Black. The remaining participants were distributed across American Indian/Alaska Native (1.0 percent), East Asian (1.5 percent), South Asian (0.9 percent), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.4 percent), biracial (3.9 percent), mixed (6.3 percent), or other (1.8 percent). The sample was slightly younger than the general US sample with 50 percent being at or under 26 and 75 percent being at or under 32. Sexual orientation for the military sample is noted in table 10.9. Most of the sample identified as heterosexual (78.8 percent, $n = 7,931$). The remaining sample identified as mix of 9.0 percent homosexual ($n = 905$), 8.3 percent bisexual ($n = 830$), 0.9 percent asexual ($n = 91$), and 0.8 percent questioning ($n = 81$). Approximately 2.2 percent ($n = 221$) of the sample did not complete this question.

Independent Samples *t*-Tests

The independent *t*-tests for the sexual orientation IAT data sample were constructed and coded in the same manner as the independent *t*-tests for the race IAT data sample. The results from the independent *t*-tests comparing the civilian sample to the US military sample are presented in table 10.8. Unlike the results from the previous section, the *t*-test results for sexual orientation were all statistically significant. None of the mean IAT scores for the military sample were lower than the mean scores for the civilian sample. The intensity of the variances

in means can be seen in table 10.8, with 2017 having the highest percentage of variance at 53.8 percent ($\delta = 0.1783$), while the sample means for 2012 had the highest δ between the two samples at a 0.2092 points difference (40.7 percent).

Table 10.9. Demographics comparative US citizen population to sexual orientation study sample

	US Citizen Population	US Citizen Sample	US Military Population	US Military Sample
<i>Total n =</i>	328,239,523	826,284	2,604,281	10,059
Descriptor	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
Male	49.2	33.0	82.1	66.5
Female	50.8	67.0	17.9	33.5
White	76.3	75.4	70.8	69.0
Black	13.4	8.8	16.8	14.3
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	1.3	0.8	1.0	1.0
East Asian	5.9*	2.3	4.4*	1.5
South Asian	-	1.5	-	0.9
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.2	0.6	1.0	1.4
Biracial	*	3.3	*	3.9
Mixed	2.8	5.2	2.5	6.3
Other	-	2.1	3.5	1.8

* The data did not break out these variables further.

The results of the t -tests are depicted in figure 10.5. The linear representation of the means by year shows a declining trend, reinforced by the exponential trendline. The military sample has a few increases, most notably in 2012. Owing to the general uniformity, generalized trend, and blanket significance in each of the models, follow-up ANOVAs were conducted for every year.

ANOVAs and Subsequent t -Tests

The sexual orientation ANOVA models were constructed like the racial IAT ANOVA models. Sexual orientation IAT data served as the dependent variable, with a three-level coded independent variable rep-

representing the three rank groupings used for this study. The results of the ANOVA tests are displayed in table 10.9 along with the results from their associated *t*-tests. Despite one lower *F* statistic in 2012 ($F=8.44$), every ANOVA model was strongly significant to the .000 level. These results reinforce the statistical relationship seen in the initial *t*-tests.

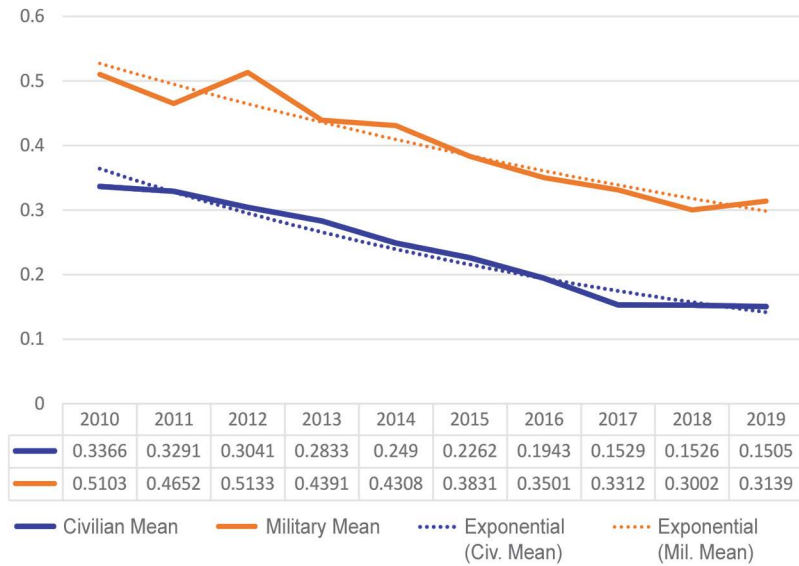


Figure 10.5. Sexual orientation IAT civilian versus military means and deltas plot for 2010–19

All the follow-up independent *t*-tests were significant across each rank group for every year. The vast majority were significant to the .000 level with a few between .001 and .009. The delta percentage of means across all rank groupings compared to civilian scores by year are considerably higher than the race IAT results. The lowest delta was for members of the junior enlisted group in 2012 (24.4 percent difference between scores). The highest was for Frontline Supervisors in 2017 (56.4 percent difference between scores).

The follow-up *t*-test results are plotted in figure 10.6. The data showcases a generalized downward trend reinforced by the exponential trend lines. Anomalies in the decline include a sharp decrease followed by an increase in the first-line supervisor category in the 2012–13 time frame. This increase is followed by a steep increase for the junior enlisted group in 2014. Both increases can be seen in figure

10.5 for the initial *t*-tests in 2012 and 2014. The civilian sample shows a general and steady decline in scores until 2017, when they plateau. The military rank groups are clustered tightly together and are distinct from the civilian sample.

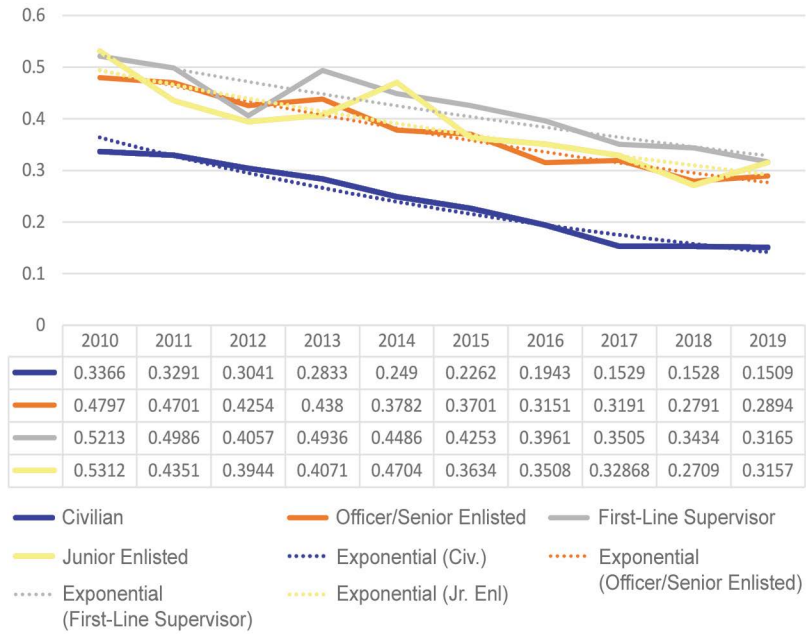


Figure 10.6. Sexual orientation IAT civilian versus military by rank means and deltas plot for 2010–19

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the analysis should be cautiously interpreted. Owing to generalizability, demographic, and sample size disparities, the results ultimately are not an exact statistical representation of the targeted population. However, the study itself should serve as a significant indicator to all leaders within each of the military branches that obligatory discrimination is a phenomenon with far-reaching implications throughout the military. Considering the results of this study with the existing body of literature highlights that patterns of obligatory discrimination have left a discernable mark on the US military.

The results of this study varied. Apart from one year (2016), a statistical difference in implicit racial associations existed between the US civilian and military samples. For all of the significant years, the military sample was more biased in rates of 3.8 percent to 13.8 percent. From 2010 to 2015, the percentage difference in mean IAT scores increased for the military sample. In 2017 the percentage difference began to decline, and in 2019, the rate was 7.5 percent less than the US population sample.

Breaking out the military sample for further examination revealed the statistical significance extended to every year of the study for officers and senior enlisted members (table 10.10). There were high rates of differences when compared to the US civilian sample, ranging from 11.5 percent to 24.6 percent. First-line supervisors demonstrated significance only in 2019, with a 33.3 percent less biased delta than the civilian sample. Junior enlisted members demonstrated marginal significance over the three years from 2017 to 2019. During this period, the junior enlisted sample showed 6.6 percent higher scores than the civilian sample to 9.1 percent less biased scores. Although the officer and senior enlisted samples exhibited higher scores than the civilian sample, all rank groupings exhibited strong downward trends over time with notable increases in the 2016–17 time frame.

The sexual orientation study produced statistically significant results for every year, with extremely large deltas in IAT score means for the two samples. The military sample's delta ranged from a 29.2 percent to 53.8 percent higher mean score than the civilian sample. Unlike the race study, all subsequent rank grouping breakouts were statistically significant. The officer and senior enlisted groupings had percentage deltas from 28.5 percent to 52.1 percent. The first-line supervisor's delta ranged from 25.0 percent to 56.4 percent, and the junior enlisted deltas ranged from 24.4 percent to 53.5.

A steady decline in scores was observed for the civilian sample until 2017, when the trend slowed significantly. The military sample showed a spike for first-line supervisors in 2013 and for junior enlisted in 2014 and 2019. All other trends for the military sample were a continual decline. Unlike the race sample where officers and senior enlisted consistently had higher scores, first-line supervisors had marginally higher scores than the rest of the military sample.

Table 10.10. Sexual orientation ANOVAs and associated independent samples *t*-test results for 2010–19

Year	ANOVA		t-Test			Delta percent	
	F	Sig	Group	Mean IAT	SD		Sig
2010	29.275	.000	Civ	.3366	.4747	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4797	.4287	.000	29.8
			First Line Sup/NCO	.5213	.4969	.000	35.4
			Jr. Enlisted	.5312	.4384	.000	36.6
2011	12.338	.000	Civ	.3291	.4758	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4701	.4639	.001	30
			First Line Sup/NCO	.4986	.4606	.000	34
			Jr. Enlisted	.4351	.4476	.002	24.4
2012	8.44	.000	Civ	.3041	.4967	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4254	.4774	.001	28.5
			First Line Sup/NCO	.4057	.5266	.009	25.0
			Jr. Enlisted	.3944	.5285	.003	22.9
2013	24.406	.000	Civ	.2833	.4935	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.4380	.4703	.000	35.3
			First Line Sup/NCO	.4936	.4625	.000	42.6
			Jr. Enlisted	.4071	.5243	.000	30.4
2014	34.298	.000	Civ	.2490	.4909	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3782	.4771	.000	34.2
			First Line Sup/NCO	.4486	.4977	.000	44.5
			Jr. Enlisted	.4704	.4505	.000	47.1
2015	26.222	.000	Civ	.2262	.4894	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3701	.4939	.000	38.9
			First Line Sup/NCO	.4253	.4913	.000	46.8
			Jr. Enlisted	.3634	.5007	.000	37.8
2016	35.281	.000	Civ	.1943	.4948	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3151	.4913	.000	38.3
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3961	.5144	.000	50.9
			Jr. Enlisted	.3508	.4868	.000	44.6
2017	50.468	.000	Civ	.1529	.4996	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3191	.4818	.000	52.1
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3505	.4963	.000	56.4
			Jr. Enlisted	.32868	.4886	.000	53.5

Table 10.10 (continued)

Year	ANOVA		t-Test			Delta percent	
	F	Sig	Group	Mean IAT	SD		Sig
2018	34.952	.000	Civ	.1528	.4944	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.2791	.4835	.000	45.3
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3434	.5179	.000	55.5
			Jr. Enlisted	.2709	.5161	.000	43.6
2019	82.838	.000	Civ	.1509	.4931	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.2894	.4992	.000	47.9
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3165	.4769	.000	52.3
			Jr. Enlisted	.3157	.4670	.000	52.2
2010–2019	292.674	.000	Civ	.2161	.4964	-	-
			Officers/Sr. Enl.	.3567	.4839	.000	39.4
			First Line Sup/NCO	.3861	.4968	.000	44.0
			Jr. Enlisted	.3576	.4898	.000	39.6

Based on the data, this research is unable to reject the null hypothesis. The study showed that the available data indicates some statistically significant variations in implicit racial associations and consistently significant differences in implicit sexual orientation associations for members of the US military when compared to a US civilian sample. When the data was further broken out by major rank groupings, the officer and senior enlisted corps demonstrated consistent statistical significance, with a higher percent of deltas in race IAT scores compared to the other sample groupings. However, all three groups demonstrated statistically significant sexual orientation scores, with high delta rates compared to the civilian sample.

There is strong evidence to show disparities between the targeted populations; however, the intensity of the IAT-D scores is needed to give perspective to the disparity. Scores on the IAT above 0.5 are considered substantial, above 0.3 moderate, above 0.1 slight, and below 0.1 impartial for the attribute tested.¹¹² In the race test, a positive number indicated a preference for White faces, whereas a negative number indicates a preference for Black faces. For the sexuality test, a positive number indicated a preference for heterosexual norms, and a negative number indicated a preference towards homosexual norms.

Applying the scale to the scores for the initial IAT race tests reveals that of the twenty mean scores (ten for the civilian sample and ten for

the military sample), two of the civilian scores (2015 and 2019) and one of the military scores (2019) are considered on the extremely high side of slight. All the other scores would cross into the moderate category. Even for the year with the highest delta in means, 2013, both scores were above the 0.30 mark for moderate. When broken out by rank, none of the scores with statistical significance were higher than the moderate category. The officer and senior enlisted rank group remained in the low to mid-range of moderate, along with the junior enlisted in 2017 and 2018. In 2019 both first-line supervisors and junior enlisted means are considered slight.

Comparisons for the sexual orientation study reveal initially higher means that quickly taper off. From 2010 to 2012, the civilian sample has a moderate mean that falls to slight for 2013–19. The military sample has two years that cross the substantial mark (2010 and 2012) before falling to the lower range of moderate in 2019. The officer and senior enlisted rank group has a high moderate score in 2010 that steadily declines across the moderate scale, falling into the slight category in 2018 and 2019. The first-line supervisor category starts with a substantial score in 2010, which falls to moderate in 2011 and continues to decline into the lower ranges of the moderate category. The junior enlisted category starts out similarly to the first-line supervisors in 2010 with substantial scores, followed by declining moderate scores in 2011. However, the junior enlisted category crosses the slight mark in 2018, followed by a low moderate score in 2019.

Although the statistical means alone highlight large disparities in raw score means between the two samples, the relative delta in the intensity of those scores is low for the few times they differ between samples. A strong downward trend is noted for both tests and all samples over the time frame studied. This result is consistent with other findings that suggest a progressive shift in the general population's implicit attitudes toward race and sexuality toward neutral.¹¹³

Implication of the Results

Does this finding mean that the US military is more racist or more homophobic than the general US population? Absolutely not; however, the results indicate area(s) of concern requiring further research. This study tested deltas in implicit associations for two attributes over a ten-year period.

Implicit associations are only a part of the cognitive and social processes humans undertake every day. There are additional layers of cognitive reasoning and explicit processes that lead to prejudicial behavior. Measures of implicit thought are not on their own indicators of destined behavior; they can be indicators of trends, especially at a population level. The temporal stability of the IAT is low when administered within short intervals; however, the assessment produces trendable data over larger populations across time.¹¹⁴ The scores are also indicative of temporary successes and failures of training. The repeal of DADT in 2010 was followed by enhanced training and diversity measures for LGB service members. A sharp decline in sexual orientation IAT scores for 2012 may be indicative of the success of this training. However, the subsequent spike in 2013–14 might also have occurred as a result of the unintended consequences of perceived favoritism. Likewise, the spike in racial IAT scores in 2016–17 correlated with a known period of enhanced racial tension during an especially volatile presidential election.¹¹⁵ The causes of these spikes, however, are speculation and areas prime for future research.

Although the scores differ for race, the intensity of the scores for the military sample are comparable to those found in the civilian sample. Yet, the results of the officer and senior enlisted corps mean scores for the race instrumentation cannot be overlooked. As leaders of the military, officers and senior enlisted are expected to set the example by which others measure themselves. Additionally, the officer side of the rank group has the legal authority under the UCMJ to administer military justice. The data available makes it difficult to draw more specific conclusions, but this area is where training could have the most impact on all US service members.

When the intensity of scores across both assessments is compared, three major implications can be drawn. First, the theory of obligatory discrimination has likely influenced military culture at the implicit level over decades of policy enforcement. Further research into how obligatory discrimination has impacted not only military culture but other fields that have coped with similar policies would be of benefit to society at large. Secondly, training works. In the period studied, obligatory discrimination policies addressing sexuality were ended. The shifting policies were accompanied by significant training across all forces; as a result, mean scores dropped 0.1964 points and almost two categories. However, scores from the race sample dropped only 0.0833 points over the same time frame. Lastly, the military as a

population is unique, and considering it representative of the general US population or the conservative US population should be revisited. In the final year of the study, mean military race scores were lower than their civilian counterparts, and mean scores for sexual orientation fell at a faster rate than for their civilian counterparts.

Recommendations

If the US military hopes to be regarded as holding itself to a higher moral standard above that of the general US population, work needs to be done.¹¹⁶ This study, in conjunction with prior research and other work cited throughout the literature review, demonstrates that a problem exists at several levels within the force. Exposure to and training on cognitive processes, especially implicit processes, should be a part of all levels of professional military education.

Use of the IAT as an individual assessment tool has some merit in making one aware of potential biases at a specific moment in time. Additionally, understanding implicit thought processes, one's own bias, and explicit countermeasures is key to overcoming unintended negative effects from implicit bias. Numerous pathways for training have proven effective in the civilian community.

As discussed, implicit processes occur without the knowledge or explicit action of the individual. Merely making individuals aware of the existence of implicit processes and the resultant bias that can occur can have significant impacts on an individual's ability to reduce unintended effects.¹¹⁷ Moving from awareness to action by introducing individuals to the IAT and other resources, including their limitations, offers individuals tools to better understand their own hidden cognitive processes.¹¹⁸ Once individuals are aware of when and how implicit attitudes form, it is possible to explicitly recognize appraisals as spontaneous affective reactions, ending the implicit bias feedback loop.¹¹⁹

Outside of training, individuals are able to adopt a multitude of behaviors that can help reduce the occurrence of implicit influence. Following the above principles of awareness, simply taking an implicit assessment before taking action on promotion or selection boards, recommending or issuing military justice, and other individualized actions could significantly reduce, if not eliminate, the effect of implicit bias on such actions. Research has also demonstrated that

meditation, mindfulness, and increased interpersonal contact can reduce negative implicit attitudes not just temporarily but over a longer term.¹²⁰

The data and conclusions presented in this study warrant further exploration. Future research would benefit from a targeted longitudinal collection of IAT scores across the force and revisions to address recent changes in the force to fill the time gap since the publishing of the preceding research. This study was limited to three broad rank groupings. Future revisions to the occupational coding for Project Implicit might consider asking participants to reveal their rank from E-1 to O-10 or by groupings familiar to the military industry: junior enlisted, NCO, senior NCO, company grade officer, field grade officer, and general officer.

Conclusion

Despite lengthy durations of obligatory discrimination, the US military has been able to slowly distance itself from defunct policy at an implicit level. Although the scores observed indicate that the presence of implicit bias in the services is declining, considerable work lies ahead to reduce these two combat-detracting biases below the 0.1 impartial threshold. With budget, manning, technology, and security issues negatively impacting combat effectiveness, the services' greatest asset—their Airmen, Guardians, Marines, Soldiers, Sailors, and Coasties—should be free from the influence and negative effects of implicit bias. There is little reason such an insidious, damaging cognitive attribute cannot be changed. As research has shown, methodologies to reduce and overcome implicit bias are simple, cheap, and effective.¹²¹ The services need fresh, evolving training across all levels of the military to make members aware of implicit biases and how to overcome them.

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Major Matherly served as the editor in chief for this book. He is a staff officer for ACC/A3CI and the Homeland Defense Operations functional area manager. His prior duty was director of inspections in the Inspector General's Office, Eastern Air Defense Sector, Rome, New York. He is also the co-editor in chief for the journal *Security and Intelligence*. (See his full biography in the front matter.)

Notes

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Chapter 11

The Transgender Airman

Tristan K. Martin

Introduction

The true number of transgender service members is unknown. The Williams Institute, University of California at Los Angeles, estimates that 15,000 transgender people serve in the military and that 134,000 American veterans are transgender.¹ The National Center for Transgender Equality and the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* found that transgender people are more likely to have served in the military than the general population.² With these statistics, it is important to provide training and education to promote an environment of dignity and respect for all service members. Through familiarization with terminology, the history of transgender service members, and policy changes, implications are discussed on ways to provide affirming support to fellow Airmen.

Terminology

Language is continuously evolving. At times, a word used in the past may become reclaimed or considered a derogatory term. For example, the word *transsexual* used by early advocates of the community (e.g., endocrinologist and sexologist Harry Benjamin) has evolved into *transgender*. It is essential to establish terminology and current definitions commonly used by transgender Airmen. By providing accurate and current terminology, medical and mental health professionals can better advocate for their patients. First, *sex* and *gender* are not synonymous. Medical doctors commonly assign a sex at birth based on genitalia. However, *gender* is the internal identity of that person, and when this gender does not align with the sex assigned at birth, that person may identify as *transgender* (or *trans*).³ *Gender identity* is the expression of gender through experiences, presentations, and roles. *Gender transition* involves the steps one takes either medically or socially (or both) to align secondary or primary sex characteristics or both with their internal

gender identity.⁴ Lastly, *cisgender* is the term used for those whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

Transgender is often used as an umbrella term to include various identities along a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum are binary *transgender men*, and at the other, binary *transgender women*. Within the spectrum are those identifying as *nonbinary* or *gender fluid/queer*. Transgender men (e.g., trans men, assigned female at birth, female-to-male) signify those assigned a female sex at birth but whose gender identity is male. Transgender women (e.g., trans women, assigned male at birth, male-to-female) are those assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female. *Sexual identity* is a distinct separation from gender, and transgender people have diverse sexual identities.

The lack of congruency between the body and mind often creates intense psychological distress, termed *gender dysphoria*.⁵ Through time, this sense of disconnectedness has evolved to encapsulate more than this experience. In previous research, Tristan Karel Martin highlighted the term *body dysphoria*, which captured the distress caused by the physical incongruence of the body with the gender identification.⁶ These two terms can be used interchangeably to express the same phenomenon.

A transgender person experiencing gender dysphoria may undergo gender transition to match their internal gender identification. Gender transition may include social and legal aspects, hormone therapy, or gender confirmation surgery. Medical transition for a trans person could include gender-affirming hormone therapy (e.g., estrogen/testosterone blocker or testosterone) or gender-affirming surgical procedures (e.g., top surgery, breast augmentation, vaginoplasty, or phalloplasty). Social transition may include clothing, hair, a chosen name, and affirming pronouns. It could also include legal transition, such as updating one's name/gender marker for one's birth certificate, driver's license, social security forms, and military-specific data in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

History of Transgender Service Members

Although history is limited, researchers have pinpointed that transgender people have served in the US military since the Civil War. Although language has evolved through time, and the word *transgender* would have been unfamiliar then, women were known to don men's uniforms and pose as men.

Most are familiar with the story of Joan of Arc, the military great whose crimes included wearing a man's uniform.⁷ Dating back to the Civil War, many women disguised themselves as men to serve in combat roles.⁸ National Archives researchers have determined that in the 1860s, at least 250 women dressed as men to fight in the war for various reasons. Most returned to civilian life as women, but a handful resumed their lives as men after the war.⁹

While there are few surviving archives or transgender people who disclosed their identities during this time, some notable service members include Albert Cashier, who joined the Illinois Infantry Regiment as a man.¹⁰ He concealed his identity for years until doctors discovered his identity, yet his fellow Army service members advocated for a military burial and monument. During this time, many recruits did not undergo physical examinations, and the ranks were often filled with unknown gender diversity.

Fast-forward to the 1950s, when President Eisenhower signed Executive Order (EO) 10450 banning lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people from being employed by the federal government. Often, society and psychiatry influenced a "banning" rationale.¹¹ The Department of Defense (DOD) formalized this policy again in 1982, stating that "homosexuality is incompatible with military service."¹² Because of this policy, the DOD estimates that there were 1,500 average yearly discharges, totaling 17,000, from 1980 to 1990 alone.¹³ Although these discriminatory policies do not explicitly mention the word *transgender*, it is assumed that they included trans people. Since there are minimal records, the actual number may be higher than estimated.

In 1993, President Clinton introduced the policy "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" (DADT) that essentially lifted the ban on discrimination in the military based on sexual identity. The DOD issued Directive 1304.26, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, prohibiting discrimination and harassment toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual service members.¹⁴ However, it banned open service and disclosure of sexual identity, but superiors could not investigate without witnessing behavior. As mentioned, while these policies do not mention *transgender*, it is assumed that many trans people were affected by this policy.

DADT remained in place in the armed forces until September 20, 2011, when President Obama repealed the policy. The repeal allowed lesbian and gay military members to serve openly in the armed forces.¹⁵

Additionally, those who were dishonorably discharged because of their sexual identity were allowed to reenlist. The basis for repealing DADT was backed by numerous studies that found no evidence that minority sexual identities negatively impacted unit mission and cohesion.¹⁶ In 2015, Obama's secretary of defense, Ash Carter, released a memorandum regarding transgender service members. It stated that no service member could be separated or denied active or reserve service based on their gender identity.¹⁷ This memorandum later became DOD Instruction (DODI) 1300.28.¹⁸ Therefore, from June 2015 to January 2018, transgender individuals could serve openly in the military. Medically necessary care also became available along with DEERS-updated gender marker protocol.

In April 2019, President Trump banned transgender individuals from enlisting in the United States military if they had a history of gender dysphoria or had medically transitioned.¹⁹ Those currently serving were only allowed to serve under their sex assigned at birth and could not pursue gender transition.²⁰

Current Policy

Dramatic shifts have occurred over the past few years regarding open service for transgender service members.²¹ The back-and-forth policies became completely inclusive on January 25, 2021, when President Biden signed two executive orders. The first was EO 14004, Enabling All Qualified Americans to Serve Their Country in Uniform, and the second was EO 1398, Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation. These EOs state that transgender individuals can openly serve in the United States military if they meet the appropriate military standards. These policies provide for the ability of LGBT individuals to serve and the protection of their privacy.²² Subsequent to the EOs, the DOD issued a series of memorandums and DOD instructions, including DODI 1300.28; DAF Policy Memorandum (DAFPM) 2021-36-01; and Policy Memorandum 2-7, as follow.

DODI 1300.28, *In-Service Transition for Transgender Service Members*, was effective April 30, 2021. It instructs transgender service members to obtain a diagnosis of gender dysphoria from their primary care manager or providers at the Transgender Health Medical Evaluation Unit (THMEU). Subsequently, the THMEU validates a medical treatment plan. A collaborative team at Lackland Air Force Base in

San Antonio, Texas, the THMEU provides gender-affirming medical and mental healthcare to active duty Airmen.²³

DAFPM 2021-36-01, “Accessions and In-Service Transition for Persons Identifying as Transgender,” was also issued April 30, 2021.²⁴ This memorandum is the Department of the Air Force (DAF) implementation of DODI 1300.28. It states that service in the Air Force and Space Force is open to all transgender individuals who can meet the required military standards according to their gender marker.

The motivation for policy change was backed by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, reiterating the power of diversity and inclusion that strengthens national security.²⁵ Further, these policies not only allowed open service but also initiated directives for both medically necessary care and applicant processing at the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS). Policy Memorandum 2-7, “Transgender Applicant Processing (MEPS),” states that if an applicant identifies as transgender, additional documentation is required from a licensed medical provider and a mental health provider.

Thousands of transgender service members currently serve in the Department of the Air Force. These changes in policy open the doors to many others who dream of being a part of the United States Air Force or Space Force.

Implications

In bridging the history of transgender people in the military and current policies, creating an inclusive environment is critical. As Michelle Dietert and Dianne Dentice reemphasize, trans people do not disrupt job performance, negatively affect unit or mission effectiveness, or require significant medical care. Additionally, there is no negative impact on retention, unit cohesion, readiness, or morale.²⁶ Further, transgender service members are deployable. As applicable, gender-affirming hormones are prescribed and treated the same way as any other medication.

Creating an inclusive environment in the USAF requires a common foundation of how to be an affirming ally. Acceptance of diversity comes from access to resources, role models, and a more inclusive social climate. Taking time to learn from the transgender community is valuable as is engaging in self-led education. Part of this education lies in acknowledging the diversity even within the transgender community and knowing

that everyone's journey is different. Education could also include staying current on terminology and knowing which words are affirming versus outdated or stigmatizing. Awareness of community issues is also critical, especially during times of heightened political discussion.

Coming Out

At times, depending on your role, an Airman may disclose their transgender identity. In that moment, offer a space centered around respect, confidentiality, and safety. Specifically, some transgender people may not be “out” in all spaces; due to ongoing discrimination, awareness of their identity could be dangerous. If someone discloses their identity or you are aware of a trans person in your flight, squadron, or base, avoid transphobic stigmatizing or slang words that ostracize or discriminate. Unfortunately, people of a minority status might experience discrimination both at home and in greater society. Being respectful and creating a safe space free of discrimination are essential. It is helpful to listen, ask the person how to provide support, show interest, and ask them what they might need moving forward.

Upon initial disclosure, someone may share a name and pronouns they would like you to use moving forward; be receptive to this request. In the English language, people often used gendered pronouns based on perceived physical appearance. Respectful conversations are imperative for those who do not conform to societal expectations or may be early in transition. Incorrect pronouns, also known as misgendering, can be hurtful, distressing, and non-affirming.²⁷ Using correct pronouns can display support and understanding. One way to navigate pronouns is to pronoun-check early on in interactions.²⁸ Pronoun checks can happen through asking questions such as “What pronouns do you use?” or when introducing yourself, stating, “Hi, my pronouns are . . .” Understanding that mistakes happen and changes take time, if you misgender someone or use the wrong name, just apologize and press forward. If you are unsure of someone's pronouns, it is okay to ask them. There is a learning process, and you might need gentle self-correction at times. If you are a health provider or having a private conversation with a transgender person, it is necessary to ask in what contexts the name and pronouns should be used since some people are not out for fears of safety or other reasons. Using correct pronouns validates someone's gender expression, displays support and respect, and reduces overall distress.

As an affirming ally, when having conversations with transgender service members about their transition process, avoid asking probing questions and making assumptions. Rather, ask questions based on medical requirements and mission readiness. Also, check in on confidentiality; ask who needs the information, and if possible, inform only those who absolutely need to know. Such cases might include an Airman completing a urinalysis, needing updated uniform items, or moving forward with hormonal or surgical interventions.

Recruiters

Creating an affirming environment within the USAF begins with recruiters. Recruiters should be knowledgeable of all policies and documents each transgender recruit needs. However, it is advised that recruits gather all medical documents prior to talking to a recruiter. Documents required from the applicant are found in the “Military Service by Transgender Persons and Persons with Gender Dysphoria” fact sheet and DODI 6130.03 V1, *Medical Standards for Military Service: Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction*.²⁹ Where the transgender recruit is in their gender transition journey dictates the documents needed. Some recruits may not have begun medical transition, while others may be years into their transition with multiple documents needed (e.g., hormone levels, surgical notes, legal name change). Recruiters play an essential role in ensuring that all documents are in place prior to MEPS, making the process smooth for MEPS medical providers. If the transgender recruit has already legally changed their gender marker, DEERS should replicate such.

Basic Training

Transgender recruits are permitted to join the USAF and attend Basic Military Training (BMT) as their affirmed gender. Depending on where the trainee is in their gender journey, some may feel comfortable going in as their assigned birth sex versus affirmed gender. The BMT experience is a physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging one. Every trainee handles and processes it differently. Although transgender individuals are equally qualified to attend BMT, safety measures need to be enacted. Prior to attending BMT, trainees are given a form indicating who they would like to disclose their gender identity to, from their flight members to the squadron commander. Although it is up to the trainee who they disclose to, it is recommended that the trainee inform

their military training instructors for safety and medication (if needed) reasons. Transgender trainees are not given any accommodations and must serve in the same close quarter capacity as all other trainees.

Operational Assignments

After transgender Airmen graduate BMT and technical school, they then move onto their respective assignments either in the active duty Air Force, Air National Guard, or Air Force Reserve. Again, where the Airman is in their journey and what they need for their transition dictates how their transition occurs in the military. For example, an active duty service member will have a different process than a drill status guardsman. On the civilian side, a part-time service member may have coordinated primary and mental healthcare. However, if active duty service members wish to begin in-service transition and take the next step in their gender transition or both, they are then referred to the THMEU for a temporary duty assignment. Not all providers have the capability of treating transgender patients.³⁰ Therefore, at the THMEU, the transgender service member receives guidance and affirming care as stated in DAFPM 2021-36-01. Additionally, responsibility falls on the unit/base to create an inclusive and affirming environment that supports and respects transgender service members.

Conclusion

The USAF continues to pride itself on being an inclusive and diverse force, which in turn is a mechanism for operational advancement. Throughout history, LGBT service members were discriminated against; however, currently, LGBT people can openly serve. With the issuance of EO 14004 and EO 1398 in January 2021, all qualified Americans could serve in the armed forces. This policy revolutionized the military opportunities for thousands of transgender youth and adults. Although the total number of transgender service members is unknown but estimated as high as 15,000,³¹ we do know that transgender people are qualified to serve and, as research has shown, are not a burden to the military. As language continues to evolve, history informs us of where we have been and where we are going. The current administration offers inclusive policies that allow transgender service members to serve openly. As we move to create inclusive spaces for all, training and education are at the forefront of being an affirming ally.

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PART 4
HARD DISCUSSIONS
GENDER DISPARITY

Chapter 12

Factors Affecting Female Air Force Officer Retention

Jessica M. Astudillo

Introduction

The United States military is working on improving diversity, equity, and inclusion among its ranks. This study examines one aspect of diversity in the United States Air Force (USAF): the recruitment and retention of female officers.

This study applies logistic regression, an analysis method used to predict binary outcomes (e.g., yes/no, good/bad, etc.), to determine potential factors affecting retention rates. All potential factors are included in survival analysis to characterize female officer retention behavior. Survival analysis is a statistical technique used to analyze data until a specific event has occurred, the event in this case being when a female member has left the Air Force. Implementing and providing such analysis will help generate a prediction model for retention rates among female officers and how to further increase diversity.

The motivation for this research, the research problem, study limitations, and the study's organization follow.

Motivation

Female retention rates in the United States military have been considerably lower than those of their male counterparts for many years. The low rate of women in the military and retention issues could be “robbing the service of the potential to improve innovation, agility and performance.”¹ In recent years, each military branch has increasingly recognized the negative impact due to these low rates and taken steps toward diversifying the ranks.² In the Air Force, women represent 14 percent of officers above the rank of lieutenant

¹ This chapter is based on the author's 2021 master's thesis, “An Examination into Retention Behavior of Air Force Female Officers,” Air Force Institute of Technology.

colonel (grade of O-5). Comparatively, the overall rate of women officers in service is 20 percent of the force.

After a decade of force restructuring, the Pentagon has been challenged with increasing the services' overall personnel strength. To bolster recruiting and retention rates, the Pentagon has implemented a series of programs designed to increase flexibility and provide incentives to specifically target members of Generations Y and Z.³ For example, "Force of the Future" initiatives were designed to improve the services' demographic and geographic reach, while the Blended Retirement Program was enacted to replace the legacy retirement plan with a system containing bonus pay.⁴ These programs have had some success but have not been effective in recruiting and retaining the intended population.⁵ Unlike previous generations, the monetary gain (when it exists) between military and civilian pay is not a top priority for the younger workforce.

Diversity in an organization is important because of the value that multiple perspectives can bring to any enterprise. The diversity focus of this study is on the Air Force active duty female officer workforce. Research increasingly shows that companies with a significant number of women executives will financially outperform their competitors.⁶ The concept of "critical mass" is defined by Joan Johnson-Freese et al. as an organization having at least one-third women in leadership roles.⁷ Rosabeth Kanter argues that once an organization reaches a critical mass of women, "people would stop seeing them as women and start evaluating their work as managers. In short, they would be regarded equally."⁸ Understanding factors associated with the attrition rate of female officers will help the USAF leverage change. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2024 women hold approximately 50 percent of payroll jobs in the US (statistics do not include self-employed, household, and farm workers).⁹ Although there has been an upward trend in this percentage, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, at about 32 percent of senior management roles globally in 2023.¹⁰ By comparison, women in the USAF comprise about 7.5 percent of the general officer ranks.¹¹ The Department of Defense and individual services must increase diversity and equity efforts and policies to correct this situation.

Background

Statistical methods, such as logistic regression analysis and survival analysis, have been applied to model retention rates for officer and enlisted service members.¹² Other studies have applied similar analyses for non-rated officers and the enlisted force in other military branches. However, there has been little focus on the retention rate of female military members.

Additionally, the USAF recently reconfigured its single Line of the Air Force category into six developmental groups to ensure officers are competing against other members with similar career progressions.¹³ Before this decision, officers from forty Air Force specialty codes (AFSC) (with various experiences, milestones, and missions) competed for promotion. Examining female officer retention based on reconfigured promotion groups will also provide insight to specific factors affecting each group.

Problem Statement

The focus of this research is determining potential factors influencing female officer retention based on demographic data provided by Headquarters Air Force, Directorate of Personnel (HAF/A1). Analysis examined the correlation of selected factors with female officer retention. Results will help improve current prediction models by incorporating factors directly affecting this population. Finally, conclusions from this study can support ongoing efforts in enhancing diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Issues, Needs, and Limitations

This study used statistics from the Military Personnel Data System (MilPDS) provided by HAF/A1. MilPDS is the primary records database for military personnel data. While major updates have been made to mitigate the loss of data and improve system performance, MilPDS remains susceptible to errors, as military records are constantly updated. For example, if a female officer changes her status from single to married, it is updated in the system but takes time to reflect in all records. Therefore, inaccurate data could present issues in analysis.

Contrary to previous research conducted on retention behavior, algorithms implemented for analysis in this study were computed

using the statistical programming language R.¹⁴ Statistical Analysis Software (SAS) has been the software program of choice for HAF/A1 analysts, and preceding studies have used it to ensure products could be transferred and reproduced. Although data was provided in SAS format, it was converted to comma-separated values (CSV) files and uploaded to R. This software, along with Python, is becoming the USAF's program of choice for statistical and mathematical analysis. Consequently, R has not been made available at all units, and it is therefore challenging to provide code for reproducibility if it is not accessible.

This study did not include influencing factors such as extended maternity leave, the Blended Retirement System (BRS), or the lifting of the combat exclusion policy. Issues associated with accessing such factors are explained in the data source section.

Finally, USAF leadership introduced developmental categories that grouped AFSCs similar in mission focus, experiences, and career milestones. However, each AFSC within these new promotion groups still differs in deployment rates, cultural aspects, and career progression. The data provided does not account for these characteristics, and they therefore may not be present in final analysis.

Organization of the Research

This study first reviews literature concerning retention in the military and significant factors that may impact the female officer population. It then presents data sources applicable to these factors and discusses the methodologies used, analyses, and test results for the identified factors. Finally, a summary of the study includes recommendations for future research.

Literature Review

This literature review explores factors applicable to the female population in the Air Force. It also examines previous research conducted on different groups within the military. Due to the immense amount of literature surrounding female attrition in the workforce, this research centralizes on practical aspects and methodologies to provide a better understanding of factors that pertain to retaining female officers.

Significant Factors

Demographic, organizational, and political elements have been found to affect retention rates within the military; however, these impacts vary by member and member group. To ensure all affecting issues are represented, past research is considered to develop a list of measurable factors impacting female retention. Among these analyses are studies containing subjective data via questionnaires. However, such subjective data are problematic when producing a predictive model. For this reason, this data is not discussed in length.

Demographic factors. Kirsten Keller et al. conducted qualitative research addressing barriers to female officer retention in the USAF.¹⁵ They interviewed focus groups across twelve installations to get insight on factors affecting women's choices to separate or remain on active duty. Keller and her team then coded transcripts from each discussion to "identify key themes common across the groups."¹⁶ A final analysis determined four critical components to the decision to stay or leave: "personal and family issues, career, work environment, and broader Air Force and military issues."¹⁷ Other factors such as childcare, deployment status, and number of moves were also discussed. However, the main reason married female officers planned to separate from the Air Force was "compatibility with spouse's career or job," which is not considered a top priority for male officers.¹⁸ Married women also noted they did not feel that "Air Force programs and policies adequately supported modern families with two working parents or female breadwinners who have stay-at-home husbands."¹⁹ They also expressed that available resources were "largely designed to support a 1950s family model that included a stay-at-home wife and mother."²⁰ Female officers who were unmarried or single suggested issues related to dating as an element affecting retention decisions.

Although the factors found in this study are helpful, there are issues when attempting to use them in a predictive model. The focus group was not continuously surveyed and did not include a longitudinal component to account for long-term change; therefore, the survey data are not consistent or practical to include in a model.²¹

According to Peter Bissonnette, demographic factors such as marital status and number of dependents are also areas of interest.²² This information captures characteristics impacting a female officer's life that might influence her decision to leave the USAF. Bissonnette focused on female naval aviators and organizational factors that involved

characteristics related to a specific unit's culture. For example, "the helicopter community is different from the FA-18 community, both in mission and organization, which creates conditions for a difference in culture."²³ A logistic regression model is applied with most of the eight variables deemed categorical. Although cultural aspects were considered, results showed the most statistically significant factor was the number of dependents. Notably, 45 percent of the studied population who remained in the Navy were female aviators with children, whereas those with children who separated represented only 27 percent of the population.

Using logistic regression and survival analysis, Jamie Zimmermann developed prediction rates for USAF enlisted retention, focusing on Airmen's gender and marital status as key predictors.²⁴ The study examined four AFSCs, or career fields, one of which had a Selective Retention Bonus (SRB). Variables used in the final models for each AFSC were race, sex, grade, marital status, dependents, and years of service. Analysis from the logistic regression models became problematic due to the noisiness (e.g., data that contains large amounts of variation that may cause results to be distorted or corrupted) of the data. Zimmermann mitigated this issue by applying survival analysis to examine retention trends. Results demonstrate that the percentage of female retention decreases around the fourth year of service.²⁵ However, reasons for this decline were beyond the scope of the research. Issues found in other studies suggest family concerns as a contributing factor to a woman's early separation when compared to their male colleagues.²⁶

Zimmermann also examined marital status to determine its effect on attrition.²⁷ The six categories were legally separated, married, single, widowed, annulled, and divorced. Results showed lower retention rates for single service members than other status categories. This outcome indicates that service members' marital status impacted their decision to stay in the military or leave.

Organizational factors. Turgay Demirel discusses the effects of an officer's source of commission on retention rates.²⁸ His research focuses on the behavior of officers at the end of their minimum service requirements and at ten years of service. The three main commissioning paths for the Air Force are Officer Training School (OTS), the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA). Each path requires a specific initial commitment starting at four years (OTS and ROTC) to at most five (USAFA). In addition,

the ten-year mark captured the end of service requirement for pilots particularly. Demirel's methodology involved separating each branch individually before evaluating them as a whole to find variations among the services. A binary logistic regression model is used for each dataset. The results suggest "differences in officer retention across commissioning sources" for all branches, meaning an officer who joined in ROTC remained in the military longer than someone who joined from a military academy.²⁹ However, these differences became insignificant after the initial service commitment. Given the initial findings, the commissioning source seems to be an essential factor to include when studying female officer retention rates.

In 2015, the Air Force formed a Barrier Analysis Working Group (BAWG) whose focus was "identifying and eliminating workplace hiring barriers."³⁰ Expanding on the importance of improving diversity and inclusion, Bryan Kolano provides a multivariate analysis, an approach evaluating the effects of multiple variables and their possible associations, on hiring and retention trends at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB), Ohio. This research identifies possible organizational barriers affecting hiring rates among women and minorities. Although the percentage of women in the workforce has trended upward in the past decade, the population of civilian women serving on WPAFB decreased between 2008 and 2018.³¹

To determine the cause of this decline, Kolano separated the data based on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields and non-STEM fields. Many positions support research and development missions on base, requiring a higher number of STEM positions. Surprisingly, the percentage of women in STEM positions grew more than that of men from 2008 to 2018. The decline of females working at WPAFB was attributed to women working in non-STEM fields. This finding supports Bissonnette's claim that organizational factors influence female retention.³² To expand on these results, this study includes a female officer's AFSC as a retention factor to better understand possible differences between career fields and possibly organizational structures.

Kolano also found a significant difference in pay between female and male civilian employees at WPAFB.³³ For 2018, women received an average salary of \$86,406, while their male coworkers received an average of \$98,846. The average salaries were then partitioned into five educational levels to determine any variation among the groups. Conclusions from the study show that the gap in pay grew as the level of

education increased; men received \$12,239 more on average at the doctorate level versus \$3,022 more at the high school level. Results from Kolano's analysis did not involve normalizing the data to address the difference in male-to-female ratios for each education level.³⁴ However, analysis from Andrew Chamberlain found that after adjusting for factors such as education, employer and location, years of experience, and job title, there remains a pay gap between men and women in the United States, with females earning an average of 94.6 cents per dollar that males make.³⁵

Gender-based pay inequality has been a significant problem throughout the history of the United States and abroad. On average, a woman in the United States earns only 79 percent of what their male counterparts do.³⁶ That disparity can add up to half a million dollars for lifetime earnings. While the pay gap has recently begun to narrow significantly, at the current rate, it is not projected to close until 2059.³⁷ The disproportion grows exponentially when race is considered. According to a report by the Pew Research Center, White women narrowed the hourly wage gap by twenty-two cents from 1980 to 2015. During the same period, Black women narrowed the gap by nine cents and Hispanic women by five cents.³⁸

A large proportion of the pay gap can be attributed to differences in education, experience, occupation, or other similar factors. The other element not explained by any measurable factor is systemic discrimination. Additionally, even some of the known elements like differences in education can, in fact, be ultimately attributed to structural oppression, such as women lacking support in STEM fields.³⁹ While gender-based pay discrimination can arise in multiple ways, one major contributing factor is the discriminatory trends of employers, customers, and even coworkers; the expected value of productivity (or reliability) due to prejudiced assumptions leads to discriminatory practices.⁴⁰

At the surface, the structure of military pay does not allow for a gender-based pay gap among peers in the same grade. An in-depth look reveals differences for the average promotion rates of women and men. For example, White women have a 31 percent likelihood of retaining to the rank of major, but White men have a likelihood of retaining to major at 45 percent.⁴¹ Based on these percentages, it can be deduced that the average pay of men would be higher than women when accounting for all men and women in the USAF. The purpose of discussing the gender pay gap serves as a means of pre-

senting underlying issues affecting the civilian sector that may also impact the female military population. It is imperative to understand that issues such as systemic discrimination affect all organizations, civilian and military alike. However, to detect and measure such underlying factors would require an in-depth examination beyond the scope of this research.

Political factors. The military as an entirety implemented changes, such as expanded maternity leave, to make the services a more attractive option for women.⁴² Other changes include the Force of the Future and BRS. Prior to 2016, maternity leave did not exceed six weeks in the USAF. Under the Pentagon's Force of the Future initiative, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter declared "12 weeks of maternity leave across all of the force establishes the right balance between offering a highly competitive leave policy while also maintaining the readiness of our total force."⁴³ The initiative also extended paternity leave from ten to fourteen days. These expansions aimed at providing a better family-to-service balance, known to negatively affect military members.⁴⁴

In 2013, the Pentagon rescinded the combat exclusion policy preventing women from serving in certain combat roles.⁴⁵ Three years later, all remaining restrictions were removed, opening all combat positions to women. This change eliminated the "final institutional barrier to women's integration" in an effort to improve recruitment and retention rates for women.⁴⁶ The addition of these career fields widens the list of AFSCs available to female service members.

In fiscal year 2016, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that includes significant changes to the military retirement plan. Under the legacy system, service members received an "immediate annuity computed based on years of service and basic pay using a 2.5-percent multiplier."⁴⁷ The BRS combined the defined-benefit system with a defined-contribution system that allowed for government matching contributions.⁴⁸ Beth Asch et al. constructed a dynamic retention model based on retention decisions made by active and reserve members.⁴⁹ This model is a type of simulation used to provide cost and retention estimates for the six military branches.

Under the NDAA, members who entered on or after January 1, 2018, are automatically enrolled in the BRS. Members who entered the military before then were given the option to choose between the BRS or legacy plan. This change eliminated the problem of separating with no retirement funds prior to twenty years. Additionally, this re-

irement program offers a continuation bonus between eight to twelve years of service that is from two and a half to thirteen times the monthly base pay. This incentive may encourage more members to remain, as the legacy retirement system did not offer anything until twenty years of service. It also provides a monetary incentive for AFSCs not offered an SRB, thus providing inducements to those considering separating. Previous studies by Demirel, Zimmermann, Jill Schofield, and Christine Zens assume that service members would remain in the military after ten years since they will not receive any retirement pay if they separate before twenty years.⁵⁰ However, that assumption can no longer be made, and this change may require the data to be analyzed in BRS and non-BRS groups.

Previous Military Studies

Understanding retention and attrition rates has been a top priority for all military branches. Previous research covered in this review concentrates on the military services as a whole or on specific career fields, such as pilots (both Navy and Air Force) and non-rated positions (both officer and enlisted). Each approach presents statistical tools applicable to analyzing the retention and attrition rates of female service members.

Schofield analyzes the attrition rates among six non-rated officer career fields using logistic regression analysis to determine significant factors for creating a prediction model.⁵¹ In the early 2000s, the USAF produced sustainment lines to determine the “optimal” number of officers required for each accessions year group. The sustainment line is based on “comparing historical attrition rates to current manpower requirements for each career field.”⁵² Upon finding the significant factors, Schofield performs survival analysis to provide a more precise model. As mentioned, this specific analysis is a statistical technique used to analyze data until the time of a specific event has occurred, such as time to failure, time to survival, or time to a specific event.⁵³

Research results contained unique indicators regarding attrition and retention for each career field.⁵⁴ Overall, career field and commissioning source were significant retention indicators. However, Schofield’s methodology relied heavily on historical data and did not account for variation over the years, which is problematic when trying to forecast retention rates. As Zens indicates, “while historical data certainly provides insight, it is desirable to utilize additional information and

methods to provide improved predictions.”⁵⁵ Although Schofield’s study focused on non-rated line officers and attrition rates, the statistical approach taken is a possible application to a subgroup of her study.

Zens’s research included MilPDS data for non-rated officers from 2002 to 2015.⁵⁶ Her analysis continued Schofield’s study but focused on four AFSCs and provided survival analysis for each career field. A survival rate was calculated to apply a survival curve to each respective job. The curve was then accumulated to examine a group’s behavior and end-strength. The regression results from her study revealed two factors significant in predicting retention rates: commissioning source and prior enlisted service. The statistical approach taken by Zens and Schofield provided helpful information to the USAF regarding factors influencing attrition and retention rates in the selected non-rated career fields.

Like Schofield and Zens, Courtney Franzen used logistic regression and survival analysis to determine a retention rate for rated officers in the USAF.⁵⁷ This population was smaller than for previous studies conducted. Given the smaller dataset, the analysis used to create a prediction model for the population can also be applied to female officers. Unlike the two previous studies, Franzen did not strictly limit the data to demographic information in determining a prediction model for retention. Her approach consisted of economic, political, and demographic data. The results of her study found “six demographic factors and one economic indicator that are statistically significant factors in modeling the retention behavior of rated officers.”⁵⁸

Mark Zais and Dan Zhang address manpower issues in the United States Army using a Markov chain model.⁵⁹ They use forecasting models to project the number of enlisted members eligible for reenlistment. However, the current method lacked the ability to identify personnel dynamics to aid in creating future incentive programs. Contrary to statistical methods, such as logistic regression, the Markov chain allows for mathematical advancements done on two levels. The individual level is defined as the “probabilistic progression for military personnel at a given career stage.”⁶⁰ The aggregate level contained continuous service and separation attitudes. Only two factors were used for the model: grade and time in grade. Results contained a model with higher retention prediction rates than other classification approaches. Despite the researchers’ successful approach, the characteristics chosen do not include those unique to the female population.

Stefanie Allen explored the effects of early mentorship on female officer retention in the Marine Corps.⁶¹ Her study involved one-on-one interviews with active duty and prior active duty female officers. Thematic analysis, “a form of pattern recognition used in content analysis whereby themes (or codes) that emerge from the data become the categories for analysis,” was used to analyze the interview data.⁶² Results revealed that a “lack of female mentors decreases female Marines’ perceptions of future career options,” specifically in areas focusing on balancing family and work life. Similarly, Keller et al. reported that one-third of survey participants stressed the importance of receiving mentorship from successful females.⁶³ Furthermore, the decreasing numbers of successful female officers in higher ranks limits the access junior female officers have to a mentor who can provide insights specific to their experience in the military.⁶⁴ Although the examination of mentorship on female retention is beyond the scope of this research, it is important to note that its impact is not negligible.

Literature Review Summary

The studies examined for this survey identify that the most notable indicators affecting women are commissioning source, marital status, prior enlisted service, and number of dependents. These elements, as well as time-in-service and AFSCs, are included in this study. Although this research does not include pay as a factor, it is critical to note that female retention rates are affected by underlying factors outside the control of this research. One of these is the difference in pay based on promotion rates. Programs that have gone into effect in the past few years have not been applied to prior studies. While the time frames of these programs are short, changes may have occurred that altered the significance of previously identified indicators.

In most cases, retention-based research uses a combination of logistic regression and survival analysis to determine attrition and retention patterns. Applying logistic regression determines the substantial factors affecting the retention rates. Survival analysis is used to develop a predictive model to indicate whether a military member will remain on active duty. Combining logistic regression and survival analysis to determine female officer retention provides a more statistically sound model that is capable of reliable prediction.

Data Sources

This section reviews data sources applicable to the factors presented. As discussed in the literature review, demographic, organizational, and political factors may be helpful in improving female officer retention.

Demographic and Organizational Data

MilPDS was the primary resource for demographic and organizational data used in this study. MilPDS is a computerized records database containing USAF personnel data and events that occur throughout an Airman's career.⁶⁵ Information such as a service member's name, Social Security number, commissioning source, number of dependents, and promotions are managed in the system.

MilPDS has undergone major updates to mitigate loss of data and enhance system performance; however, it continues to remain susceptible to occasional errors. Manual updates to current records and new information are added constantly by technicians across the USAF. These changes prove challenging and may result in accidental incorrect input, deletion, or manipulation. HAF/A1 has developed processes to automatically fix some errors by scanning previous extracts to fill in missing information. To also help minimize and correct inaccurate information, notifications to review records and request updates are sent yearly to service members, if necessary. The database remains inaccurate if a member fails to submit a request for correction until it is discovered. Data backups are performed frequently as a precaution and are referenced in the event of an unexpected malfunction. If a backup occurs after an error is induced into the system and not corrected by the next backup, then the obtained data still contains incorrect information.⁶⁶

Extracts were provided by HAF/A1 in SAS format, converted to CVS files, and uploaded to R for analysis. The data consists of active duty officer personnel records for all AFSCs from September 2009 to September 2019. Demographic factors provided in the files include the number of dependents, race description, marital status, spouse's career field status, and age. Organizational factors pulled from the data are represented by the duty AFSC and source of commissioning. For this study, the dataset was refined to rated and non-rated line officers. This means attorneys, chaplains, and medical officers (dentists, nurses, doctors, etc.) were not included.

Political Data

Unlike demographic or organizational data, political data is not as apparent and becomes difficult to quantify. Aspects representing political influences can be seen in the approved NDAA each year. Some of these changes include extending maternity leave, allowing women to join combat-related jobs, and altering retirement benefits. Other effects involve changes in operations tempo that are influenced by an electorate. MilPDS does not track factors related to extended maternity leave, and thus they are not provided in the SAS extracts. Information linked to an active duty mother's maternity leave requires access to records beyond the scope of this study. Although extending maternity leave from six to twelve weeks for active duty mothers has been shown to have a positive effect on breastfeeding, it is still unknown if the extension has improved female retention or job satisfaction.⁶⁷ Further research on female retention rates by including data such as maternity leave would be useful.

Since the lifting of all gender-based job restrictions in the armed forces in January 2016, the USAF has endeavored to integrate women into all military career fields. This policy opened seven previously male-only combat-related jobs in the USAF to female service members. Of the seven career fields (special tactics officer, pararescue, tactical air control party [TACP], combat rescue officer, combat control team, special operation weather officer and enlisted), two are coded as officer-only positions, specifically special operations weather officer and combat rescue.⁶⁸ Despite these additions, few data points are associated with women in these two fields. Therefore, a significant influence due to these specific data sources will not be present. Additionally, the time frame in which these jobs have been available to women encompasses only four years, from 2016 to 2020. Future studies in female retention, encompassing a longer time span, may employ a larger, more complete, dataset, allowing for an in-depth analysis on possible effects of combat related career fields on female officer retention.

The new retirement system, BRS, was enacted by all military branches in January 2018. It combines benefits from the civilian 401(k) and the legacy ("high 3") military retirement system. Service members who joined prior to January 1, 2018, were able to choose between the new retirement plan and the legacy; all members joining after January 1, 2018, are automatically enrolled into the BRS. Unfortunately, the time frame in which the BRS has been in place is too short to provide

significant influence on female retention. Service members who may have chosen to opt into the BRS in 2018 and decided to separate in 2019 yield just one year of data in this study. One year of data is insufficient to provide insight to female retention behavior.

Other areas of interest that may best represent political influences are operations tempo (OPTEMPO) and number of deployments. OPTEMPO is defined as “the rate at which units are involved in all military activities, including contingency operations, exercises, and training deployments.”⁶⁹ Unfortunately, this type of factor fluctuates based on each military base and its mission, making it problematic for regression or survival analysis. Due to the dynamic nature of the data associated with OPTEMPO, it is not included in this study. However, political influences can be represented by the number of deployments in a female officer’s career. This information is provided and directly extracted from MilPDS.

Results and Analysis

This section presents the methodologies used and analyses conducted in this study. Logistic regression is applied to identify factors significant to female officer retention. Odds ratios are then calculated to compare the likelihood of occurrence between variables. Finally, survival analysis is performed to develop a model for predicting retention behavior.

Logistic Regression

Logistic regression is conducted to detect critical factors related to female officer retention. Once the significant variables were identified, the odds ratios for each significant element were determined.

Data. Data provided by HAF/A1 for the period from September 2009 to September 2019 was used for logistic regression. A binary response variable, called “retain,” is assigned to each service member with “0” signifying the member separated and “1” signifying they stayed in. Variables considered are marital status (1 = Single, 2 = Married, 3 = Divorced/Annulled/Legally Separated, etc.), commissioning source (1 = Academy, 2 = ROTC, 3 = OTS, 4 = Other), race (1 = American Indian/Native Alaskan, 2 = Asian, 3 = Black/African American, 4 = Declined to Respond, 5 = More than One Race, 6 = Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 7 = White), spouse’s

career category (1 = Active duty, 2 = Air Force Reserve/Air National Guard (AFR/ANG), 3 = Other, 4 = Not Applicable), number of dependents (0 = No Dependents, 1 = One or More Dependents), number of deployments (0 = Has Not Deployed, 1 = One Deployment, 2 = Two or More Deployments), prior enlisted service (0 = No Prior Service, 1 = Has Prior Service), and distinguished graduate (DG) status at source of commission (0 = regular graduate, 1 = DG).

Extracts containing officer-only service members are refined using SAS filtering options to subgroup the data into female-only information encompassing fields such as marital status, AFSC, and other selected factors. Once the datasets were reduced to include all necessary factors, the data was saved in CSV format, which was used to clean the data and upload to R. Assumptions were made during the cleaning process, such as placing a female (if her marital status = married) member's spouse in the "other" category if their career type was not provided in MilPDS. A code of "not applicable" in the spouse's career variable was used for the marital status of women identified as divorced/annulled/legally separated. Further refinement in R included redefining variables and deleting duplicate records. In situations involving duplicate records, the last record is saved. It is assumed the last entry obtained is the most accurate, and "stagnant" information (e.g., commissioning source, prior service, etc.) does not change over a female's career.

Prior to model production, verification of logistic regression assumptions is checked. The assumption of a binary dependent variable is met, as the response variable for each model is 0 = female officer separated and 1 = female officer is retained. Logistic regression also requires observations to be independent, so a check of multicollinearity is conducted. If variables are shown to have a near-linear dependence, then the "problem of multicollinearity exists."⁷⁰ Dependencies between variables cause inferences in the regression model to become misleading and must be addressed before model creation. During examination, covariates such as age and grade revealed relationships were highly correlated and were removed to meet the independence assumption.

The first logistic regression model built is at an aggregate level containing all records from 2009 to 2019. Each female officer had one entry for this dataset, creating a complete cohort. Analysis for this model is discussed under the analysis at the cohort level.

Data is then partitioned into five commissioned years of service (CYOS) groups. Service members are assigned to a CYOS subset if

their time in service spans the entire CYOS range. Due to the time frame of the data captured, each record is susceptible to truncation and censoring. Truncation occurs when data is observed only if it covers a particular range and values that “fall outside a certain range” are not observed.⁷¹ Censoring occurs when “response values cannot be observed for some or all of the units under study.”⁷² It applies in this case because the data extracts are collected from a certain timeline that may not contain an officer’s completed military record. The middle, beginning, or end of a record may not be observed during the twelve-year span of records under examination. For example, if a female officer separated after fourteen years, her record would be included in the zero to six CYOS, four to eight CYOS, and eight to fourteen CYOS. However, her record is not observed in the twelve to nineteen CYOS since her record does not span the entire range of that subset. For each dataset, there was only one entry per female officer whose time in service potentially spanned the entirety of that CYOS subset.

Finally, the data was organized into officer developmental categories (provided in table 12.3) by CYOS to reflect recent changes to future officer promotion boards. In October 2020, the USAF reconfigured its single Line of the USAF category into six developmental groups. Prior to this decision, officers from forty AFSCs with various experiences, milestones, and missions competed for promotion. Recategorizing officers into these subgroups gives officers a chance to compete against other members with similar career progressions when they reach their promotion boards.⁷³

The categories examined in this study are Air Operations and Special Warfare (AOSW) (rated officers), Information Warfare (IW), Combat Support (CS), and Force Modernization (FM). Developmental groups involving nuclear and missile operations and space operations are not inspected in this study. Data collected for rated officers did not distinguish the difference between student and non-student rated officers. Therefore, determining retention patterns between training and non-training environments will require additional research.

Calculations. Once the data are refined for each iteration of building a logistic regression model, R’s `glm()` command was used to generate a model for female officer retention. All characteristics utilized in the model (listed in the Logistic Regression data section) are categorical or binary variables. Wald Chi-Square *p* values for each covariate are summarized and provided in each section presented within the analysis at the cohort, CYOS, and developmental category levels. With

a 95 percent confidence level, attributes with p values under 0.05 are significant and highlighted in each analysis of effects table.

Odds ratios for significant indicators are also examined to analyze the likeliness of retaining over a baseline case. The baseline case for each instance is set to one to measure the association between variables. If a variable is greater than one, it is n times more likely to retain over the baseline.⁷⁴ If it is under one, it is n times less likely to retain over the baseline.

Analysis at the cohort level. Table 12.1 displays the covariates sorted from most to least significant based on the p values for this logistic regression model. The R-squared value (indicating the amount of variance in a dependent variable that can be explained by an independent variable) produced was 0.0434, which signifies that the model is not a good fit in predicting female officer retention. This result is expected, as the data contains potential errors due to real-world extracts taken from MilPDS.

Table 12.1. Analysis of effects by cohort summary of p Values. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Variable	p Value
Dependents	< 0.0001
Marital status	< 0.0001
Deployments	< 0.0001
Prior service	0.0002
Race	0.0018
Spouse's career	0.0153
DG	0.0291
Commissioning source	0.0753
Observations	7,017

In past research, commissioning source was shown to influence officer retention; however, when solely examining female officers, this is not the case. Logistic regression performed at the cohort level shows that all variables except commissioning source are significant indicators for female officer retention.⁷⁵ For this reason, this covariate is removed for logistic regression analysis performed at the CYOS and developmental category levels.

Analysis at CYOS level. When analyzing female officers at the CYOS level, factors vary based on the range of years examined. Table 12.2

displays the covariates from most to least commonly significant with the given Wald Chi-Square p values. The most significant characteristic across all CYOS ranges is DG status, followed by number of dependents, number of deployments, marital status, and prior enlisted service. Odds ratios for the following indicators were examined to analyze the likelihood of staying in the Air Force based on CYOS.

Table 12.2. Analysis of effects by CYOS summary of p values. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Variable	CYOS				
	0-6	4-8	8-14	12-19	20-22
DG	0.0277	0.0018	0.0002	0.0092	0.0184
Dependents	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.0031	0.4162
Deployments	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.2441	0.0006
Marital status	< 0.0001	0.0119	0.0003	0.0027	0.7998
Prior service	0.0002	0.0022	0.1280	0.0061	0.0944
Race	0.0018	0.7642	0.1280	< 0.0001	0.5675
Spouse's career	0.0073	0.1283	0.0539	0.0881	0.0445
Observations	7,017	5,392	2,657	1,373	517

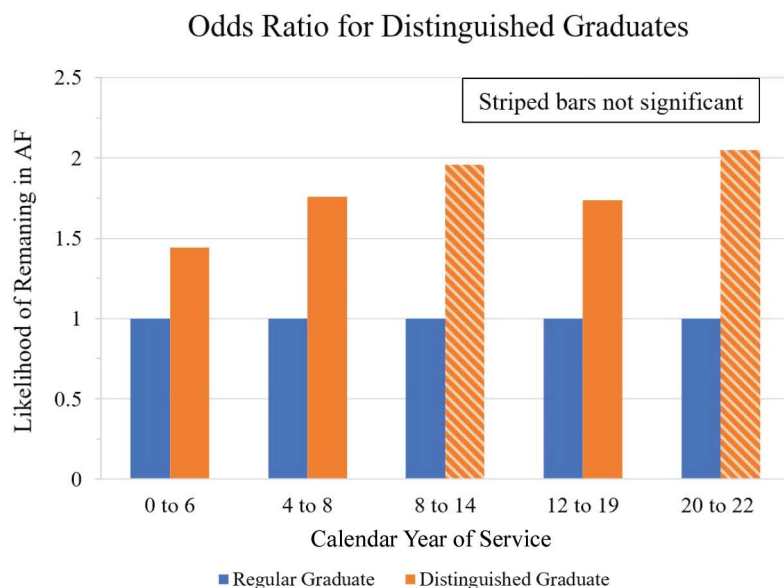


Figure 12.1. Odds ratio of retention for distinguished graduates

Figure 12.1 depicts the odds ratio of retention based on DG status. Female officers who did not graduate with DG status are set as the baseline of comparison with a value set to one. DGs graduating at the top 10 percent of their class are recognized as having a high level of leadership compared to their peers. This covariate has two CYOS bins with odds ratio confidence intervals that cross 1, meaning there is insufficient data to suggest a statistical difference between DG and regular graduates (signified by striped bars). These data points occur at eight to fourteen and twenty to twenty-two CYOS.

Figure 12.2 shows the odds ratio of retention for female officers with dependents. The baseline of comparison for each CYOS range is female officers without dependents. The four to eight CYOS bin has an odds ratio with a confidence interval crossing one, indicating there is insufficient evidence to conclude statistical differences exist between those with and without dependents (signified by striped bar). All other CYOS ranges depicted signify a difference in retention between females with and without dependents.

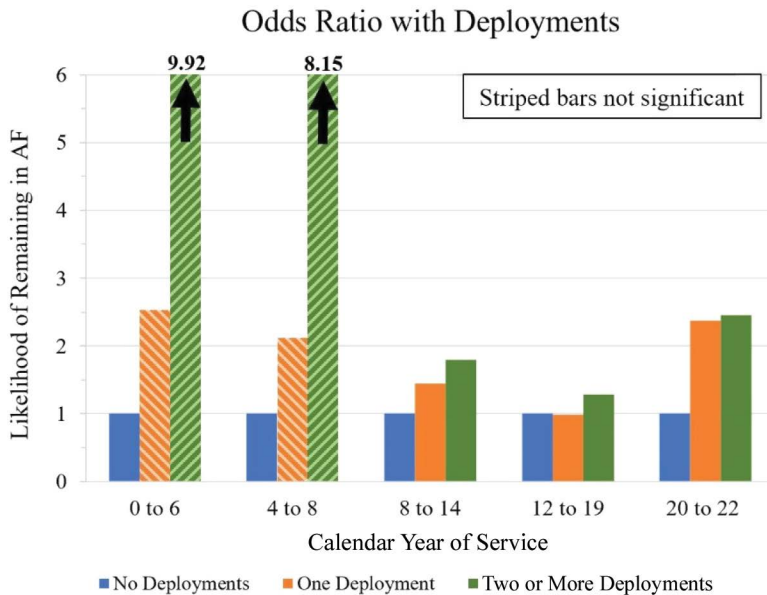


Figure 12.2. Odds ratio of retention for female officers with dependents

Female officers with dependents are consistently more likely to retain than those without dependents from zero to six through twelve

to nineteen commissioned years of service. These odds ratios are more distinct in the zero to six and four to eight CYOS groups. Females with dependents are 2.04 times more likely to retain than those without dependents from zero to six CYOS. Between four to eight CYOS, females with dependents are 2.54 times more likely to retain than those without. The delta between these two groups decreases from eight to fourteen CYOS and twelve to nineteen CYOS. Although reasons cannot be provided based on this data, further research could determine possible underlying factors.

Figure 12.3 shows the odds ratio for retention based on the number of deployments. Female officers with no deployments are set as the baseline. All CYOS ranges were considered significant except the zero to six and four to eight CYOS bins. Overall, women with two or more deployments were more likely to retain than those with one or no deployments. The greatest disparity between those with two or more deployments and those with one or less is in the zero to six and four to eight CYOS groups.

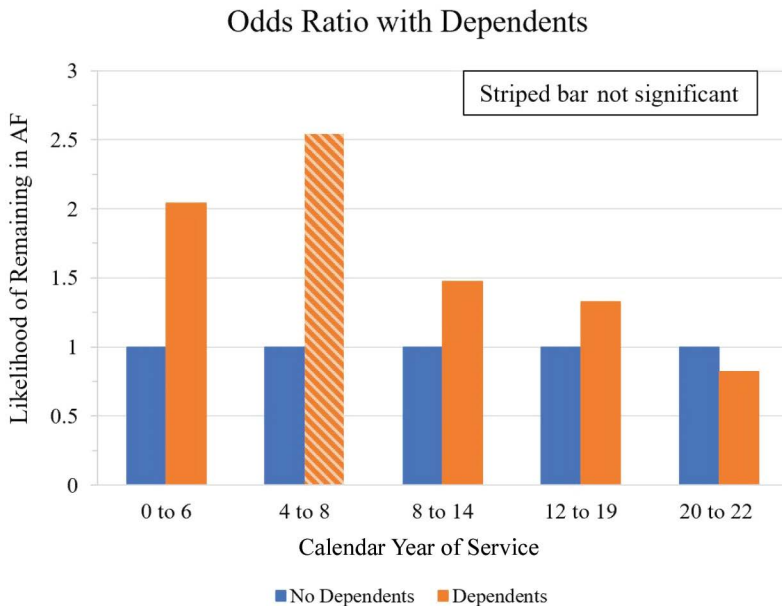


Figure 12.3. Odds ratio of retention for number of deployments

Although this data cannot provide the exact reason for the high retention likelihood in these two groups, the initial service commit-

ments required for USAF officers may be the primary influencer. Those who commission from ROTC and OTS have a commitment of four years of service, while those who commission through the USAFA have a five-year commitment before they are eligible to separate. Additionally, pilots incur a ten-year service commitment, and navigators incur a six-year service commitment from the date they complete training. Furthermore, each of the twenty-seven AFSCs analyzed in this dataset has a different operations tempo. For example, female officers in security forces deploy at a higher rate in the first eight years of service than those serving as operations analysts.

The variation between those with and without deployments decreases significantly by eight to fourteen CYOS. At twelve to nineteen CYOS, those with one or no deployments are equally likely to retain, and those with two or more deployments are 1.29 times more likely to retain. During this time, officers reach an important decision point in their career: continue to retirement or separate. This time frame is also around the same point pilots and navigators complete their service commitment, affecting the smaller gap in likelihood to retain between the three groups under investigation. The data also covers the period during the pilot shortage that affected the USAF, which may be reflected in the eight to fourteen CYOS range. Conversely, the odds ratio of retention for female officers with one or more deployments increases by the time they have reached twenty to twenty-two years CYOS. This correlation may be due to the perception that officers with deployment experience have a higher probability of promotion to the general officer corps.

Figure 12.4 displays the odds ratio of retention based on marital status. The baseline for marital status is single female officers, with a value kept at one. Previously married female officers were more likely to retain than single or married female officers in the zero to six CYOS range (1.21 odds ratio). This disparity increases in the four to eight CYOS range, making them 1.58 times more likely to retain. Surprisingly, results for this population have the lowest odds ratios between eight to fourteen and twelve to nineteen CYOS (0.54 and 0.50, respectively).

Married female officers are 0.65 times less likely to retain than single females in their first six years of service. The likelihood of retaining for this population becomes slightly higher than for single females, with an odds ratio of 1.06 between four to eight CYOS. However, this likelihood decreases significantly between eight to

fourteen and twelve to nineteen CYOS. These two CYOS bins are significant to a female officer's career as she (1) reaches roughly the halfway point to retirement and must decide to continue service and (2) approaches promotional boards for O-5 (lieutenant colonel). Both events are imperative to retention since this is when the percentage of female representation drops.

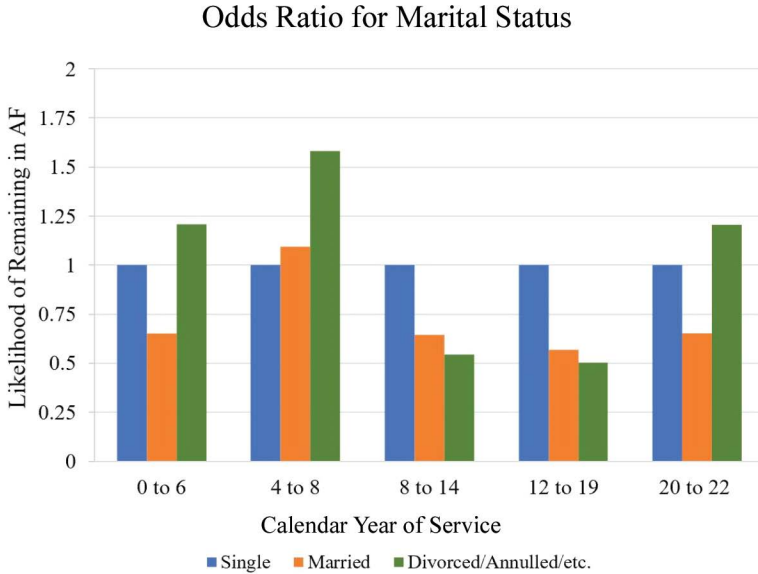


Figure 12.4. Odds ratio for marital status

While this data cannot provide specific indicators explaining lower retention ratios for married and previously married females, previous research suggests underlying factors related to family or personal matters may contribute to the lower likelihood of retention.⁷⁶ It should also be noted that single female officers may be sacrificing their personal lives (dating, children, etc.) to continue to twenty years of service.

Figure 12.5 shows the odds ratio of retention based on prior years of service. Female officers with no prior years of service are used as the baseline. Even though two CYOS bins (twelve to nineteen and twenty to twenty-two) are considered insignificant, female officers with prior service are more likely to retain than females without prior service. This conclusion corresponds with previous studies conducted on non-rated and rated officers.⁷⁷

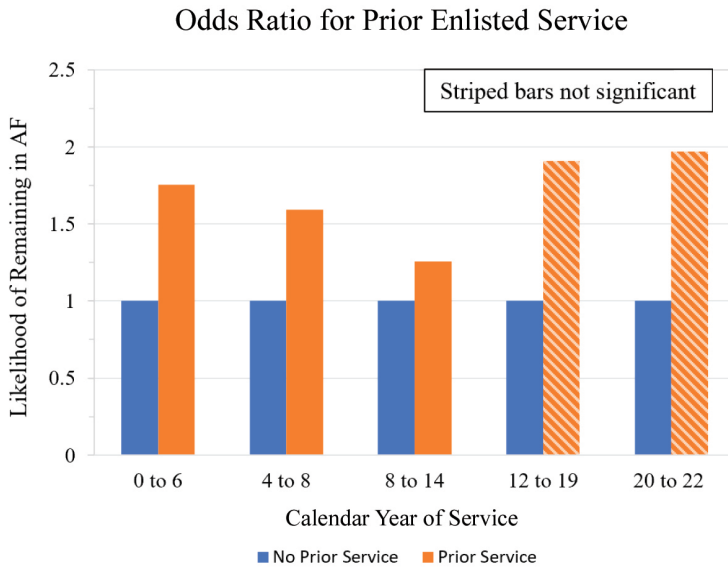


Figure 12.5. Odds ratio of retention for prior enlisted service

In general, officers must serve twenty years (cumulative) in the military to become eligible for retirement. As part of the voluntary force management program enacted in 2012, the USAF offered a 10-8 waiver on retirement for prior enlisted members. Thus, prior service officers with ten years of service could apply for retirement if they had eight CYOS. Female officers with at least eighteen total active duty years of service fall within the eight to fourteen CYOS. Females who also have eleven or more years of enlisted service are also eligible for retirement during this time. Both situations may explain the drop in retention for prior service from four to eight and eight to fourteen CYOS. Although considered insignificant, the twelve to nineteen CYOS data suggests that prior enlisted females are almost twice more likely to retain than female officers without prior service.

Analysis at the developmental category level. Logistic regression models for the four developmental categories are analyzed using the same categorical variables presented within the analysis at the CYOS level. Although results at the CYOS level determined race and spouse's career category significant for two of five CYOS, they remain in the regression models. Retaining these factors helps examine the sensitivity of each developmental category in relation to each other covariate. Table 12.3 shows the AFSCs associated with each developmental category analyzed in this study.

Table 12.3. Developmental categories with associated AFSCs

Developmental Category	AFSCs
Air Operations and Special Warfare	Pilot (11X), Combat Systems (12X), Air Battle Manager (13B), Special Tactics (19ZX A), Combat Rescue (19ZXC), Tactical Air Control Party (19ZXB), Remotely Piloted Aircraft Pilot (18X)
Information Warfare	Information Operations (14F), Intelligence (14N), Weather (15W), Cyber Operations (17X), Public Affairs (35X), Operations Research Analyst (15A), Special Investigations (71S)
Combat Support	Aerospace Physiologist (13H), Airfield Operations (13M), Aircraft Maintenance (21A), Munitions and Missile Maintenance (21M), Logistics Readiness (21R), Security Forces (31P), Civil Engineering (32E), Force Support (38F), Contracting (64P), Financial Management (65X)
Force Modernization	Chemist (61C), Physicist/Nuclear Engineer (61D), Developmental Engineer (62E), Acquisition Management (63A)

Female officers serving in the Air Operations and Special Warfare category are examined first. Table 12.4 shows the Wald Chi-Square p values for each variable based on CYOS. The most significant variables affecting retention rates for women in this category are the number of dependents and the number of deployments. Both covariates are significant in the four to eight, eight to fourteen, and twelve to nineteen CYOS categories. The zero to six and twenty to twenty-two CYOS categories do not contain any significant variables. The zero to six CYOS results may be affected by service commitment requirements for pilots and navigators (Combat Systems officers). Pilots incur a ten-year active duty service commitment, while navigators serve six years beginning the day they complete training. By four to eight CYOS, navigators have completed their commitment and now have the option of separating, thus impacting retention beginning within this range. The twenty to twenty-two CYOS range may not consist of any significant factors due to the lack of data (sixty data points total).

DG, marital status, race, and spouse's career category contain p values less than 0.05 in one CYOS bin. Unlike results provided under the analysis at the CYOS level, prior service for rated officers was not shown to be significant. Odds ratios for dependents are reviewed to identify if females with or without dependents are more likely to retain. Likelihoods for deployments are not discussed, as all odds ratios were deemed insignificant.

Table 12.4. Analysis of effects for Air Operations and Special Warfare summary of *p* values. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Variable	CYOS				
	0-6	4-8	8-14	12-19	20-22
DG	0.6750	0.4400	0.0929	0.0294	0.2480
Dependents	0.3950	0.0226	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.4930
Deployments	0.5310	0.0102	< 0.0001	0.0032	0.1600
Marital status	0.1950	0.4933	0.0556	0.0365	0.5350
Prior service	0.5620	0.8866	0.3927	0.1547	0.6110
Race	0.3370	0.0837	0.0263	0.2862	0.4700
Spouse's career	0.7770	0.0602	0.4124	0.0326	0.5400
Observations	1,587	1,262	542	248	60

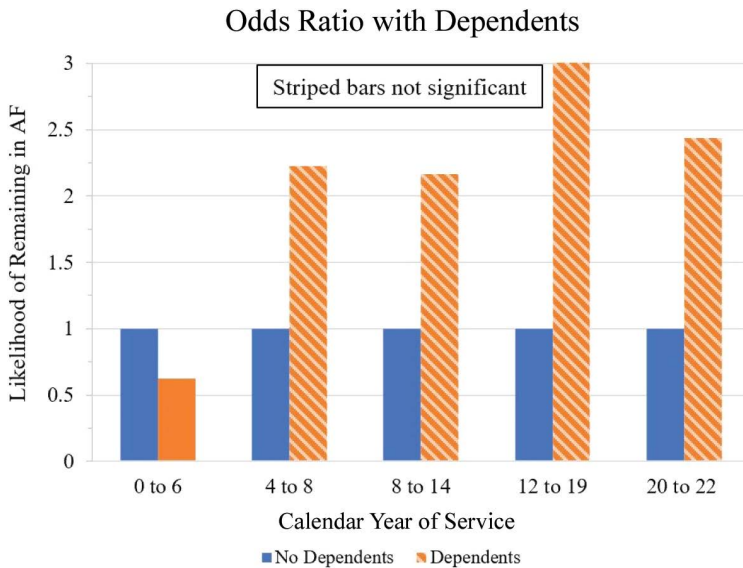


Figure 12.6. Air Operations and Special Warfare odds ratio of retention with dependents

Figure 12.6 (above) shows the odds ratio of retention for Air Operations and Special Warfare officers with dependents. The baseline of comparison is female officers without dependents. All CYOS bins except zero to six CYOS have odds ratios with confidence intervals crossing one, indicating insufficient evidence to conclude statistical differences exist between those with and without dependents (signified by striped bar).

For zero to six CYOS, female officers in Air Operations and Special Warfare with dependents are 0.63 less likely to retain than those without dependents. However, the likelihood of retention for these rated officers with dependents increases from four to eight through twenty to twenty-two CYOS. Females with dependents are between 2.16 to 4.84 times more likely to stay than those without. Future research analyzing this developmental category at the AFSC level may provide more understanding of the effects of dependents on retention.

Table 12.5 shows the Wald Chi-Square *p* values for female officers serving in the Information Warfare category. Performing logistic regression at the developmental category confirmed differences exist in significant factors compared to results provided in the analysis at the CYOS level. A spouse's career category was the most commonly significant variable affecting retention rates for women in IW. This variable is significant for zero to six, four to eight, and twenty to twenty-two CYOS. Unlike the analysis conducted at the cohort level, race is considered insignificant across all CYOS ranges. Odds ratios for spouse's career category are reviewed.

Table 12.5. Analysis of effects for Information Warfare summary of *p* values. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Variable	CYOS				
	0-6	4-8	8-14	12-19	20-22
DG	0.0611	0.0257	0.0540	0.6185	0.0127
Dependents	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.7635	0.7176	0.3956
Deployments	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.1395	0.4557	0.2929
Marital status	0.0010	0.2617	0.1576	0.1073	0.2307
Prior service	0.0047	0.0644	0.8874	0.0928	0.0551
Race	0.1203	0.4139	0.9733	0.0676	0.2689
Spouse's career	0.0077	0.0210	0.9245	0.1031	0.0180
Observations	2,118	1,561	800	442	190

Figure 12.7 shows the likelihood of retaining based on a spouse's career category for IW officers. The baseline category for spouse's career category is a female officer married to an active duty member (also known as "dual military"). Female officers married to partners serving in an Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard component are 1.28 times more likely to retain than dual military members from zero to six CYOS. This likelihood increases to 1.88 between four to eight

CYOS. Surprisingly, the likelihood of retaining decreased drastically after four to eight CYOS. These women reach the lowest likelihood of retaining between twelve to nineteen CYOS, with a 0.48 odds ratio. Lower retention likelihoods for this category may be influenced by a provision passed in the 2012 NDAA whereby reserve members could be involuntarily activated in support of combatant command missions. The global war on terrorism has also activated thousands of reserve and National Guard members since 2001.

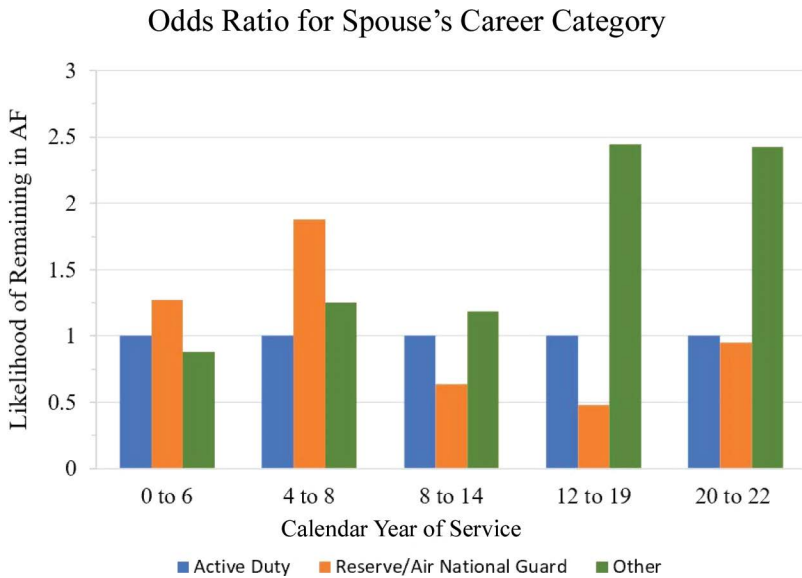


Figure 12.7. Information Warfare odds ratio of retention for spouse's career category

Women with spouses serving in “other” occupations (those in the civilian sector and non-DOD federal workers) are 0.88 times less likely to retain than dual military members between zero to six CYOS. However, the likelihood of retaining positively increases from the four to eight through the twenty to twenty-two CYOS bins. These female officers are between 1.19 and 2.45 times more likely to retain than dual military female officers. One reason higher retention likelihoods are linked to a female officer with a civilian partner may be the relocation process during each permanent change of station (PCS). Although a civilian partner can relocate with their military spouse, their careers are negatively impacted.⁷⁸ Issues related to lower likelihoods of retain-

ing for dual military (when compared to those married to civilians) are separate assignments and back-to-back deployments, resulting in extended periods of time spent separated.

Analysis of effects for female officers serving in the Combat Support category are shown in table 12.6 with Wald Chi-Square p values. When compared with the other career categories, women in this field tend to have more factors affecting them from zero to six through eight to fourteen CYOS. The most commonly significant variables affecting retention rates for women in Combat Support are the number of dependents, the number of deployments, marital status, and prior service. This developmental category displays similar results discussed in the analysis at CYOS level when examining odds ratios for deployments and marital status.

Table 12.6. Analysis of effects for Combat Support summary of p values. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Variable	CYOS				
	0–6	4–8	8–14	12–19	20–22
DG	0.4435	0.0668	0.0163	0.8524	0.5160
Dependents	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.0002	0.8551	0.9060
Deployments	< 0.0001	< 0.0001	0.0503	0.8369	0.1040
Marital status	0.0060	0.0125	0.0051	0.3556	0.0562
Prior service	0.0098	0.0016	0.0176	0.2417	0.4850
Race	0.0044	0.0091	0.5890	0.9381	0.4160
Spouse's career	0.0028	0.9495	0.1337	0.0001	0.5740
Observations	2,394	1,848	947	483	194

Odds ratios of retention based on dependents are displayed in figure 12.8. Women without dependents are the baseline case with a ratio set to one. Women with dependents are more likely to retain than women without dependents between zero to six and eight to fourteen CYOS. Unlike outcomes presented in figure 12.2, the odds of retaining for women with dependents becomes lower than for women without dependents between twelve to nineteen CYOS. The shift in retention likelihoods between eight to fourteen and twelve to nineteen CYOS reveals a critical decision point for a female officer. At this point, she has served about half the time required for retirement. She is also approaching promotional boards for O-5 (lieutenant colonel). Both or one of these events negatively impacts female officer retention for this developmental category, as the number of women serving at this point decreases.

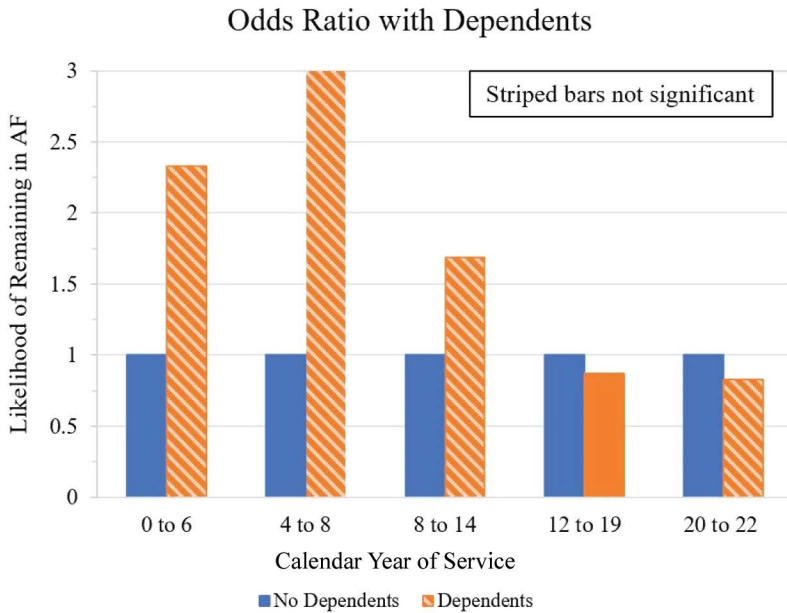


Figure 12.8. Combat Support odds ratio of retention with dependents

Figure 12.9 shows the odds ratio of retention with deployments. The baseline case for deployments is females with no deployment experience. Again, results for this developmental category are similar to ratios displayed in figure 12.3. The only difference is a higher likelihood of retaining from twenty to twenty-two CYOS. Women with one deployment are more likely to retain (odds ratio of 8.77) than women with two or no deployments. Female officers serving in the Combat Support sector tend to have a higher deployment-to-dwell rate due to their direct support in combat operations. This factor places a strain on the female officer as well as their family members. Keller et al. found that 78 percent of women expressed concerns about the effects of deployments on spouses and children.⁷⁹

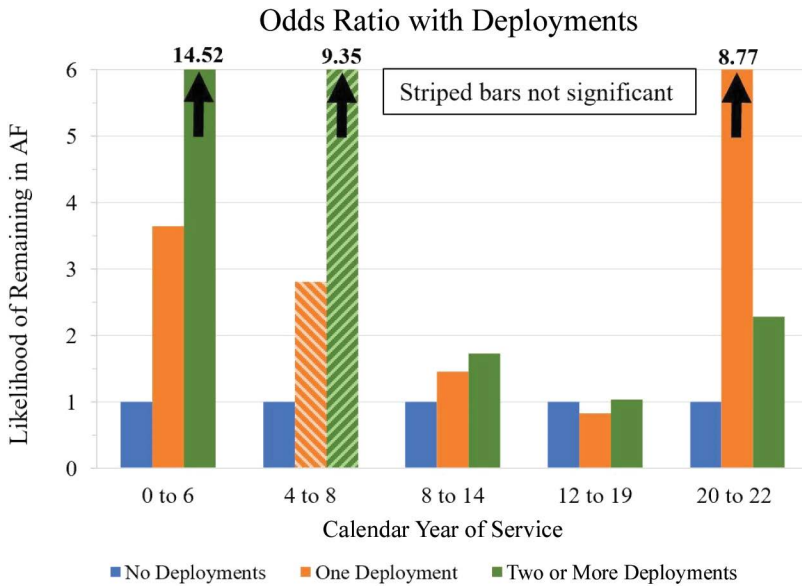


Figure 12.9. Combat Support odds ratio of retention with deployments

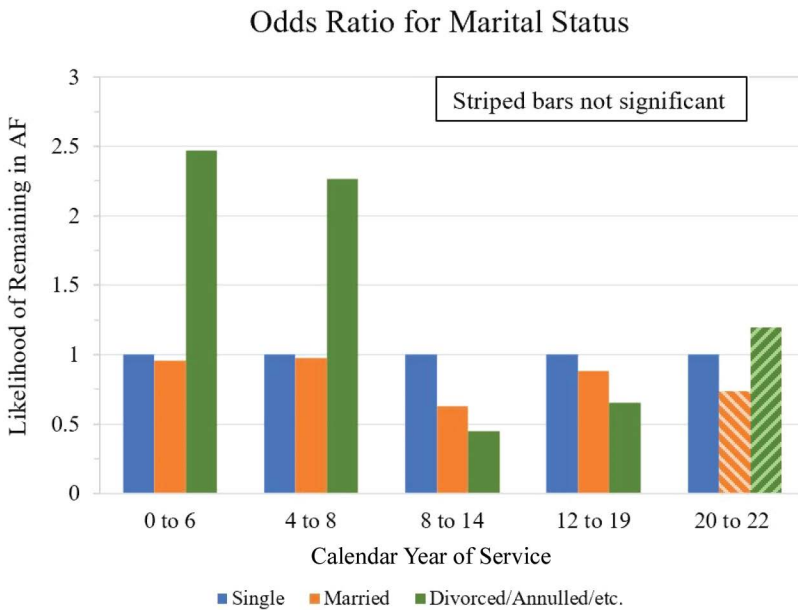


Figure 12.10. Combat Support odds ratio of retention for marital status

The odds ratios of retention based on marital status are shown in figure 12.10 (above). Single females are the baseline case. There are slight differences in odds ratios when comparing results for odds ratio of retention for marital status for female officers based on their years of service shown in figure 12.4 and the Combat Support group. Women who were previously married are 2.47 more likely to retain than single females from zero to six CYOS and 2.26 more likely to retain between four and eight CYOS. This is an increase of 1.26 and 0.68, respectively, compared to figure 12.4.

The ratios of previously married women may be related to their dependent status and number of deployments. When analyzing these three covariates together, previously married women with two or more deployments who have dependents are more likely to retain from zero to six and four to eight CYOS. When comparing the same three groups from twelve to nineteen CYOS, the retention ratios decrease significantly. This decrease indicates that previously married women with children are affected by higher deployment rates. This group must balance work-to-family life. They are separated from their children each time they deploy or travel, which means they must depend on family or friends to become care providers for their children in their absence. Deployments may also be a contributing factor to higher rates of divorce in this developmental category. Future research including changes in marital status for a female officer may provide more insight.

Table 12.7 shows the Wald Chi-Square *p* values for female officers serving in the Force Modernization category. Marital status is the most commonly significant variable affecting retention rates for women in this category. This variable is significant for zero to six, eight to fourteen, and twelve to nineteen CYOS. Prior service is considered insignificant across all CYOS ranges, unlike results from the analysis at the cohort level. Reasons may include a lower population of females in this category or bachelor's degree requirements for the AFSCs in this group. Specifically, Force Modernization has more STEM-related AFSCs than other categories. These types of bachelor's degrees may be more challenging to obtain as a prior service member if attending school while serving full time in the military.

Table 12.7. Analysis of effects for Force Modernization summary of *p* values. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Variable	CYOS				
	0–6	4–8	8–14	12–19	20–22
DG	0.3114	0.1682	0.3625	0.0337	0.7897
Dependents	0.8734	0.0021	0.9838	0.2033	0.6089
Deployments	0.0257	0.0065	0.0517	0.3826	0.9484
Marital status	0.0087	0.2821	0.0246	0.0431	0.6760
Prior service	0.5270	0.7850	0.4964	0.4719	0.4016
Race	0.9367	0.8136	0.5928	0.3926	0.0369
Spouse's career	0.0010	0.6205	0.0885	0.0025	0.2300
Observations	918	721	368	200	73

Figure 12.11 shows the odds ratio of retention for Force Modernization based on marital status. Single women are the baseline of comparison. Contrary to figures 12.4 (odds ratio of retention based on marital status for all female service members) and 12.10 (Combat Support odds ratio of retention for marital status), previously married women in the FM field have the highest likelihood of retaining at zero to six and twenty to twenty-two CYOS. This population also has the lowest likelihood of retaining at eight to fourteen and twelve to nineteen CYOS, with odds ratios of 0.19 and 0.22, respectively. Exact reasons why FM has the highest retention rates for previously married women are unknown. Deployments may be a cause of higher divorce rates in this population, resulting in higher retention. Also unknown is why the likelihood of retention at twenty to twenty-two CYOS in FM is drastically higher than for other AFSC categories.

Married women as a group also have the highest likelihood of retaining at zero to six and four to eight CYOS (fig. 12.4) compared to married women in Combat Support (fig. 12.10). Additionally, the lowest likelihoods of retaining for married women are also represented in the Combat Support category. Married women in CS are 0.37 less likely to retain at eight to fourteen CYOS, 0.31 less likely at twelve to nineteen CYOS, and 0.30 less likely at twenty to twenty-two CYOS than the group as a whole. Declining likelihoods of retention occurring between eight to fourteen and twelve to nineteen CYOS are also critical time frames for female officers in this developmental category. Reasons for these low retention ratios are the same proposed for CS odds ratios of retention for deployments and dependents.

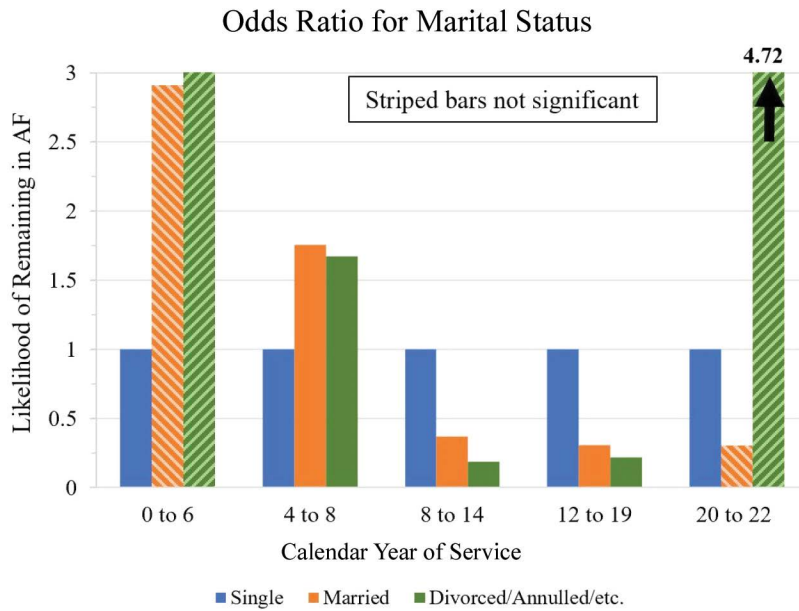


Figure 12.11. Force Modernization odds ratio of retention for marital status

Survival Analysis

Survival analysis is used to create survival curves with retention behavior for female officers. This analysis approach accommodates the censored data (when the event of interest cannot be observed for some of the data under study) provided in this study. The random variable in this model represents time to an event, specifically time until a female officer leaves the military.

Cox proportional hazards regression (a technique for assessing the association between variables and survival rate) is then used to examine the relationship between the survival time of a female officer (the commissioned years of service) and her predictor variables for retention. This type of regression also accommodates censored data and does not require a normal distribution assumption on the data.

Data. Extracts provided by HAF/A1 were aggregated at a cohort level, which contains all female officers in the dataset. Each female officer has one entry containing the number of dependents, marital status, deployments, prior service, race, spouse’s career, and DG status. Refining data in R included redefining variables and deleting duplicate

records. In situations involving duplicated records, the last record is saved. It is assumed the last record obtained is the most accurate, and “stagnant” information (e.g., commissioning source, prior service, etc.) does not change over a female’s career. Examination at the CYOS level is not covered in this analysis because survival functions are graphical representations of an event over the span of a thirty-year career. Since each CYOS covers at most seven years, this variable would not provide any insights to retention behavior.

Once the data are analyzed at the cohort level, it is divided into four developmental categories. The categories examined in this study are Air Operations and Special Warfare (rated officers), Information Warfare, Combat Support, and Force Modernization (see table 12.3). Developmental groups involving nuclear and missile operations and space operations are not examined in this study. This research also excludes non-line female officers serving as attorneys, chaplains, and medical officers (dentists, nurses, doctors, etc.).

Due to the time frame of the data captured, each record is susceptible to truncation and censoring. Truncation occurs when data is observed only if it covers a particular range, and values that “fall outside a certain range” are not observed.⁸⁰ Specifically, left truncation occurs when the data is observed, but the observation period (time a female officer separates the military) is not captured. Censoring occurs when “response values cannot be observed for some or all of the units under study.”⁸¹ In this case, censoring occurs because the data extracts are collected from a certain timeline that may not contain an officer’s completed military record. Therefore, for this portion of the analysis, it is assumed that a female is a commissioned officer at the time she is observed, and her start time begins at time zero. For example, if a female officer is observed with six CYOS in 2010, then it is assumed that she commissioned at zero CYOS since five CYOS are not provided within the observation period (2009–19). However, with this assumption, she remains in the dataset for analysis.

Calculations. Once the data are refined for each survival function, R’s `survfit()` function is used to compute the Kaplan-Meier estimates for truncated and censored data. This nonparametric estimate is used to analyze time to a specific event; in this case, time to separate. R’s `surv(time = x, event = y)` represents the failure time (CYOS a female officer has completed in her record) and the censoring variable (0 = separated, 1 = retained). Cox proportional hazards are computed using R’s `coxph()` function to test the impact of each explanatory vari-

able. Assessing the proportional hazards helps determine whether a Cox regression model adequately represents the data. Hazard ratios (HR) are then graphed using `ggforest()` to determine the association between each covariate and the event probability (event = separated/retained). A variable with an HR greater than one increases the hazard of the event. An HR equal to one signifies no effect, and an HR less than one decreases the hazard of the event.

Analysis at the cohort level. Logistic regression at the cohort level determined that commissioning source was not a significant factor for female officer retention. This variable is removed when analyzing survival analysis at the cohort level for survival analysis. Explanatory variables analyzed in this section are DG, dependents, deployments, marital status, prior service, race, and spouse's career category.

Kaplan-Meier curves for DG status at the cohort level is shown in figure 12.12. Shaded regions around each line represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Although odds ratios for DG status (see fig. 12.1) were graphed by CYOS bins, the likelihood of retaining for DG was consistently higher. Retention curves for DGs and regular graduates show similar results. The curves do not cross at any point, with DGs having the dominant retention curve from roughly eight to thirty years of service. Regular graduates have a gradual decline in retaining over the course of their careers. This data supports the perception that DGs have a higher level of leadership and, therefore, higher retention behaviors.

Figure 12.13 depicts estimates for female officers with dependents. Like odds ratio results (see fig. 12.2), female officers with dependents have a higher retention rate. The curves do not cross at any point in the timeline, with dependents serving as the dominant curve. Females with no dependents have a pronounced decline at roughly seven CYOS that continues until about twelve CYOS. This trend is important, as the survival probability drops from about 80 percent to 25 percent in this time frame. Additionally, this behavior is not depicted in the odds ratios. Further research into the differences affecting women without dependents may uncover a cause of their low retention behavior. Survival probabilities for females with dependents are linear until just before twenty CYOS. Additional variables such as extended maternity leave, physical training exemptions, and deployment deferments may help provide a more accurate survival estimate.

Cohort Level Survival Estimates for Dependents

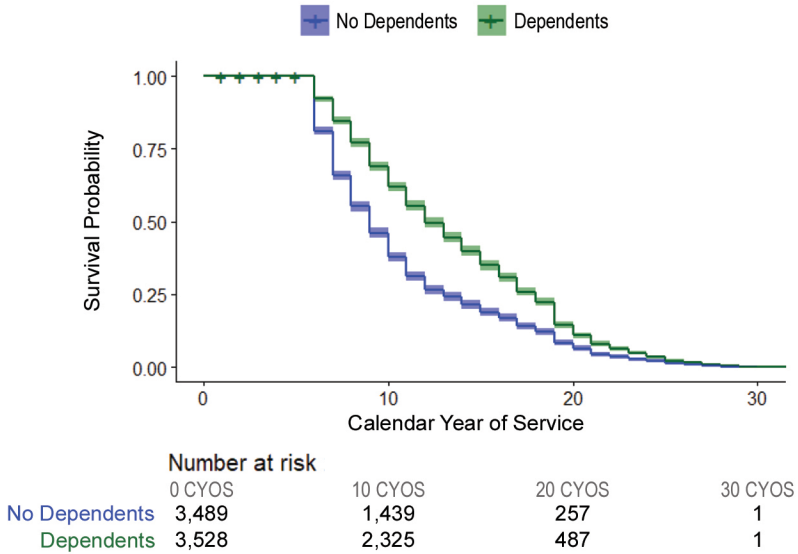


Figure 12.12. Kaplan-Meier Curve for distinguished graduates

Cohort Level Survival Estimates for Distinguished Graduates

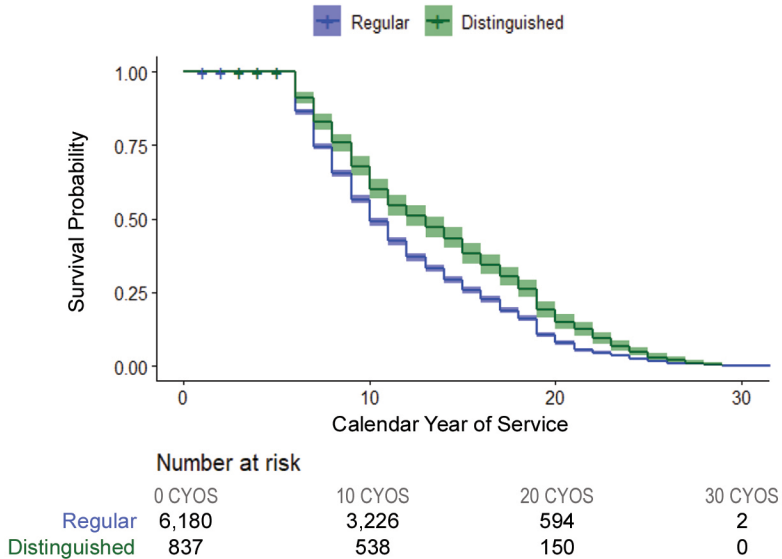


Figure 12.13. Kaplan-Meier curve for dependents

Figure 12.14 shows the Kaplan-Meier curve for number of deployments. Female officers with no deployment experience = 0, one deployment = 1, and two or more = 2+. Odds ratios for deployments displayed similar results, with higher retention likelihoods for female officers with two or more deployments. Kaplan-Meier estimates provide additional information, such as the wide gaps between each level and the number of women lost throughout the thirty-year span.

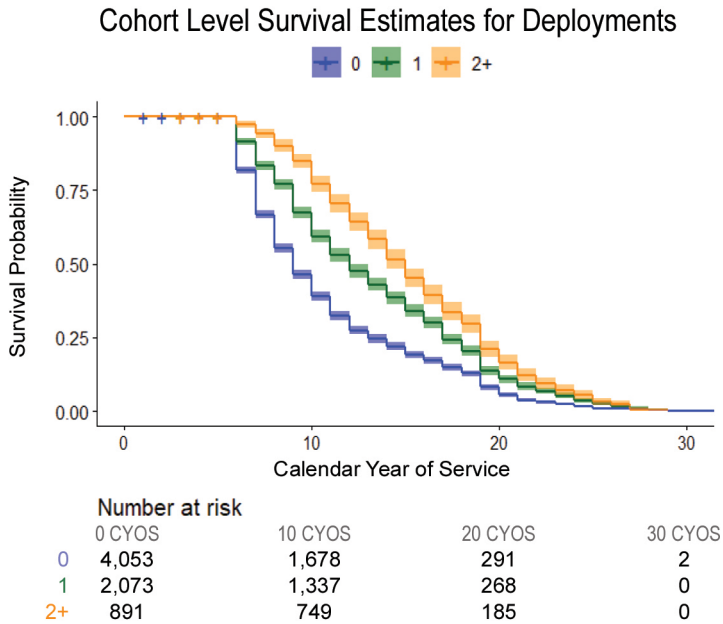


Figure 12.14. Kaplan-Meier curve for deployments

It is important to note that results for deployments may be influenced by a female officer’s AFSC type. Confounded elements are variables “whose presence affects the variables being studied so that the results do not reflect the actual relationship.”⁸² The number of deployments for each AFSC differs due to career and mission requirements. Therefore, it becomes challenging to minimize the effect between deployments and AFSC type. Results showing possible relationships between these variables are reviewed in survival analysis at the developmental category level.

There is a distinct difference in retention rates between women with no deployments and those with two or more. The gap between those with zero and one deployment is closer yet still shows a definite vari-

ance in retention. The survival curve for those with no deployment experience has a steep decline at roughly eight CYOS and continues until eighteen CYOS. Females with one deployment have a gradual decline in retention with no distinct plateaus. The curve for females with two or more deployments has the best survival curve, dominating zero or one deployment. When comparing the numbers at risk, retention for those with two or more deployments decreases by 16 percent from zero to ten CYOS. The retention rate for those with one deployment decreases by 36 percent, and those with zero deployments have a 59 percent decrease.

Marital status survival estimates are captured in figure 12.15. Married female estimates weakly dominate estimates for previously married women. Both survival curves dominate single female officers. When analyzing risk numbers, the percentage of single females who separate from the USAF is 58.2 percent between zero to ten years of service. Roughly 43 percent of married women and 38 percent of previously married women separate by ten CYOS. Overall, single female officers leave at a higher rate than others. Understanding the retention behavior of single female officers may provide insight to create programs aimed at attracting and retaining them.

Cohort Level Survival Estimates for Marital Status

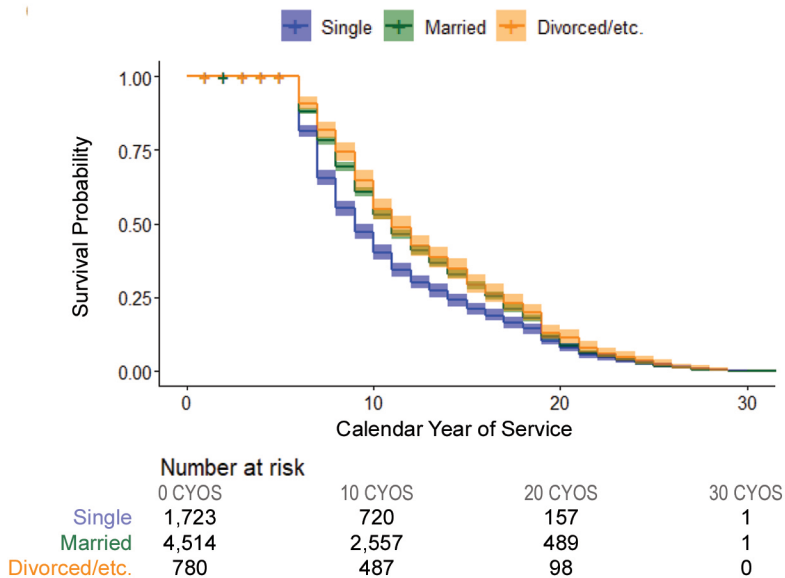


Figure 12.15. Kaplan-Meier curve for marital status

The Kaplan-Meier estimates for prior service are shown in figure 12.16. There are no distinct differences in retention behaviors between prior and non-prior service members. Women with no prior service have slightly higher estimates of retention. Women with ten years of prior service began retiring after reaching ten CYOS (reaching a total of twenty years of service when combined), potentially impacting the lower retention probabilities shown from ten to twenty CYOS.

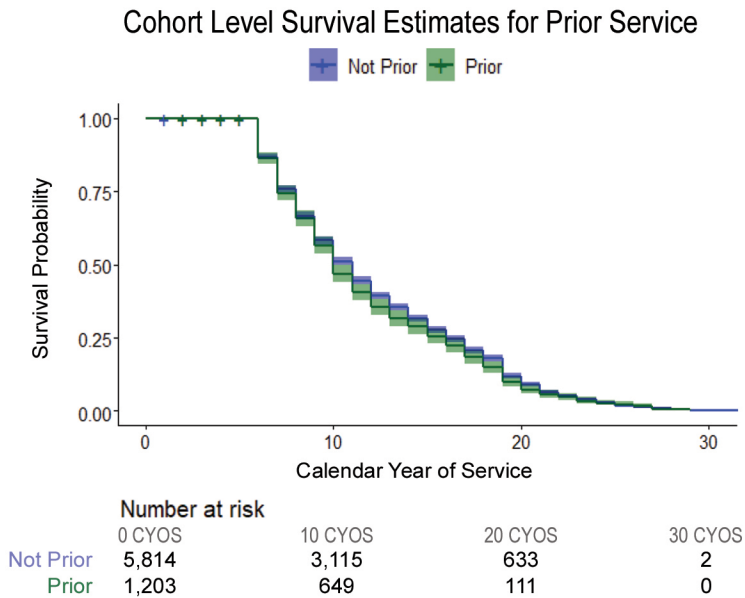


Figure 12.16. Kaplan-Meier curve for prior service

Figure 12.17 shows the survival probabilities based on race. Confidence intervals are not provided for this estimate to provide a clear display of all retention rates. It should be noted that confidence intervals were tight around each survival curve, signifying sufficient data is provided for analysis. Female officers in this group with the lowest retention rate are those of Asian descent between ten to twelve CYOS. From roughly thirteen to eighteen CYOS, Black females have the highest retention rates. The most notable information provided by this estimate is the risk numbers provided over the course of thirty CYOS. At thirty CYOS, two females achieved general officer rank. Roughly 8 percent of women represent “officers at brigadier general (O-7) or higher.”⁸³ Although the data does not contain every female officer’s

career record, the low number of women serving at thirty CYOS shows a significant decline past twenty CYOS.

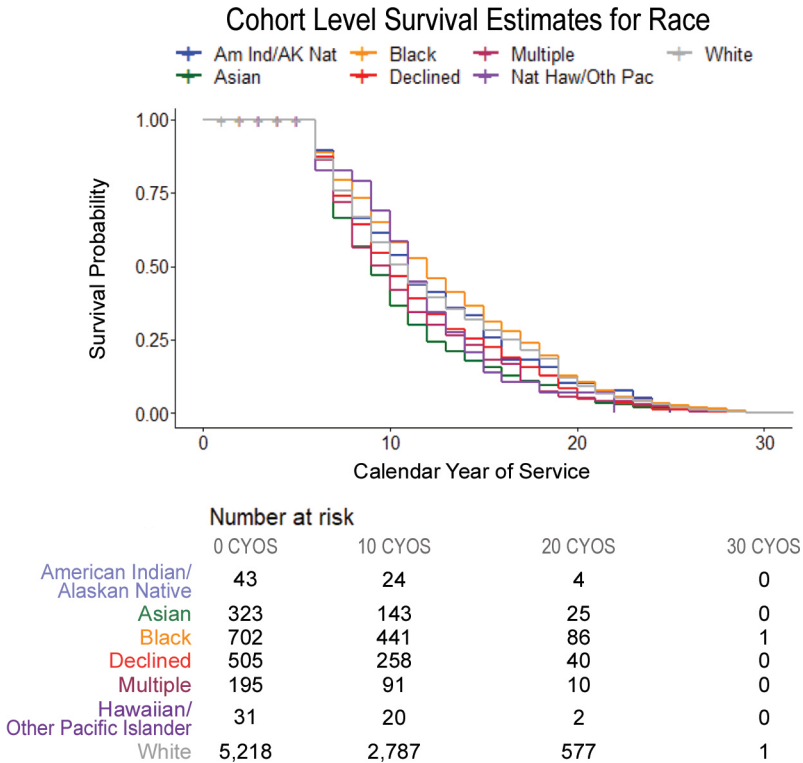


Figure 12.17. Kaplan-Meier curve for race

Kaplan-Meier estimates for a spouse’s career category are represented in figure 12.18. Overall, women married to spouses working in “other” occupations (those in the civilian sector and non-DOD federal workers) cross with women married to reserve/Air National Guard members [noted as RANG on the plot] at about the eight CYOS. However, those married to “other” become the dominant curve until roughly twenty-six CYOS.

Dual military women have the lowest retention behavior from ten to twenty CYOS. This group has a lower retention when compared to other married members. Roughly 53 percent of dual military separate from the military between approximately seven to ten CYOS. Issues related to lower retention rates for dual military females include extended periods of separation from their spouses (and children), separate assignment locations, back-to-back deployments, and frequent business trips.

Cohort Level Survival Estimates for Spouse's Career Status

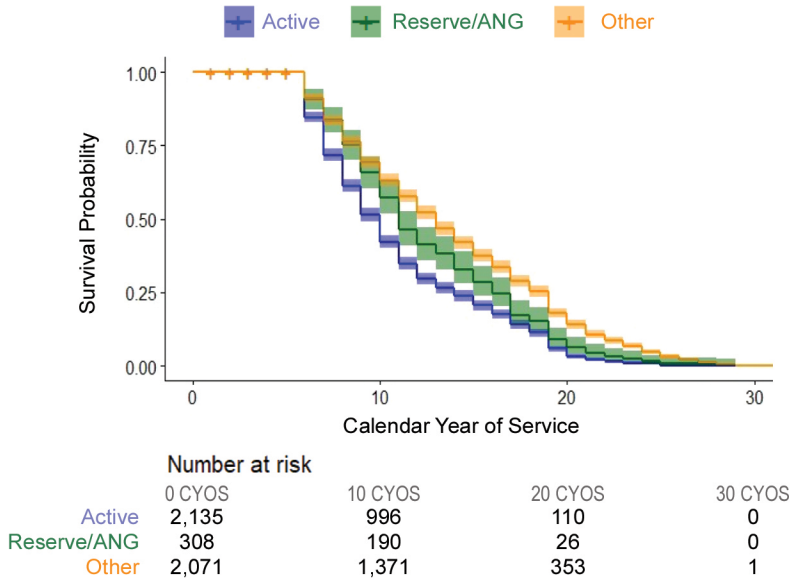


Figure 12.18. Kaplan-Meier curve for spouse’s career category

Analysis at the developmental category level. Table 12.8 displays the explanatory variables used for survival analysis by developmental category. The number of deployments tends to be the most prominent element across all categories. Estimates based on deployments for all categories are discussed first, as they carry similar behaviors. Kaplan-Meier estimates for all other variables are then discussed individually. This study did not distinguish between student and non-student rated officers. Therefore, analysis conducted on rated officers does not identify specific retention behaviors of those in or out of training.

Table 12.8. Factors significant to a developmental category’s regression model

Developmental category	Significant factors
Air Operations and Special Warfare (AOSW)	Dependents, deployments
Information Warfare (IW)	Spouse’s career, deployments
Combat Support (CS)	Dependents, deployments, marital status, prior service
Force Modernization (FM)	Deployments, marital status, spouse’s career

Figure 12.19 shows Kaplan-Meier estimates based on the number of deployments for all developmental categories by CYOS of service (0 = no deployments, 1 = one deployment, and 2+ = two or more

deployments). Women with more than two deployments are considered to have higher retention rates across all AFSC categories. However, confidence bands for AOSW and FM pose issues related to estimate accuracy. Generally, wider confidence intervals are related to a lack of data. When reviewing risk numbers in these groups, AOSW has forty-six data points while FM has twenty-four. Additionally, results for deployments may be confounded with AFSC types included in each developmental category; this type of relationship was discussed in the survival analysis conducted at the cohort level. Finally, including more categories to determine if a break in retention behavior exists seems intractable due to the high correlation between the number of deployments and AFSC type.

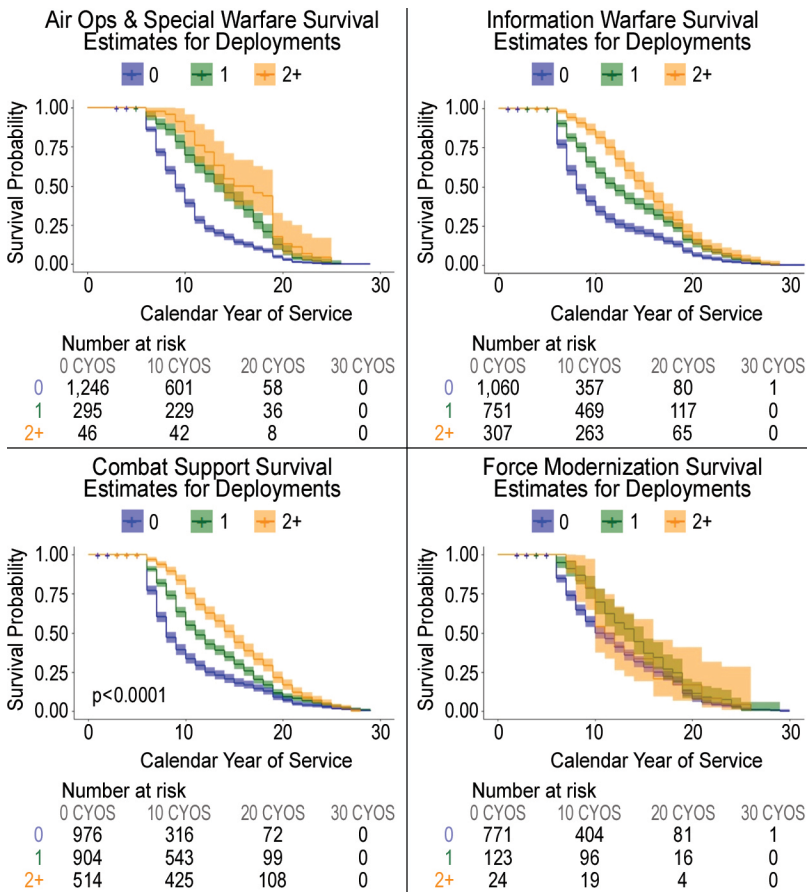


Figure 12.19. Kaplan-Meier curves for deployments

Confidence bands for IW and CS related to two or more deployments do not present the same characteristics, implying there are no issues with accuracy. Women in IW with two-plus deployments have the highest retention rates overall, with over 75 percent survival probability from approximately eight to twelve CYOS.

The retention curve for females in the AOSW group with no deployments declined steeply from about seven to ten CYOS. A loss of approximately 52 percent of the population occurs between zero and ten CYOS, with a 90 percent loss occurring between ten and twenty CYOS. Females in IW and CS have similar retention curve behaviors, but probabilities for IW are slightly higher. For example, between zero and ten CYOS, 64 percent of females in IW with no deployments separate versus 67 percent in CS. From ten to twenty CYOS, these percentages increase to approximately 78 percent and 77 percent, respectively. Thus, overall, women in Combat Support positions are leaving at higher rates than those in non-Combat Support positions. Women in the FM career fields with no deployment status have higher retention rates than those in the other developmental categories. Roughly 48 percent of female officers in FM separate between zero to ten CYOS. Between ten and twenty CYOS, the percentage of those in FM leaving the USAF is higher than those in IW and CS at 80 percent. AFSCs in the FM category may not have high deployment rates, leading to lower separation percentages in this time frame.

Possible life events affecting retention behaviors for females with no deployment experience may be pregnancy and its associated perceptions. Keller et al. found a “perceived stigma associated with pregnancy in the Air Force.” Female officers in the survey group “described a perception by leadership and peers that female officers are not pulling their weight and others will have to pick up the slack of their workload when they are on maternity leave.” Additional research that includes survey data and maternity leave would be helpful in determining the specific reasons why women without deployment experience generally have lower retention behaviors.

Figure 12.20 shows survival curves based on those with dependents for AOSW and CS. This result reflects conclusions based on the information in figure 12.6. Female officers with dependents have a dominant retention curve compared to those without dependents in both cases. Women without dependents have a steep decline from seven CYOS to about ten CYOS. By ten CYOS, their retention probability

drops below 25 percent. This behavior was also recognized at the cohort level with odds ratios and survival analysis (see fig. 12.3).

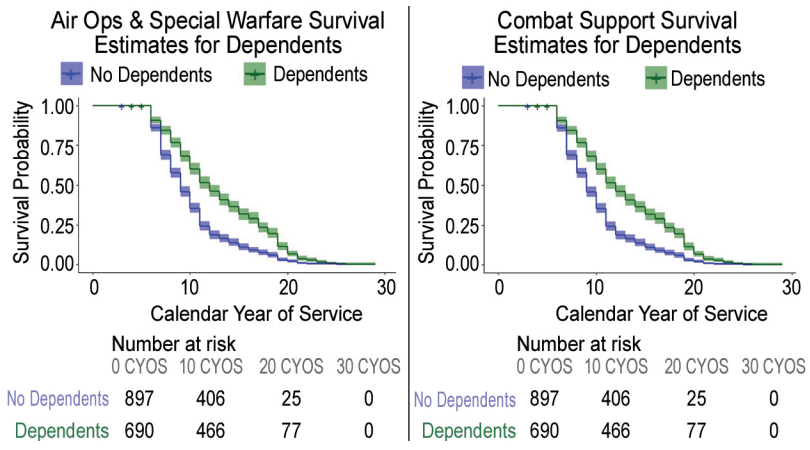


Figure 12.20. Kaplan-Meier curve for those with dependents (AOSW and CS)

Healthcare benefits and job security may not be as appealing to this population, both of which may be the reason for higher retention rates for those with dependents. Women with dependents may be more inclined to stay to continue providing for their families. Those without dependents who have fewer financial or healthcare concerns have more latitude to search for jobs in the civilian sector.

Survival probabilities in the spouse’s career category for IW and FM are presented in figure 12.21. Confidence intervals are not provided for this estimate to provide a clear display of all retention rates. None of the confidence bands signified inaccuracy in the data. Analysis of effects provided at the CYOS level (covered under logistic regression analysis at the CYOS level) determined that the spouse’s career was significant at zero to six and twenty to twenty-two CYOS. Furthermore, when examined at the IW developmental category, AFR/ANG had the best likelihood of retaining in the zero to six and the four to eight CYOS. Women married to “other” spouses had the best retention likelihoods from twelve to nineteen and twenty to twenty-two CYOS. Retention curves for IW corroborate these conclusions. The retention curve for AFR/ANG crosses over “other” between eight and ten CYOS, but “other” dominates from ten to approximately twenty-five CYOS.

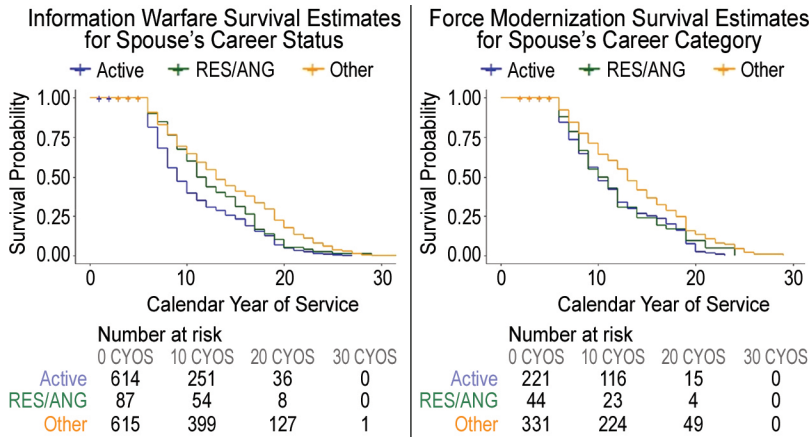


Figure 12.21. Kaplan-Meier curve for spouse's career category (IW and FM)

Women in FM with spouses in “other” jobs are also shown to have the highest retention rates. Their curve dominates all other levels from about eight to twenty-five CYOS. Survival curves for RANG and dual military cross at multiple points between seven and nineteen CYOS. At about nineteen to twenty-two CYOS, dual military are shown to separate or retire more than AFR/ANG. This data may suggest that dual military females are choosing to retire to allow their spouse's career to continue. When asked about the influence their spouse's career had on their decision to separate, dual military female officers indicated that “the spouse whose military career generally suffered was the female rather than the male.”⁸⁴ This factor also leads to the lower representation of female officers in the general officer ranks.

Figure 12.22 shows retention curves based on marital status for female officers in CS. Contrary to results provided in figure 12.10, Combat Support odds ratio of retention for marital status, single female officers are shown to have the worst retention behavior. By ten CYOS, 59 percent of single female officers are shown to attrite. In comparison, 44 percent of married women and 37 percent of previously married-women separate by ten CYOS. Retention curves for married and previously married officers cross at multiple points between ten to twenty CYOS but remain higher than their single colleagues.

Combat Support Survival Estimates for Marital Status

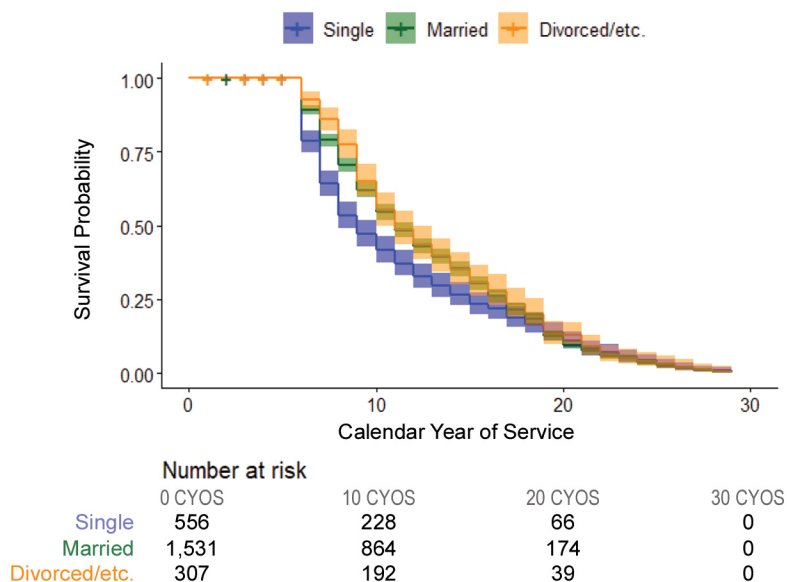


Figure 12.22. Kaplan-Meier curve for marital status (CS)

Overall, single female officers are leaving at a higher rate than others. Single female officers have raised concerns related to delaying their personal lives (e.g., marriage, children, etc.) as reasons to leave the military. They also express the lack of programs for single military members, as most programs provided on bases are family oriented.⁸⁵ Further research examining underlying issues affecting the attrition of single females may aid in developing programs to retain them.

Cox proportional hazards regression. The Cox proportional hazards regression is used to assess the effects of the explanatory indicators on female officer survival rates. Hazard ratios for significant variables are also examined at the cohort and developmental category levels. Stepwise regression from the `coxph()` function determined prior service was not significant. Table 12.9 shows the Wald Chi-Square p values for significant factors at the cohort level.

In figure 12.23, hazard ratios are graphed to indicate whether a covariate is positively or negatively associated with the event probability. Covariates with ranges identified as “reference” are equivalent to variables set as baseline cases in the odds ratio analysis. Figure 12.23 shows married females, females of Asian descent, and those identified

to be more than one race have higher hazards of separating from the USAF. Women with the lowest hazard ratio are those with two-plus deployments followed by those with one deployment, and women with dependents. Confidence intervals for each race are wide, signifying issues in the accuracy of the estimated covariate exists.

Table 12.9. Cox proportional covariate for cohort level. Highlighted entries were found significant in the analysis.

Covariate	p Value
DG	< 0.0001
Dependents	< 0.0001
Deployments	< 0.0001
Marital status	< 0.0406
Spouse's career	< 0.0001
Race	0.0004
Observations	7,017

In figure 12.23, hazard ratios are graphed to indicate whether a covariate is positively or negatively associated with the event probability.

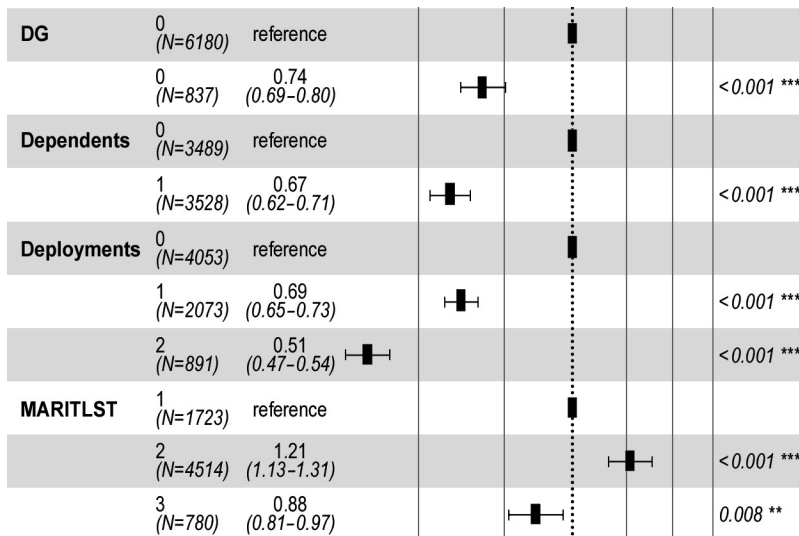
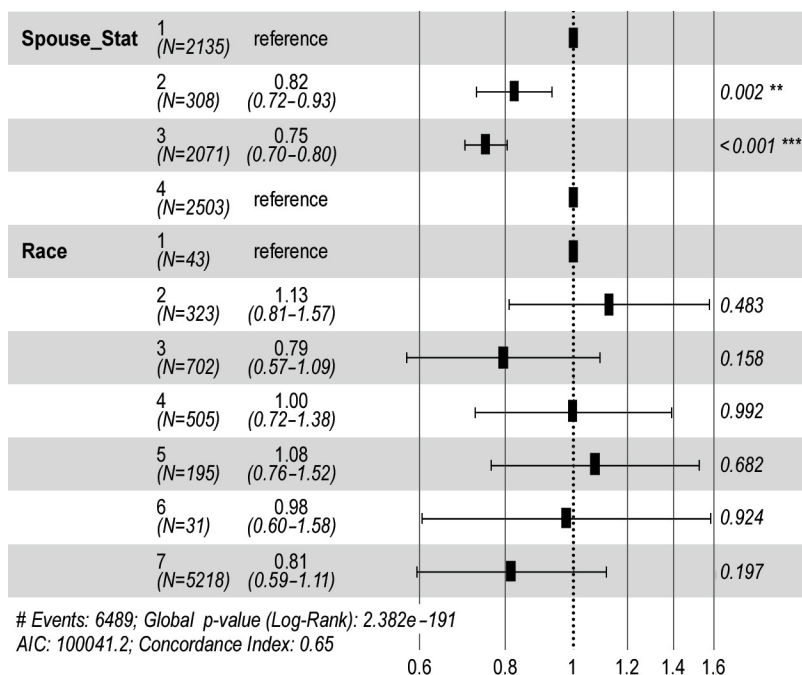


Figure 12.23. Hazard ratios for covariate at the cohort level

Figure 12.23 (continued)



Explanatory variables for each developmental category are shown in table 12.10. Analysis began with the most commonly significant variables resulting from logistic regression (reference logistic regression analysis conducted at the developmental category level and table 12.8). Results from the stepwise regression shows the final variables shown to be significant for each category.

Table 12.10. Cox proportional covariate p values for developmental categories. Results found significant in the analysis are highlighted.

Covariate	Developmental Categories			
	AOSW	IW	CS	FM
Dependents	< 0.001	—	< 0.0001	—
Deployments	< 0.001	0.0002	< 0.0001	0.0343
Marital status	—	—	—	0.0004
Spouse's career	—	< 0.0001	—	0.0123
Prior service	—	—	—	—
Observations	1,587	2,118	2,394	918

Figure 12.24 shows the hazard ratios for Air Operations and Special Warfare. Confidence intervals are wide for female officers with two-plus deployments, which supports the results from the Kaplan-Meier curves indicating that there are issues with the accuracy of the data provided.

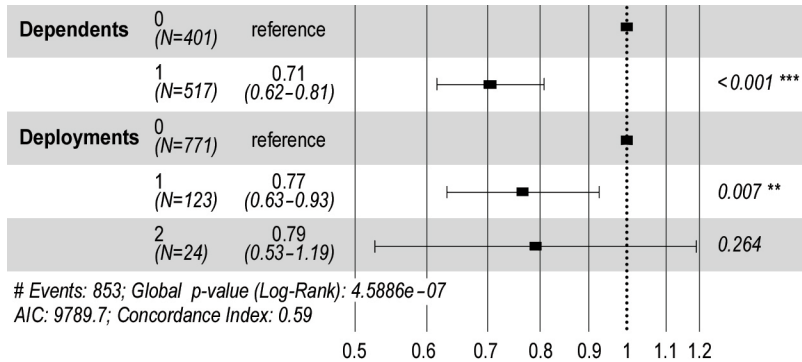


Figure 12.24. Hazard ratios for covariates for AOSW

Figure 12.25 captures the hazard ratios for Information Warfare. Reference variables are not present in the figure since the p values for the other levels are significantly less than 0.0001. Women with two or more deployments are shown to have the best retention ratio.

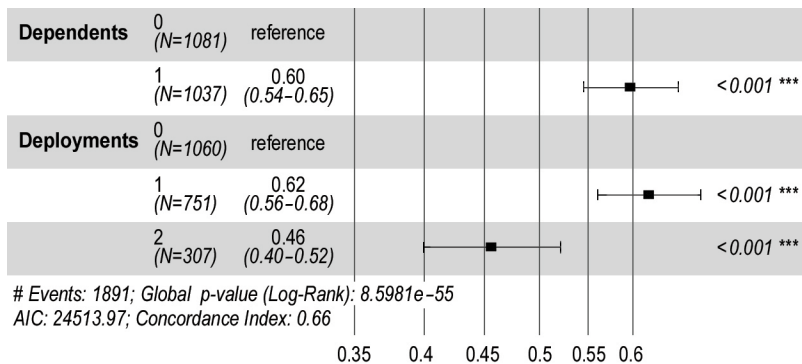


Figure 12.25. Hazard ratios for covariates for IW

Hazard ratios for Combat Support are shown in figure 12.26. There are no issues with accuracy for any of the covariates present in the graph. Results for this category coincide with results provided in the odds ratios and Kaplan-Meier estimates. Female officers with two or more deployments are a good prognostic factor (a factor that has an impact on a variable's outcome) (HR < 1), followed by females with

dependents and one deployment. Poor prognostic factors are prior enlisted and married female officers.

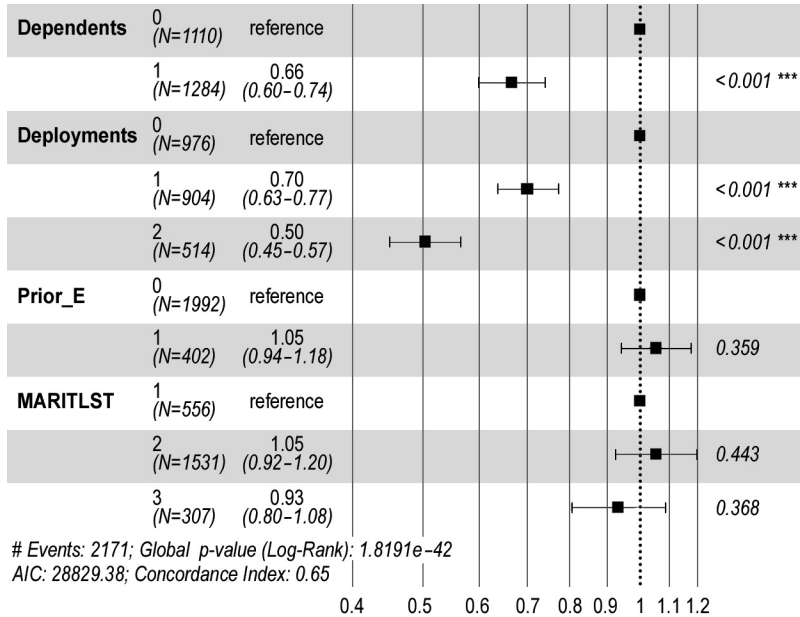


Figure 12.26. Hazard ratios for covariates for CS

Finally, ratios for Force Modernization are displayed in figure 12.27. Confidence intervals for women with two or more deployments confirm that accuracy issues exist with the element, with supporting results found in figure 12.19. Married women (noted under “Spouse Stat”) also display concerns with the data’s accuracy. Previously married women had the highest likelihoods of retention.

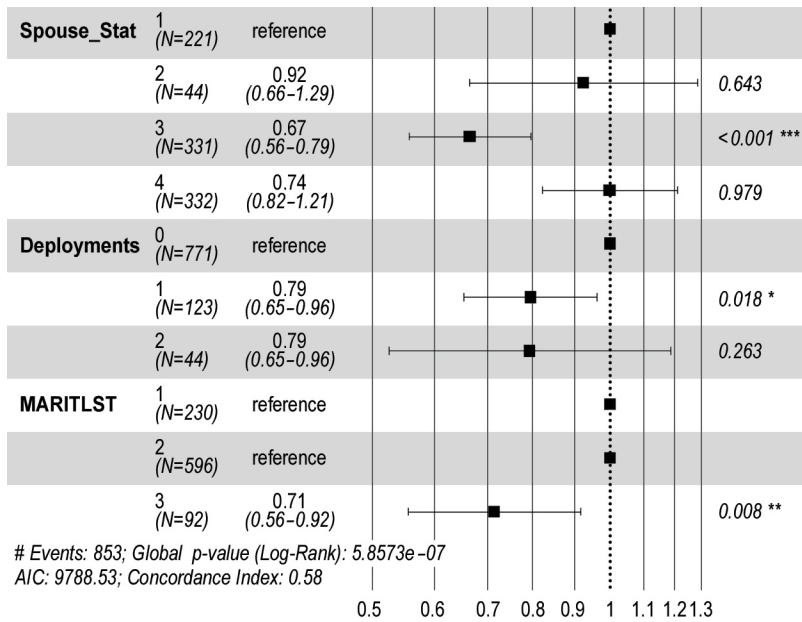


Figure 12.27. Hazard ratios for covariates for FM

Conclusions and Recommendations

Limitations

This study was limited to characterizing retention behavior based on MilPDS demographic data. Access to additional data (e.g., duration of maternity leave, age of dependents, BRS opt-in, etc.) will provide more insight on factors influencing women to separate. The findings in this research have created a foundation for further analysis in female officer retention.

Additionally, analysis of developmental categories did not capture unique nuances related to each AFSC. For example, deployment requirements for an operational research analyst (15A) differ from a cyber analyst (17X). Conclusions for each category have the possibility of being skewed because each one contains a higher population of any one AFSC, dominating the remaining AFSCs in the group. Therefore, findings are concluded for the entire category. To understand

what affects a specific AFSC will require analysis to be conducted at that AFSC level.

Finally, the MilPDS system is prone to errors, such as incorrect inputs, deletions, or glitches. System backups are conducted on a routine basis to mitigate these faults along with processes set in place to fill in missing data. Assumptions were also made to fill in missing information, such as the career category for the spouse of a married female.

Follow-on Research

This research is the first conducted focusing solely on USAF female officer retention behavior through using logistic regression and survival analysis. Future research using other methodologies (e.g., forecasting, simulation, etc.) to assess female officer retention could be used to predict future behavior or explain trends. Including economic, political, and AFSC-specific factors in analysis will provide more accurate results. Factors reflecting recent changes to USAF policy, such as extended maternity leave and combat-related AFSCs, will also inform leadership of the effects these programs have on female officers.

Another program to be included in follow-on research is the Blended Retirement System. This change was not covered, as it became effective in January 2018. Thus, there was only one year of data to analyze for the period of this study, which is not enough to provide an in-depth effect on retention behaviors. Future analysis can compare attrition rates between BRS and legacy retirement members. Including the BRS may have a positive influence because it introduces a mid-career bonus pay. This information is imperative since results from this study have shown that retention declines between eight and twelve CYOS.

Studying the female enlisted force is another approach that continues focus on improving female retention. It is unknown whether elements affecting the officer population also affect enlisted members. Thus, examining this population will aid in determining significant factors and their effect on retention.

Conclusion

Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in the USAF. Diversity in an organization is important because of the value that multiple perspectives can bring to the group. Antecedent studies have analyzed officer and enlisted sectors to understand retention

behaviors. However, statistical analysis focused solely on the female population at the officer or enlisted levels has not been performed. This study furthers the understanding of factors influencing low retention rates of female officer members.

The purpose of this research was to determine factors significant to female officers and their retention behavior based on these elements. Results indicate that the number of dependents, the number of deployments, marital status, and spouse's career category most influence female retention. These factors vary when analyzed at the developmental category level. Dependents affected the rated career fields, while a spouse's career category affected the Information Warfare career field. Women in the Combat Support AFSC were most affected by the number of dependents, marital status, and prior service. Those in the Force Modernization field were also influenced by marital status and spouse's career category. The most prominent factor affecting all categories was the number of deployments. It should be noted that the number of deployments may be confounded with AFSC type, thus influencing results for each developmental category. Finally, contrary to previous studies including male and females, the source of commissioning had no bearing on female attrition.⁸⁶

Common patterns were recognized throughout analysis conducted at the cohort level. Most notably, survival probabilities for populations with the lowest retention rates tended to separate between eight to fifteen CYOS. This result suggests that current incentives aimed at those between these years of service may not be influencing female officers to remain. Single female officers tended to separate from the military after their initial service commitment at a higher rate than married or previously married female officers. This conclusion also applies to women without dependents, all recognized as single in MilPDS. When analyzing marital status, dual military females attrite more than those married to partners in the reserve or civilian sectors. Women with no deployment experience also left the military at a higher rate.

Results for each of the developmental categories contained all the same factors negatively affecting the same populations found at the cohort level. The same can be said for those with the highest retention behavior.

Populations with the highest retention behaviors were women with two or more deployments who also had dependents. Women married to those in the non-DOD or civilian sector and reserve had similar retention behaviors. However, those married to civilians showed higher retention than others past twenty CYOS.

Findings from this study support HAF/A1's work to increase the number of women serving and to improve diversity, inclusion, and equity. Study results also support the efforts of the Diversity and Inclusion Council, enacted by the former Air Force chief of staff, Gen Charles Q. Brown.

Recommendations

Study results reveal that eight to twelve CYOS is a critical time span, with the highest separation rate for female officers. HAF/A1 should evaluate Selective Retention Bonus opportunities to determine whether members closer to the middle of their careers are taking advantage of these programs. Extending SRB service commitments should also be reevaluated to focus on retaining members during the time attrition rates are highest. Data related to BRS continuation pay should also be examined to discern its effects on female officer retention. This information can also be used to compare attrition rates between those who opted into the BRS versus those with the legacy retirement.

Policies supporting the military family are another area that should be under review. The literature review indicates that resources available to military members and their families do not cater to military servicewomen. Dynamics of today's modern family differ from those of older models with a working father and stay-at-home mother. Although women married to members in the civilian sectors displayed higher retention rates, this finding does not conclude that female representation will increase. It is recommended that HAF/A1 conduct research on servicewomen with military spouses, specifically, to assess their needs to create effective programs that will improve marital stability, life, and female retention. Additionally, needs of female members married to other military members may vary from those with non-DOD or civilian spouses. Research on dual military members and their needs is also recommended to provide insight on creating programs to support females married to other military members.

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Captain Astudillo is an operations research analyst for the United States Air Force. Her years of experience span various topics from creating test plans for major DOD programs to policy changes directly impacting underrepresented populations. She continues to pursue her passion in the latter, dedicating her research to those whose unacknowledged contributions improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our armed forces.

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Chapter 13

Women in the Air Force

Past, Present, and Future

Marissa N. Kester

In December 2015, Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced that as of January 1, 2016, women could enter any military career field and serve in any military unit for which they met the standard.

This moment was a culmination of all moments prior.

Since the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act of 1948 first allowed women a permanent position in the regular and reserve forces, there have been doubts surrounding their inclusion in the military. Even after policy decisions were put in place, questions lingered. Was this the right choice? Should women be allowed in the services? To what extent? What should they be allowed to do? What are they capable of? Is it worth the trouble of accommodating women in a "masculine" institution, both logistically and culturally? What are the appropriate "feminine" parameters of their inclusion?

The history we collectively hold and share is primarily documented through the eyes and voices of men. The story of the United States Air Force is no different. Though all members of the Air Force, past and present, collectively refer to and think of themselves as Airmen, the experiences, available opportunities, and perceptions of all Airmen have not been the same.

An inescapable aspect of this topic is that the history of women in any context is often a story of absence, which can make it difficult to write about. Additionally, presenting an established historical narrative from a new or different perspective might imply a reader's beliefs or assumptions are wrong or outdated, which can make it hard to read about. Throughout its seventy-six-year history, the Air Force has often led the way in terms of allowing equal opportunity within the service.

Note: The content in this chapter originally appeared in the author's book, *There From the Beginning: Women in the US Air Force* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2021). Available for free download at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress/>, or request print copies at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress/Bookstore/>.

For simplicity and readability, the terms "Airman" and "Airmen" encompass all Department of the Air Force members, including US Air Force service members, US Space Force Guardians, and civilian and military personnel in all job titles and positions from entry-level to top leadership.

Unlike the other US military branches, the Air Force has never known an existence without women in the ranks. This fact has helped shape the status, integration, opportunities, perceptions, and ultimately utilization of female Airmen throughout the decades. However, at any point in history, the Air Force has still been a product of its time and associated political, economic, and social constructs.

The point is not to sit in judgment or cast blame but instead to understand so we can move forward from this present moment with more awareness and understanding. Dealing intelligently with force-management issues requires that policymakers and those who vote them into power understand how we got to where we are today. Why do we have the current policies, constraints, and reoccurring issues pertaining to women in the Air Force that we do?

The 2015 decision to open all career fields to women seemed to put an end to most of those questions that had followed women in the military since 1948. For the first time, women reached a status of full legal inclusion in the Air Force, something their female predecessors likely never dreamed was possible. Though this was a major milestone and step for not only women in the Air Force but women and pose as men. America, the full value of women in the military still has yet to be realized. As the push for greater diversity of thought, experience, and skill within the force has become a strategic defense imperative, gender integration becomes arguably even more important as we look to the force of the future—one that we cannot risk handling in superficial and temporary ways. Looking back to understand the path and experience of women in the Air Force provides immeasurable context when deciding where we want to go.

Women in the Air Force: A Brief History

American women have always been part of the fight for national security and homeland defense. Long before they were legally considered citizens or held the right to vote, women volunteered to join ranks with men in defense of the United States. For most of our nation's history, they did so with no recognition, protection, benefit, or support.

During the twentieth century, the revolutionary notion that women were also American citizens started to challenge society's long-held roles and expectations about women. The women's suffrage movement, resulting in the Nineteenth Amendment, combined with industrializa-

tion and its offshoots (mass education, urbanization, and the growing use of recently developed technologies such as the typewriter and telephone) encouraged women to step away from the home and into the community in a different manner than before. Preparations for war allowed women to enter the skilled, industrial labor force, working in shipyards, mills, and factories manufacturing aircraft and weapons.

This wave of social change also produced the first official military servicewomen. Throughout history, the most common way women have served with and in the United States military has been as part of the medical services, typically as nurses. These first female nurses worked almost exclusively in combat theaters and were immune from protection or benefits related to their actions since they served strictly in a civilian capacity.¹ However, as has been illustrated time and again, legal status does not protect one from the hardships and horrors of war, which was something nurses often dealt with firsthand.

Though at the turn of the twentieth century American culture generally dictated that the proper place for women was at home, WWI personnel needs tipped the scales, overriding cultural values. A few weeks before the US entered World War I, the US Navy became the first service to place women in full military status. When then secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels asked his legal advisor if there was any law specifying Navy enlisted clerks must be men and was told that due to vague wording technically there was not, he began enlisting women in the Naval Reserve as yeomen (F). In defense of his decision, Daniels stated that by enlisting women “we will have the best clerical assistance the country can provide.”² A year later, the Marine Corps also started enlisting women into its reserve. Except for the 450 civilian female switchboard operators, known as “hello girls,” hired to work overseas for the Army, women were still barred from military service in the Army at this time.

During WWII, the Army Air Forces (AAF) was the first service component to take the lead in using female troops, developing plans early on to employ them in “nonstandard” roles such as aircraft mechanics and radio operators. The women assigned to the AAF were referred to as Air WAACs (Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps) (later Air WACs [Women’s Army Corps]) and were the first US female Airmen.

On September 10, 1942, twenty-eight women showed up to in-process at the AAF’s 2nd Ferrying Group at New Castle Army Air Base in Wilmington, Delaware. These women, nicknamed “the Originals,” formed the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS) and were

the first to fly for the US military. A few days later, the Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD) was formed under famed civilian aviator Jacqueline Cochran, and in 1943 the two units were combined to create the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP).

Despite his best efforts, Army Air Force general Henry H. "Hap" Arnold's push to militarize female pilots, which would have resulted in full military status and benefits, was denied. Shortly after D-Day, on June 21, 1944, the WASP militarization bill was defeated; six months later, on December 20, 1944, the WASPs were deactivated. Throughout the twenty-eight-month duration of the program, 1,102 WASPs conducted a wide variety of flying jobs at 120 US military bases, flying over 60 million collective miles in every type of military aircraft. Of these women, 134 qualified as pursuit pilots, and 38 died in service, primarily due to plane mechanical failures. However, almost immediately after the war ended, these women were largely forgotten. Even during the time of their service, the WASPs received little publicity or recognition. It took thirty-two years for former WASPs to receive militarized status (in 1977) and thirty-three more years to be recognized and awarded a Congressional Gold Medal for their service (in 2010).³

While the postwar US military scrambled to reorganize under mounting tension with the USSR, the glaring gap between current military capability and public deterrence rhetoric helped justify two culturally radical manpower reforms: Public Law (PL) 625 and Executive Order (EO) 9981. Not entirely altruistic or morally progressive, the need for sheer manpower, tinged with political expediency toward gaining the female and African American vote, were enough to push the reforms through the system.⁴ Of additional concern was the inevitable shortage of available manpower if a national emergency occurred within the next decade. Because of the low birth rate during the Great Depression in the 1930s, the number of young, healthy men projected to be available for military service during the 1950s and 1960s was small, especially when compared to the numbers available for World War II.⁵

The success of the WASPs during World War II helped promote the belief that women could play a valid support role in the military, and though the Women's Army Corps faced termination after demobilization, the Army Air Forces worked to prevent that from happening. On June 12, 1948, after a year of bitter congressional and public debate, President Harry Truman signed PL 625, known as the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. This act established, for the first time, a per-

manent place for women in the regular and reserve Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps as commissioned officers, warrant officers, and enlisted members. One month later, EO 9981 established the equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed forces (based on race, not gender), paving the way for racial desegregation of all services, including the newly created Air Force.

The point of the Integration Act was to create a means for mobilizing “woman power” in the event of sudden or large-scale war. As a carryover from most of World War II, the newest female service members were still largely thought of as an auxiliary force with the purpose of “freeing a man to fight.” This mindset translated into numerous restrictions on female service members’ careers that proved difficult to challenge legally and culturally within the coming decades.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean communist troops marched across the 38th parallel into the Republic of Korea, and the brand-new Air Force and Air Force Reserve were unexpectedly put to the test.⁶ Soon after, the Department of Defense announced its plans to double the size of the armed forces, with the goal of three million men in uniform. By August 1950, both officer and enlisted reserve women of all services were caught up in their first military recall on both a voluntary and involuntary basis. In response to lagging recruiting numbers, Secretary of Defense George Marshall created the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) in August 1951 to “give advice and guidance on policies relating to women in the service.”⁷ Over the course of the war the number of women in uniform more than doubled, and by 1953 approximately 12,800 Air Force women were serving worldwide.⁸

Despite the temporary female personnel boost at the beginning of the Korean war, the women’s recruiting campaign was ultimately a failure. These same failures and contributing factors, primarily stemming from changing cultural moods and values, would continue to affect recruitment and retention of women in the Air Force through the next two decades. Because there was no immediate “crisis” to contend with, career options for women continued to shrink as more emphasis was placed upon their feminine responsibilities and roles. All the services slowly shifted women into jobs they could do “as well as or better than men” (meaning administration and nursing), ultimately duplicating their potential civilian status and employment. As the 1950s and 1960s progressed, Air Force women found themselves with

all-time-low personnel numbers and opportunities and increasingly isolated and segregated from the rest of the force.

The 1970s were a turning point for military women due to greater equality and opportunity through legislation and a change in perception of how American women saw themselves, their roles, and their potential in the Air Force. Together, the effects of the Vietnam War, the equal rights movement, and the expanding numbers of women in the labor force created the opportunistic boost necessary to break the Women in the Air Force's (WAF) stagnation—and arguably regression—of the previous fifteen years. By the end of the decade, the US had become the world leader in use of military “womanpower,” both in total number as well as in proportion to the total force, with the Air Force leading the way.⁹

In retrospect, Vietnam was a turning point—and a major external influence on the integration of women into the service. All the ways the war had played out made it clear the Air Force was no longer living in a Cold War–era climate. The character of warfare had changed, and so had the way the Air Force was mobilized and used to fight. These major perspective shifts would soon be accompanied by the switch to an all-volunteer military force, which would affect everything from doctrine and tactics to personnel management—and specifically the use of womanpower.

Similar to the initial integration of women into the force, the primary motivation for further inclusion of women was not necessarily inspirational or altruistic but because they were needed to solve a potential personnel problem: the viability and sustainability of an all-volunteer force (AVF). By 1973, only four Air Force specialties remained closed to women: pilot, navigator, missile operations, and security forces. All would open within the next decade. In 1976, the same year the WAF director's position and office were quietly dissolved, pilot training was opened to women. A year later women became eligible for aviation duty in non-combat aircraft, and the Titan missile crew duty was opened to women. By the end of the decade, it had become clear the removal of the draft and the increase in the number of servicewomen had actually increased the quality of recruits. The percentage of women in traditional jobs had dropped from 90 percent (1972) to 54 percent, and female officers were now flying jets, teaching flight skills, and sitting at the launch controls of ICBMs, while enlisted women were maintaining fighter aircraft, missiles, and computers; operating large equipment; refueling aircraft on the ground and in flight; and controlling air traffic.¹⁰

The late seventies and early eighties were a highlight reel of firsts for women in the Air Force. In 1976, three years after the first female naval officers earned their military pilot wings, the Air Force allowed women into pilot training. After placing the first woman on operational crew status in 1975, Strategic Air Command assigned the first woman aircrew member to alert duty in 1978. In 1982, the Air Force selected its first female aviator for Test Pilot School, and the following year an Air Force Reserve (AFR) officer was selected as the first woman in any reserve component to be promoted to brigadier general. A major policy landmark for women came in 1983 when Congress passed Public Law 98-160, establishing a much-needed female veterans' commission. This law further legitimized females in the military, acknowledging women should be treated as equals, not as men, in respect to their military service.¹¹

From the late 1980s to mid-1990s, combat exclusion policies began to be tested and updated, ultimately landing on the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule (DGCDAR) in 1994. These changes were aided by women's participation in the Gulf War, which was the largest deployment of military women in US history up until that point. Dubbed the "Mommy War" by the US media, American military women did almost every mission except engage in physical combat, although the line was often blurred. In the eyes of the American public, the Cold War and Gulf War proved that America could win wars with an all-volunteer force.

Since 2000, particularly after the events of 9/11, the test and question for America's volunteer military has become sustainability. The weight of continuous, worldwide military involvement since 2001, particularly in the Middle East, has required all the military services to create and enact both major and minor policy and cultural changes to support and maintain the AVF. The services have little choice but to think in terms of families and minorities, generational patterns, and quality of life requirements to be able to recruit and retain individuals who are not only talented but also willing to serve. Supporting women's careers and leadership development has been a critical part of this process.

The evolving process of AVF sustainment has been a slow transformation from the belief that the military is, or should be, a traditional, masculine institution into one that is increasingly progressive and diverse. Military personnel diversity has moved from a congressional requirement to something that is viewed as advantageous to the force

and the mission. However, the practical implementation and response to creating a diverse force has met some expected resistance along the way. The full inclusion of women into the most masculine of institutions has required a dance of external factors and internal influencers but is ultimately the result of every woman who has been willing to step into the arena along the way. Since 2000, the Air Force has led the way within the DOD in bridging the gap from theoretical diversity to practical implementation.

Women in the Air Force Today

It has been more than seven decades since the Air Force was established and women were first allowed into the armed services. Today, women comprise about 21.4 percent of the regular Air Force (69,728 total) and 27.7 percent of the Air Force Reserve (approximately 19,000 total).¹² The percentage of women in both the regular and reserve components steadily ticked up since 2016 (see table 13.1). Across all ranks, the reserve component has maintained a consistently higher percentage of women than the regular component. Both regular and reserve components followed the same general trend, with the lowest percentage of women compared to men in the most senior ranks and the highest percentage of women in the lowest ranks.

Table 13.1. Women in regular and reserve components of Air Force (2016), rounded to nearest 500

Regular component^a	Total	No. Women	% Women
Regular enlisted	265,000	54,000	20.4
Regular officer	63,500	14,000	21.9
Regular total	328,500	68,000	20.7
Reserve component^b	Total	No. Women	% Women
Reserve enlisted	55,000	14,500	26.4
Reserve officer	14,000	3,500	26.4
Reserve total ^c	69,000	18,000	26.4

Sources:

^a “Total Force Military Demographics,” 2016.

^b “Total Force Military Demographics,” 2016.

^c Selected Reserve only (traditional reservist, active guard reservist, air reserve technician, individual mobilization augmentee); Total Selected Reserve Authorizations in 2019: 70,000; Total Reserve available (including all Individual Ready Reserve [IRR], retired and standby Reserve personnel) in 2019: 847,816.

The Air Force has consistently maintained the highest average percentage of women across all services, with 20 percent of its total force being female in 2019. Despite this growth, the female population across all services has mostly leveled off since the 1990s. Retention of female Airmen, particularly officers, has become a high personnel priority over the last decade, with various aspects of the retention question undergoing active analysis at the time of this writing.

Prior to combat-related fields (aviation, missiles, special forces, etc.) being opened to women during the 1980s and 1990s, women's retention and promotion were not typically considered in force management decisions. In the last twenty-five years, the Air Force and other services have pivoted in adapting their policies, creating programs, and generally shifting their perspective to that of considering and supporting a woman's career in the military.

Women's inclusion, acceptance, and utilization in the military have developed rapidly over the last century. However, these changes have had nothing to do with a change in female capability or character. Women have always been just as brave, patriotic, smart, skilled, and willing to serve and fight as any man. It is our cultural perception of women and what they bring to the fight that has changed over time and is continuing to expand today.

Gender integration—into the military and American workforce at large—was one of the most hotly contested social issues of the twentieth century, demanding both men and women understand that femininity was not a bar to competence any more than masculinity was a guarantee of it. Currently, few could argue women are not fully included in the Air Force at both a policy and practical level. Where the Air Force has the potential, and perhaps even responsibility, to go is full gender integration. Integration requires shifting foundational and fundamental perspectives related to the institution as a whole. It requires examining what the Air Force as an institution values in its Airmen and leaders, the way it sees itself as a military service, its place in the national defense strategy, and the problems it might face now and in the future.

Ultimately, the genuine integration of women—or other under-represented sectors—in the Air Force ultimately rests on perceived value. People will not show up, let alone speak up, if they do not feel their presence or opinion is genuinely heard and considered. Part of valuing female service members is having policies that support their career goals and ability to serve without undue stressors, both of which

have been areas of focus over the last few years. But a deeper, more integrated way to value women is to change the culture around what it means to serve, lead, and be a good Airman.

Gender Integration: Why Does It Matter?

Considering the future of women in the Air Force, many variables arise. Some are tactical-level items that can be handled with action teams and policy changes. Others are strategic, harder-to-grasp issues that will take commitment and time to change but nevertheless will have a major impact on the Air Force and the women serving in it.

Before discussing problems and solutions, we must always first challenge our assumptions and ask the question, Does it matter? At its core, the Air Force “is a utilitarian institution. Its bottom line is effective national defense, and the only viable metric is mission effectiveness. Anything that does not feed that core purpose is a luxury and unaffordable in the current fiscal, political, and strategic climate. This is true from hardware to personnel management, and it drives service emphasis on meritocratic personnel systems. Meritocracy is a deeply ingrained value and belief within the Air Force and broader DOD, and rightfully so; after all, our military requires superior performance to ensure our national security objectives.”¹³ Why should we focus energy and resources on caring about physical descriptors, such as biological gender, if the mission always comes first? It is because the body we inhabit comes with a preordained value based on our cultural consciousness. One’s body determines their experience of the world. Those experiences offer unique perceptions, skills, experiences, and ideas regarding perceived problems and solutions. Ultimately, mission effectiveness and diversity of thought are synergistic and become even more so as technological advances continue to shift the character of warfare.

In an era of great power competition, with a level technological playing field and outmatched human resource pool, innovation is where future wars will be won.¹⁴ On an official visit to the People’s Liberation Army’s National University of Defense Technology in Changsha, China, two colleagues from the Air Force Research Institute spoke with a group of senior Chinese officers about an edition of the *Air and Space Power Journal* (Chinese-language version). In the conversation, the colleagues noted the officers’ view that “the People’s

Liberation Army Air Force could overcome American technology in a conflict, but—where they fell short in their eyes—was in ingenuity, independence, and creativity.”¹⁵ Innovation requires a culture that signals no one person, team, position, rank, or gender is the exclusive source of new ideas and solutions. Central to the Air Force’s foundational identity and purpose, the service’s long-term focus on innovation is perhaps the reason women have generally been more integrated into the Air Force than any other service starting with the Army Air Force in World War II.

The military necessity for innovation goes hand in hand with the need for diversity. This imperative is echoed in the 2013 *Air Force Diversity Strategic Roadmap*: “Diversity is a military necessity. . . . [Diversity] opens the door to creative solutions to complex problems and provides our Air Force a competitive edge in air, space, and cyberspace. . . . Diversity is an imperative if the Air Force is to remain competitive in attracting, recruiting, and retaining America’s best talent.”¹⁶

In an increasingly competitive and dynamic global environment, encouraging diversity opens the discussion to different ideas, perceptions, and realizations concerning both problems and solutions. This is where the value of diversity—and for the purpose of this book, women—in the Air Force really lies: in expanding the toolbox to include the entire range of human experience, wisdom, talent, and capability. However, for diverse ideas and perceptions to be of value, they must be heard and understood. To get those innovative ideas and perceptions to the table in the first place, those who carry them must be valued for their outside-the-norm perception and line of thinking. Our current force management model is predicated on looking to past conflicts to prepare for future conflicts. The underlying bias here is believing that because our current systems have made us the greatest military and air force in the world since World War II, any change to the status quo is a fundamental threat to our military superiority.¹⁷ At every major turn, the inclusion of women into fields previously prohibited, such as aviation and combat, has felt like an existential threat to not only the culture but also the effectiveness of the force. Unfortunately for those who are still unknowingly operating under these biases, the world is changing, as it tends to do. The rise of great power competition and strategic-level rivalries, artificial intelligence, and sociopolitical change on a global scale has affected the way we think about and fight wars. Innovation has become the name of the game over the last century, and the stakes feel higher now than ever.

Talent Management

A primary, if not *the* primary, weapon to combat current and future problems is talent management. By 2030, China will have four times the US population and fifteen times the number of science, technology, engineering, and math graduates as the US. Based on numbers alone, it would appear that China has a significant advantage in leveraging human capital for the People's Liberation Army. However, as history often illustrates, military power cannot be measured in a simple one-for-one body count. Just as an aircraft, weapon, or sensor is only as good as the operator, a military is only as good as the way it can leverage its largest resource—people. While effectively managing the hundreds of thousands of individuals who compose the Air Force has never been a simple or straightforward feat, in an era of “do more with less” the importance of overcoming obstacles to recruiting, retaining, and managing a diversity of talent cannot be overstated.

A primary obstacle to effective talent management is that current personnel management policies are based on outdated cultural values. They were created by and for previous generations and are increasingly incompatible with those who serve today. The Air Force, as with all other services, must adapt to the larger American social climate in order to recruit and retain the best talent available. This is not a personal, moral, or even national defense issue; it is simply the reality of having a resource-constrained, all-volunteer force. A 2017 Pentagon study found that 71 percent of adults between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four are ineligible to serve; in 2020, that percentage rose to 77 percent.¹⁸ No military service can afford to think of itself solely as an elite, masculine institution anymore. This type of self-image promotes homogenization of thought and perception and makes it difficult to recruit and retain anyone who feels they do not fit this image. Broadly speaking, “we must reform our personnel practices into a talent management system that provides Airmen the flexibility they need to integrate their service-life balance across the span of their lives and career through greater agency and commander involvement.”¹⁹ Talent management has become the new name of the game. The Air Force will need to continue developing more “effective and holistic methodologies for defining, measuring, and identifying diverse talent” to cultivate the most effective force of the future.²⁰

A fundamental part of talent management—and indeed where the services focus—is the policies and systems in place that support service-

women daily. In the past, women have generally succeeded in integrating themselves into the force by following the status quo and continually proving themselves and their worth. They have found ways to work around existing policies that did not account for women's needs or simply accepted the reality of their career limitations. They have pumped breastmilk in storage closets and toilet stalls, traded childcare with male coworkers' spouses, attempted to plan families around career opportunities, taken hormonal birth control to deploy, worn ill-fitting uniforms and protective gear, and dehydrated themselves so they would not have to use the restroom during a flight. These are just a few of the countless examples of ways women have ensured that the mission was accomplished. The side effect of acceptance has been giving the perception to leadership that there are no problems or inequities, when in fact there are.

Since their inception, task forces and teams that support women's integration and advancement in the force, such as the Air Force Women's Initiative Team and Air Force Barrier Analysis Working Group, have proven to be the most effective way to tackle those hidden problems through policy change. As we have seen through the history of women in the Air Force, diversity cannot be mandated—and when it is, it tends to be much less effective. Therefore, these groups have succeeded by focusing on identifying institutional barriers to female entry, retention, and advancement. So far, changes affecting women have primarily fallen into two categories: pregnancy/family support and human systems integration.

Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Family Support

In less than fifty years, the force has gone from seeing pregnancy and motherhood as entirely incompatible with military service to leading the way with policy reform to accommodate and support the realities and needs of women and families. In previous generations, particularly recruiting campaigns in the 1950s, the Air Force was almost entirely concerned with the recruitment of women with no hope or plan for retention. It was accepted and expected, by culture and reinforced by policy, that the Air Force was a pit stop on the path to marriage and children. As waivers became acceptable and policies changed to accommodate marriage and motherhood in a service-woman's career, the emphasis shifted from recruitment to the retention

of those women, particularly through childbearing years.²¹ As the trend of both men and women seeking greater agency and flexibility in their careers and work-life balance has strengthened, American values and expectations concerning marriage, parenting, income, and career have also shifted. While family policies can either hurt or support both men and women, the current cultural reality is that women are the ones who most often alter their military career by separation or suboptimization to accommodate their families' needs. As a result, retaining women has become a more important factor—and revealing indicator—of proper force and talent management.

Historically, pregnancy and motherhood have been significant barriers to female retention and career advancement. In the 2018 RAND study *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force*, focus groups found that family and personal life were prevalent themes regarding a woman's decision to separate from the force.²² Additionally, groups found that 83 percent of participants identified the importance of having female role models in senior leadership positions. Participants emphasized that they rarely see female leaders who are married with children. The resulting perception among younger female officers is that it is not possible for women to both have a family and become a senior leader in the Air Force. While the DOD has begun a policy review for the career enhancement of pregnant US service members, a primary focus going forward needs to be destigmatizing pregnancy and motherhood in the military.

Human Systems Design and Integration

In her book *Invisible Women*, Caroline Criado Perez opens with the point that “seeing men as the human default is fundamental to the structure of human society.”²³ This foundation of “male as the universal bias” is the lens through which Western civilization has viewed the world and accordingly developed. The result of this bias is what Perez has termed the *gender data gap*: “From cars that are 71% less safe for women than men (because they've been designed using a 50th percentile male dummy), to voice-recognition technology that is 70% less likely to accurately understand women than men (because many algorithms are trained on 70% male datasets), to medication that doesn't work when a woman is on her period (because women weren't included in the clinical trials), we are living in a world that has been designed

for men because for the most part, we have not been collecting data on women. This is the gender data gap.”²⁴ Additionally, “one of the most important things to say about gender gap data is that it is not generally malicious, or even deliberate. Quite the opposite, it is simply the product of a way of thinking that has been around for millennia and is, therefore, a kind of *not* thinking” (emphasis in original).²⁵

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all the ways human systems integration is currently being, or still needs to be, evaluated and updated with women in mind, key topics for the Air Force include the following:

- Job-specific height requirements (founded on outdated anthropometric data)
- Aircraft and flight equipment design, such as ejection seats, in-flight bladder relief, fixed-wing helmets, and maternity flight suits
- Safety and protective equipment, such as body armor
- Facility adaptation
- Combat trauma care procedures
- Decision-making algorithms
- Maternity uniforms

Policy is where the Air Force can display what it values and believes is required to have the best, most efficient and effective force possible. But policy changes and good intentions can only go so far. Discussions around gender integration often focus on developing policies to solve the recurring issues of recruiting and retaining women. These are incredibly necessary and appreciated, but policy changes are not the final solution. It is not enough to just get, keep, and promote women within the existing system—it is time for the system to update its values concerning women in the service.

Implicit Bias and Value

As we have seen over the course of the history of women in the Air Force, the inclusion and integration of minorities into the military is often a product of personnel needs rather than a moral or innovative imperative. Mandatory changes, particularly those that come from outside the force, that benefit women, people of color, or any other

minority group can feel like a liberal agenda trying to “transform the military from a competitive meritocracy to an entitlement-oriented social justice organization.”²⁶ This reaction is based on outdated cultural beliefs that place the experiences, perceptions, and understanding held by the masses as truer than those held by the few. Though women compose 50 percent of the population, their less than 50 percent representation in the force still qualifies them as “the few,” immediately underestimating their value and therefore potential impact on the mission. This is not a conscious choice anyone makes—as beliefs and values are held at a deeper level than cognitive awareness—but instead illustrates implicit bias in action.

Bias is generally defined as attitudes, behaviors, and actions that are prejudiced in favor of (or against) one person or group compared to another. It is the physical manifestation of what we believe to be true. Though this mindset is a cognitive reality we all engage in, biases are something we can become aware of and actively work to shift or even eliminate. On the other hand, *implicit bias* is a judgment that occurs automatically and unintentionally, and it is often at odds with what our minds believe to be true. It is the step before physical action existing in the seemingly murky realm of belief and value. Modern research on implicit bias suggests that people can—and do—act on deeply ingrained cognitive shortcuts such as stereotypes and prejudices without intending to do so.²⁷

Imagine Steve, who intellectually believes that women and men are equally suited for service and careers in the military. Despite his explicitly egalitarian belief, Steve might nevertheless behave in a number of biased but accepted ways, such as distrusting feedback from his female coworkers, describing a stern female leader as “bitchy,” or choosing a man instead of a woman for a specific job opportunity where both candidates were equally qualified. Part of the reason for Steve’s discriminatory behavior might be an implicit gender bias. Programmed into us by our families, communities, and culture, implicit bias is essentially at the level of myth: it forms the foundation of our cultural narrative and reinforces the values we base our lives on, both individually and collectively.

The deeper roadblocks to gender integration truly lie at the (often) unconscious level of belief and value. What we value is determined by what we believe, and what we believe is determined by our cultural, familial, and personal narratives, or myth. What our cultural myth tells us about the incompatibility of war and women is what we believe

and therefore built into military institutions, whether our conscious minds agree.

The good news is that myth can be updated, though it may take multiple generations to shift the collective perspective. Social change typically works in this way; the actions of one generation become the common, accepted experience of the next. Recent cinematic trends that feature a female superheroine as the main character, such as *Wonder Woman* and *Captain Marvel*, are examples of how the myths concerning women and war can start to change. While the Air Force and individual units can, and should, update their history and heritage displays to include women, ultimately there is still cognitive tension with the larger American mythos that does not correlate the idea of women in war outside a stand-alone, masculinized female superhero. A primary reason for this incongruence lies in deeply embedded cultural beliefs regarding gender and the proper structure of the world.

Military as a Masculine Institution

Our Western lens of the world stems from the ancient Greek world-view and philosophy—of which dualism is a primary characteristic. The belief that situations, ideas, and people must either be this or that is deeply embedded into the way our civilization views the world, one another, and ourselves. To orient around this belief, our brains create shortcuts: good is *this*, bad is *that*; right is *this*, wrong is *that*; masculine is *this*, feminine is *that*. Certain human qualities became prescriptions assigned as either masculine or feminine and then conflated with biological gender, operating under the unwritten rule that nary the two shall meet. As such, in the Western psyche, war, violence, combat, and technology are perceived as exclusively masculine domains and qualities.²⁸ In the modern Western mind, the military is one of the longest-held, most traditionally masculine institutions there is—a man's world. However, most ancient cultures associated their fiercest deities of war with women. The Sumerian goddess Inanna, Babylonian Ishtar, Egyptian Sekhmet, Norse Freya, and Hindu Kali are examples of warrior goddesses revered for their beauty, strength, and power. Even after the status and perception of women began shifting significantly around 800–600 BCE, in the aftermath of the axial age, the warrior goddesses Athena (Greek) and Bellona (Roman) were still primary players in early Western mythology and culture.²⁹

For most of human history, the ability, willingness, and skills to engage in warfare, violence, and the pursuit of power were not thought of as exclusively masculine attributes. We are not bound in any way to this military-as-masculine perception except through our own modern cultural mythology (and lack of knowledge/appreciation for pre-Roman Christianity history).

The point here is not to argue the merits for or against this perception but to instead point it out as an operating assumption and, thus, potential barrier to diversity and, ultimately, mission effectiveness. By continuing to uphold the cultural belief that war and the military are masculine domains, we are perpetuating the “male as universal” view and institutionalizing it in the forms of policy, practices, and values. For example, when it comes to analyzing adversaries and war-gaming solutions, masculine-based thinking (linear, systems based, hierarchical) often perpetuates itself by viewing the problem and solution through the same lens, potentially resulting in catastrophic blind spots. Overreliance and emphasis on technology, systems-based, and tactical-level solutions easily and imperceptibly turn into Maslow’s law of the instrument—a cognitive bias holding that when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail.³⁰ As a military service, the Air Force must stay open and aware of ways it is self-limiting its innovation and effectiveness. If genuinely valued, different ways of thinking and perceiving can help cut through biases and assumptions we did not know we had.

Similarly, in efforts to recruit and retain a diverse force, institutionalized masculine perception ends up as a self-selection machine in which only those who think and see the world the same way are the ones who stay in the service and rise to the top. What we categorize and value as “military professionalism” is a codification of this homogenization. Conformity and compliance with protocol, uniforms, dress and appearance regulations, standardized operations, continuity processes, career development paths, promotion standards, and so on are all external symbols of value. The institutional belief is that the better one conforms and complies with these measurements of professionalism, the smarter, more capable, and generally better the Airman is. While perhaps useful in certain circumstances, this belief also holds a high degree of tension opposing innovative thinking, creativity, independence, and diversity of thought. Likewise, the Air Force’s historical bent toward viewing itself as an elite force with a core value of excellence can end up reiterating homogenization. While the core

values are well-intentioned guide points for the Air Force to vector itself, it is useful to examine the individual implicit biases that may occur when leading toward or comparing these values. What is the standard for defining excellence, and under whose lens does that purview lay?

This military-as-masculine bias continues down to the individual experience level. Though our conscious mind may tell us differently, our implicit biases and beliefs still dictate who we perceive to be the best fit for a combat job, typically a white, educated, and physically fit man. The bias for the best family structure for supporting a career remains the 1950s nuclear family model with a full-time, domestic, noncareer spouse. Finally, the appropriate career progression and promotion structure follow requirements legislated by the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) in a certain time window that corresponds with prime childbearing years and do not account for personal career goals. Many units and career fields still hold the belief that those who show their face the most and stay in the office the longest are the best workers. We support that belief by valuing those who do so with awards, high rankings among peers, and leadership track opportunities. But this belief inherently negatively impacts parents, particularly mothers, as they are considered the default caregiver in most households.³¹

By watching their parents, school and religion norms, the media, and leaders in the community and world around them, children figure out at a young age which qualities are valued and rewarded in our masculine-oriented society: typically, assertiveness, ambition, action, and analytical orientation. Often these culturally approved “masculine” qualities can become overdeveloped to the exclusion of more “feminine” qualities, such as cooperation, empathy, and intuition.³² Therefore, the presence of more women in the force does not always necessarily equate to the presence of more diverse strengths and skill sets. To reiterate, the argument is not regarding biological gender or implying that one is better than the other; rather, female inclusion policies and quotas are not enough and in fact may encourage a scarcity mindset. True integration—and the benefits of it—lie at the level of belief that feminine perception and skills are equally critical to national defense, strategy, and war fighting.

Though the character of warfare changes, the nature of war remains consistent.³³ At the heart of this consistency is humanness; war is a human attempt to sort out human problems—most of which defy

technological and linear solutions. War is bigger than our cultural perceptions and classifications of it and therefore will always require the appreciation and use of skills and strengths that cover the entire range of humanity. Skills certainly not exclusive to women include empathy, emotional congruence (or intuition), creativity, collaboration, the ability to sit in nuance and complexity without acting, and the ability to nurture teams, projects, environments, and ideas; however, they are culturally associated as feminine.³⁴ Therefore, in a masculine-oriented culture, their perceived importance and value have long been diminished. At the tactical and operational levels of war, the integration of masculine and feminine skills and strengths will most effectively handle the unavoidably human aspect of war. We must discard certain outdated aspects of our cultural conditioning around gender so we can embrace the full potential of human capability.

The military is a unique organization in that personnel practices should not be altered based on fairness or even moral obligation; mission effectiveness is the metric by which we must live and operate. As such, we must always stay open to the idea that we are blind to our blind spots, our assumptions (beliefs) might be faulty or outdated, military culture change is unavoidable, and war does not care about tradition, ego, or a combatant's gender.

Conclusion

Meeting the dynamic and complex challenges the nation faces now and in the future will require innovative leaders able and willing to foster a culture of trust and respect for all, not just those who fit the current value system. Effective talent management and updated institutional values will encourage those with diverse skills, aptitudes, experiences, ideas, and perspectives to express them in pursuit of innovative solution sets. Women and gender integration are a big part of this necessary culture shift.

For our nation to survive and thrive, we need to remember the inherent value of the feminine in what were previously considered masculine domains. History can offer us a place to start remembering the myths we need as we move into a new world: women as warriors and leaders. The first generation of female Airmen had to prove their worth despite their femininity by putting their heads down, accepting what was given, and pushing forward. The following generations had

to overdevelop and overvalue masculine skills to be accepted. Standing on the shoulders of their predecessors, the newest generation of female Airmen is less likely to have to, or be willing to, do either of those things.

Examining the beliefs that undermine our individual and institutional values is a personal responsibility of both men and women. We are at a point in the gender integration story where the plotline is no longer that women must fight to be seen and included but, instead, where everyone must examine what they believe when it comes to the role and potential of women in the military. The goal of gender integration is not gender neutrality. It is to value the feminine and the masculine equally, realizing that every human embodies both aspects and skillsets. It is to stop wasting energy on outdated metrics of excellence and professionalism that promote homogeneity of thought, action, and perception. And it is to encourage all Airmen to bring their strengths to the table in an environment where difference in opinion, personality, appearance, interests, and career goals is valued. This is the way to take diversity from a cognitive exercise to a realized strategic weapon.

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Notes

(In lieu of a bibliography, all references are fully cited the first time they appear in each chapter.)

1. Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Presidio Press, 1992), 11–12.
2. The 1916 US Naval Reserve Act permitted the enlistment of qualified “persons” for service in the Navy. Holm, 9–10.
3. Ann B. Carl, *A WASP Among Eagles: A Woman Military Test Pilot in World War II* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1999), 111.
4. Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607–2012* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 451.
5. Linda Witt et al., *“A Defense Weapon Known to Be of Value”: Servicewomen of the Korean War Era* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2005), 62.
6. From 1948 to 1949 the US had withdrawn troops from Korea as the Joint Chiefs of Staff determined the country had no strategic value. After the invasion, President

Truman believed the US needed to take a firm stand to lessen the chances of Soviet communist expansion in Europe. Thought of as a “preventative and limited war,” the US still needed to build up its military forces to cope with the immediate crisis while preparing for what at the time seemed to be an increasingly possible World War III. Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *For the Common Defense*, 453.

7. Throughout the history of women in military service, DACOWITS has been critical to pushing for further integration and equality of women in the military, often proposing measures years, if not decades, before their passage. Women in all services owe much to the committee.

8. Martha Lockwood, “Women’s Legacy Parallels Air Force History,” Air Force News Service, September 18, 2014, <https://www.af.mil/>.

9. Holm, *Women in the Military*, 246.

10. After initial policy changes early in the decade, Air Force women were still only being assigned to 70 percent of the non-combat jobs that were technically open to them. While some women did not know certain jobs were now open to them, others preferred traditional jobs that they knew would help get them hired for future civilian job positions. In response, the services created mandatory “sex-based, affirmative-action” quotas for nontraditional occupations (mechanical, electronic, etc.) and caps on easy-to-fill traditional occupations (administration, medical, personnel, etc.). Though well intentioned, the quotas resulted in overly ambitious recruiting goals for nontraditional jobs, while caps on traditional jobs sent many qualified women away from service. Women in nontraditional jobs often experienced low morale as they lacked interaction or support with fellow servicewomen. Holm, 274–75.

11. Marissa N. Kester, *There From the Beginning: Women in the US Air Force* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2021), 117, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AUPress/>.

12. Air Force Personnel Center, “Active-Duty Demographics,” March 23, 2023, <https://www.afpc.af.mil/>; and Air Force Reserve Public Affairs, “Air Force Reserve Snapshot: 3rd Quarter 2020,” afrc.af.mil/Portals/.

13. An excellent resource for this topic and the source for this quote is a paper by Maj Heather “Lucky” Penney and Maj Mirriam “Blitz” Krieger, *Female Officer Retention and the Millennial Imperative: Transforming Force Management into Talent Management* (Washington, DC: Chief of the Staff of the Air Force Special Project, 2016), 3.

14. First given a conceptual name in the 2017 National Security Strategy, great power competition, or long-term strategic competition, is the modern phrase used to refer to conventional defense thinking and strategy, primarily against Russia and China.

15. Adam Lowther and Brooke Mitchell, “Professional Military Education Needs More Creativity, Not More History,” War on the Rocks, May 28, 2020, 21, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

16. Air Force Global Diversity Division, AF/A1DV, *USAF Diversity Strategic Roadmap*, March 12, 2013, 4, <https://www.af.mil/>.

17. Penney and Krieger, *Female Officer Retention*, 3.

18. Thomas Novelly, “Even More Young Americans Are Unfit to Serve, a New Study Finds. Here’s Why,” Military.com, September 28, 2022, <https://www.military.com/>. According to 2017 Pentagon data, 71 percent of young Americans between 17 and 24 are ineligible to serve in the United States military primarily because they do not meet educational or physical fitness requirements or they have a criminal history. According to the Pentagon, in 2020 that figure rose 6 percent. Comprising 50 percent of the US population, women qualify for military service at a higher rate than men but continue to be recruited and retained at much lower rates.

19. Penney and Krieger, *Female Officer Retention*, 45.
20. Penney and Krieger, 22.
21. Kirsten M. Keller et al., *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force*, Research Report RR-2073-AF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), <https://www.rand.org/>.
22. Keller et al.
23. Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (New York: Abrams Press, 2019), 1.
24. Caroline Criado Perez, “We Need to Close the Gender Data Gap by Including Women in Our Algorithms,” *Time Magazine*, Special Issue, 2020, <https://time.com/>. TIME’s Davos 2020 issue was produced in partnership with the World Economic Forum.
25. Perez, *Invisible Women*.
26. Penney and Krieger, *Female Officer Retention*, 3.
27. National Institutes of Health, “Implicit Bias,” accessed July 31, 2019, <https://diversity.nih.gov/>.
28. R. Brian Ferguson, “Masculinity and War,” *Current Anthropology* 62, no. S23 (February 2021): S108–S120, <https://doi.org/10.1086/711622>.
29. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, 1st Ballantine books ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 2, 16–18.
30. The Decision Lab, “Why Do We Use the Same Skills Everywhere?”
31. Sally Helgesen, “The Evolution of Women’s Leadership,” *Strategy + Business*, no. 100 (Autumn 2020), <https://www.strategy-business.com/>.
32. Milan N. Vego, “Systems versus Classical Approach to Warfare,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 52, 1st Qtr (2009): 40–48, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA515175.pdf>.
33. Vego, 40–48. As Professor Vego of the Naval War College points out in his article, there is a difference between the nature and character of war. The nature of war refers to the “constant, universal, and inherent qualities that ultimately define war throughout the ages, such as violence, chance, luck, friction, and uncertainty.” The character of war refers to “those transitory, circumstantial, and adaptive features that account for the different periods of warfare. They are primarily determined by socio-political and historical conditions in a certain era as well as technological advances.” Vego, 46.
34. Milan N. Vego, “A Case against Systemic Operational Design,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 69–75, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/>.

Chapter 14

General Officer Gender Diversity

How Do We Get from Here to There?

Tara R. Lunardi

Introduction

Today we lose our folks because our young recruits don't see themselves. . . . We inspire them in the beginning at the recruit stage and then later they don't think they can be part of it as they look up the chain. . . . We need to get out and talk about all the opportunities available . . . more senior ranking officers, especially women and minorities, who can show them it can be done, and the opportunity is there.

—Gen Jacqueline D. Van Ovost
Commander, US Transportation Command
Interview by the author, 2016

This research stems from a genuine desire to understand why, seventy-six years after the USAF's creation, its general officer (GO) force remains disproportionately composed of male officers. While the focus on pilot leadership has roots in the separation of the service from its Army origins and has served the Air Force well in developing a unique identity, the current mission and requirements of the force—coupled with widely accepted benefits and value of diversity of thought and experience—reveal an anachronistic composition of its GO corps. As leaders ask more of career fields beyond the rated (flying) community, be it space and missiles, mission support, cyber operations, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), or special operations, it becomes more difficult to reconcile their growing contributions with the proportionally lower GO promotion op-

For simplicity and readability, the terms “Airman” and “Airmen” used generically encompass all Department of the Air Force members, including US Air Force service members, US Space Force Guardians, and civilian and military personnel in all job titles and positions from entry-level to top leadership.

portunities afforded them. The apparent, if unofficial, axiom that senior leadership should be the predominant purview of a limited set of officers is no longer resonant with the twenty-first-century reality of diversity's innovative benefits. This pilot-centric mindset not only limits professional diversity at the GO level but inevitably creates gender barriers. The lack of gender diversity in the GO ranks is partially the result of women choosing to leave the service for various reasons mid-career, thus shrinking the pool of women competitive for GO. It also is an effect of women foregoing longer careers due to institutionally limited opportunities to advance into the GO ranks absent a specific functional pedigree. Though well-intentioned, recent and much-needed USAF diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives will take a generation or more to achieve the intended impact. Even so, their effect on diversifying the USAF's "generalist" force is questionable absent a deliberate focus on tying promotions to requirements and providing talented officers from more diverse communities increased opportunities to compete equally for GO positions that do not require an operational fill. If leveraging diversity's value across the enterprise is indeed a mission imperative, it should be considered a priority not only in officer recruitment and development but also at the strategic level where senior leader decisions have the most impact. To resolve its credibility dilemma, the service should consider actualizing cultural change both relevant to the future and more inclusive of the total force. Historically, GO leadership has been described in periods characterizing the predominant communities from which they came, such as the "rise of the bombers" and the "rise of the fighters"; perhaps now is the time for a rise of women (and men) enablers raised from outside the cockpit.¹

Although diversity is multifaceted, in this study I focus on the importance of gender diversity in the USAF's strategic leadership positions, not to meet quotas but to strengthen the service's ability to develop, retain, and lead a relevant twenty-first-century force. I begin by explaining the importance of diversity and how it impacts innovation, a key element in shaping an effective "force of the future." I then describe how the USAF builds its GO force and present empirical data detailing the realities of this process. Next, I outline implications on gender diversity that may be drawn from this data, augmented by input from interviews of eighteen USAF GOs.

Finally, I outline the prevailing defense of the current GO promotion and assignment paradigm and offer recommendations for increas-

ing opportunity *today* for more women (and other minorities) to advance into the GO cadre through a deliberate, balanced approach to filling senior leadership positions.

If you start out with a lower percentage of minorities who are wearing wings, then that's the way that's going to end up. That in and of itself is a problem. . . . Who said that senior positions need to be held by those that are operators?

—Gen Larry Spencer, USAF, Retired
Former Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force
Air Force Times, March 1, 2016

Although there are progressive D&I initiatives in nascent stages of implementation today, these efforts target officer recruiting and retention; they do not effect change at the strategic GO level. According to current data, the majority of USAF senior-most leaders remain male pilots—a trend most evident at the four-star tier. Since 2011, 66 percent of O-7 to O-10 active duty line officer positions have been filled by officers from rated career fields known to be lacking gender diversity: 92 percent of all line officer GOs are men. While the USAF is far from demographically representative of society with women composing 20 percent of the active duty force versus 51 percent of the US population, this divergence becomes more acute at the GO level.² This study examines the lack of gender diversity across the GO ranks and its implications for shaping a “force of the future.” To address this disconnect and maintain force effectiveness and future relevancy, it argues for a cultural shift wherein the service deliberately modifies its traditional path to GO from one favoring male-dominated communities to one providing more balanced opportunity for high-potential officers of all skill sets. The recommendations outlined herein offer immediate remedies to pursue greater functional diversity and, by extension, gender diversity. While it is important that the “look up” into GO ranks reflects the “look out” across the total force, the benefits of diversity are beyond aesthetics.³ In a war for talent, it is critical the USAF promotes diversity at the flag officer level—not solely lower echelons—by shaping a multidimensional GO cadre to lead today’s innovative Airmen. The USAF need not choose between operational capability and diversity; it can have both.

Diversity: What's the Big Deal?

With dedicated, informed leadership, diversity becomes the tinder to ignite innovation.

—Frans Johansson
Author, *The Medici Effect*
Harvard Business Review, October 2005

Diversity is neither new nor mysterious; it refers to differences in how individuals see, categorize, and understand the world.⁴ It is commonly divided into identity (inherent) diversity, referring to traits with which one is born—gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation—and cognitive diversity (also diversity of thought or acquired diversity), referring to traits garnered from different life experiences and backgrounds.⁵ Numerous studies show that cognitive diversity shapes more effective environments that are fertile for creative solutions. In 2004, Scott Page from the University of Michigan and Lu Hong from Loyola University Chicago conducted a study showing that individuals from diverse backgrounds attacked problems using unique approaches, avoided groupthink, and ultimately outperformed the most gifted problem solvers.⁶ Interacting with diverse groups can be more cognitively taxing due to healthy tension that often results, but the ability to collaborate across diverse perspectives is considered one of the innate advantages humans have over computers.⁷ When too many individuals with the same backgrounds and perspectives attempt to solve problems, they often become complacent, perceiving the world in similar ways and leading to myopic outlooks or fixating on the same solutions; this phenomenon is otherwise known as groupthink.⁸ Page and Hong's analysis of diversity reveals that while individuals are limited by their finite neurons and axons, collectively, diverse organizations face no such constraint because they possess incredible capacity to think differently, providing the seeds of innovation, progress, and understanding.⁹

While countless studies prove diversity's value, history is also littered with examples of innovation born of bringing together varied skill sets to solve challenges and inspire new ideas. The Renaissance period in fourteenth-century Europe spawned the phenomenon known later as the "Medici effect," referring to the "creative explosion" that took place in Florence, Italy, where the Medici family connected people with

diverse trades and talents from all over the world—poets, philosophers, painters, architects, sculptors, and scientists—sharing ideas and inspiration that characterized the inventive era.¹⁰ This practice exists today at successful companies like Amazon, Facebook, eBay, Intuit, and Merck, all of which recognize innovation as a competitive advantage. They therefore cast wide nets in search of employees with diverse backgrounds to challenge the status quo and approach problems from multiple points of view.¹¹ Simply stated, diversity unlocks innovation.

The USAF is not unlike these companies in acknowledging the powerful impact of diversity and the critical need for innovation to overcome challenges in today's complex, uncertain environment. Unlike the corporate world, however, Airmen must be grown from within to fill leadership positions after gaining the necessary technical experience and proving themselves in challenging assignments. In today's economy, the US military is in a "war for talent" to shape the future force and maintain a competitive, relevant edge.¹² As outlined in the *Air Force Future Operating Concept* (AFFOC) for 2035, the service is in search of "bold and innovative approaches" to successfully execute core missions, and its Airmen will chart the way ahead.¹³ While the AFFOC focuses on Airmen performing the mission at the tactical and operational levels, GOs will lead this future force at the strategic level. Bold, innovative ideas require support from visionary generals without loyalties to any one weapon system or capability and who are unbiased in thought and preparation for what is beyond the horizon.¹⁴

As with any deliberate paradigm shift, the first step is admitting there is a problem. Since 2015, the secretary of defense as well as the secretary and chief of staff of the Air Force have publicly acknowledged the need for and value of greater diversity across the DOD/USAF, codified in new policies, directives, and instructions. They recognize that a more diversified group of leaders with varied skill sets, ways of thinking, and experience provides creative solutions to increasingly complex challenges facing warfighters.¹⁵ Additionally, former Air Force secretary (SECAF) Deborah James and former Air Force chief of staff (CSAF) Gen David Goldfein (retired) openly acknowledged that the USAF draws most of its top leaders from operational career fields (rated officers) that are historically male-dominated, resulting in a "ripple effect" of reduced diversity—both gender and functional—among the service's top leadership.¹⁶ This reality is inconsistent with USAF efforts to better reflect the society it protects and its desire to foster innovation.

To date, service diversity initiatives have focused on aggressive recruiting and retention programs; indeed, many seem promising, even if nascent in their implementation. Specifically, the SECAF's D&I plans released in March 2015 and September 2016 are significant steps to increase female retention rates. Examples include the Career Intermission Program, allowing Airmen the flexibility of transferring from active duty to the Individual Ready Reserve for one to three years; the Reserve Officer Training Corps Rated Height Screening Initiative, allowing more female cadets to obtain height waivers to maximize the talent base; increasing the female officer applicant pool goal from 25 percent to 30 percent; and extending post-pregnancy deployment deferment eligibility for a full year. Unfortunately, none of these D&I programs seeks to transform the way the service builds its most senior-ranking, strategic decision-makers.

Certainly, the new D&I initiatives may increase diversity across lower ranks and help the USAF meet its recruiting and retention goals. One would hope that in the push to recruit more diverse personnel into the rated fields and meet elevated quota goals, the USAF will not limit itself with assumptions about the lack of GO potential for non-rated communities or overlook the value of young talent desiring to serve in a non-rated capacity. If a young female decides to make the USAF a career and excels in a non-rated field, she is no less valuable; however, unless the path to GO changes, she will have significantly limited flag officer opportunity. Indeed, a senior GO interviewed for this chapter validated the reality:

Our USAF recruiting offices are increasing their efforts to recruit female talent and advising them up front that if they want to be a GO someday, they need to go into operational jobs like pilot, navigator, ABM [antiballistic missile], and cyber. . . . Even though we opened up a lot of jobs to women, there are many that still choose to go into non-rated career fields instead of rated ones. It will take time to get more women GOs to a "balanced level" . . . perhaps not a generation, but at least a decade with the new D&I initiatives. When the pool is very small already, it's difficult to get more women. . . . We'd have more women GOs if positions were filled with more officers from non-rated career fields, but we also value operational experience at the top. . . . How do you balance it?¹⁷

Nonetheless, it would behoove those leading the charge to recall an experience that former USAF vice chief of staff Gen Larry Spencer had in 2015 while visiting local schools in the Washington, DC, and Baltimore areas to discuss with young minority students USAF career opportunities, specifically F-22 and F-35 pilots.¹⁸ The kids thought flying was “neat,” but none wanted to fly; instead they wanted to be in engineering and financial fields.¹⁹ General Spencer was astonished and commented, “Here are bright students who could come in and be chief of staff someday, but none of them were at all interested in flying.”²⁰

Is the USAF a Meritocracy?

It's the accumulated advantage phenomenon of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. . . . As you gain momentum in your career, you get traction, and you get assignments and you've got different achievements, you're put into a different path. And whether you're on that path or not can be determined relatively young. And so, you get this halo effect that consistently has an impact.

—Nelson Lim, RAND Researcher
“Race and the Air Force,” *Air Force Times*, March 1, 2016

According to Nelson Lim, a researcher with RAND Corporation who conducted the 2014 study *Improving Demographic Diversity in the U.S. Air Force Officer Corps*, the USAF does not have a biased promotion process. The real issue is a pipeline for promotion that, under existing practices, provides advantage to officers in operational roles and career fields that lack diversity.²¹ It is important to explore how the USAF builds its pipeline of senior cadre and to review relevant empirical data concerning today's GO force in assessing if and where potential changes could achieve greater diversity. Although somewhat shrouded in mystery and uncodified in USAF guidance, the GO path appears to reflect a meritocracy by recognizing the best performers and those with the most proven potential to serve in the next higher grade. However, closer examination reveals practices that disproportionately favor the male-dominated rated community.

The Current Process

To begin, colonels eligible for brigadier general meet an annual statutory board composed of major command commanders (MAJ-COM/CC) (the “hiring authority”); members may also include other GOs selected by the General Officer Management Office (AF/DPG) and vetted by the CSAF.²² Those selected for brigadier general are routed for SECAF and CSAF approval, then through congressional confirmation before becoming final. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the criteria for GO selection are not requirements driven; there is no formula or checklist required for promotion to brigadier general that can be found in an Air Force instruction (AFI) or manual. Additionally, there is no codified or formal requirement for a certain percentage of GOs to come from specific career fields. In fact, all officers in the grade of brigadier general or higher assume a new primary Air Force specialty code (AFSC) of 90G0 or “generalist” regardless of duty assignment.²³ The only codified prerequisite for GO is to be joint qualified (serve in joint duty assignments long enough to obtain at least thirty-six joint points) per the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986; even this caveat can be waived “when necessary for the good of the service.”²⁴ Despite the lack of statutory guidelines, the careers of a vast majority of colonels selected for brigadier general follow a common (unofficial) template that includes the following milestones: selected for promotion early—known as below promotion zone (BPZ)—for grade(s) O-5 and/or O-6 in order to hit the tight GO promotion window by their twenty-fourth year (otherwise known as “pole year”) of time in service (TIS); attended senior developmental education (SDE) in-residence; and completed successful command tours as an O-6 at both the group and wing levels. As a demographic example, of the 1,500 colonels (6 percent of the active duty officer force) who competed for brigadier general in 2015, only forty-three were selected (or 2.8 percent of those considered—consistent with historical average 2 percent promotion rate).²⁵ Of those selected for promotion, 100 percent completed SDE in-residence, 79 percent were two grades BPZ, 19 percent were one grade BPZ, 95 percent had completed joint tours; and average TIS was 24.12 years.²⁶ Colonels missing one or more of these elements will likely need a four-star general to personally engage and ensure they are positioned in the right job to get “the number” (identified as no. 1 stratification of colonels eligible for promotion to general)

from a very senior-ranking official to compensate.²⁷ Additional delineating factors include multiple distinguished graduate (DG) designations from professional military education (PME) and/or special schools such as the USAF Weapons School and School of Advanced Air and Space Studies (SAASS), early identification as a high-potential officer (HPO), and garnering key Air Force-level awards. Before meeting the promotion board, MAJCOM/CCs stratify their definitely promote (DP) colonels. For example, the Air Combat Command (ACC) commander would stratify their best colonel as 1/400 (the no. 1 of 400 colonels for brigadier general—“the number”). On the whole, the top stratified colonels come from MAJCOMs with the preponderance of flying wings, such as Pacific Air Forces, ACC, and Air Mobility Command. A former AF/DPG member recalled, “After we culled together all of the promotion forms and tallied up the #1s, we knew who was getting promoted, and we’d have the list 98 percent completed before stepping into the promotion board.”²⁸

The Empirical Data

Though rated officers comprise approximately a third of the active duty line officer corps, in the GO ranks that number doubles; from 2011 through 2016, 66 percent of the GO cadre was rated officers (see fig. 14.1).²⁹ When asked why there was a significant majority of GO “generalists” (90G0) from the rated community, Greg Lowrimore from the Air Force Colonel’s Management Group (AF/DPO) responded,

It’s interesting you bring that up because the 2016 brigadier general board president talked about the proportion of rated to non-rated officers selected, and the new CSAF is looking at this process closely now. . . . For example, the individual that runs this school [AWC] isn’t a pilot; those before him were, but there are an awful lot of GO jobs that don’t require the background of a pilot. CSAF is relooking at where we’re going in the future . . . cyber, space, and missiles, etc. . . . All that is under discussion right now. . . . Officers that get the competitive nods tend to be rated. . . . We’ve built a system that favors rated officers.³⁰

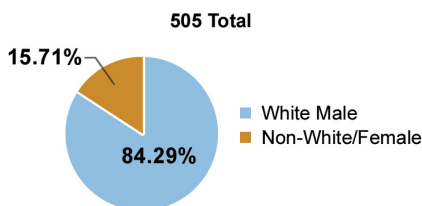


Figure 14.1. General officers (line only), rated versus non-rated, 2011–16

There is no disputing the numbers; they demonstrate empirically that the USAF has disproportionately drawn its top leaders from the rated community, a fact now also acknowledged publicly by many senior leaders and personnel experts across the service.³¹ A system that historically provides less GO opportunity to non-rated officers translates into commensurate gender opportunity losses. This consequence is inevitable, as a system favoring officers in the GO pipeline who come from rated career fields, composed primarily of White males, invariably offers less chance for those from career fields in which women are better represented. The results of this historical GO model are consistently and remarkably homogenous (see figs. 14.2 and 14.3).³²

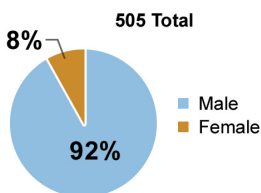


Figure 14.2. GO line percentages by gender, 2011–16

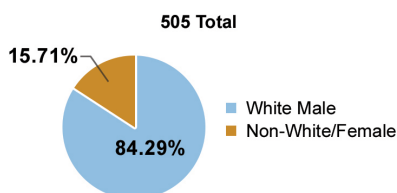


Figure 14.3. GO line percentages by race and gender, 2011–16

The conundrum is further clarified in figures 14.4 and 14.5 (next page); the further up the pyramid one moves, the fewer females there are from which to select for promotion.³³

Data pulled from the Air Force Personnel Center's (AFPC) report tool in January 2017 shows that the number of O-6 female line officers available to compete for brigadier general decreases tremendously from the overall line officer pool (207) to the rated pool (36).³⁴ In other words, by selecting GOs from a substantially narrower pool of primarily rated male officers, the USAF inevitably promotes few women into the GO ranks.

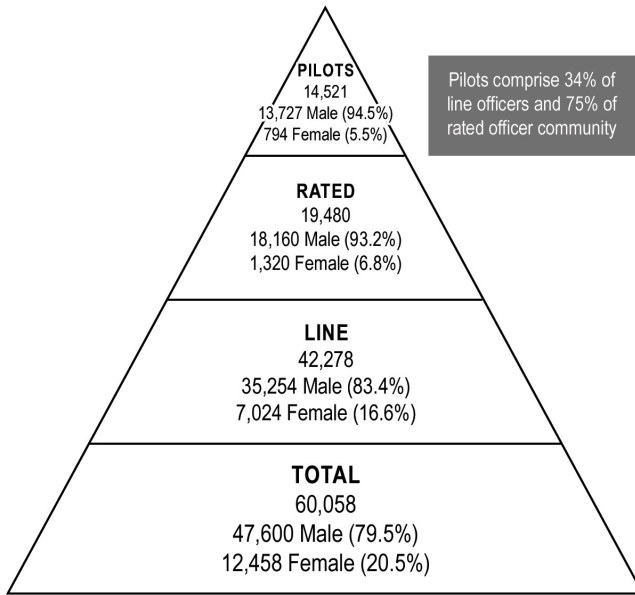


Figure 14.4. Total US Air Force active duty officer force, January 2017

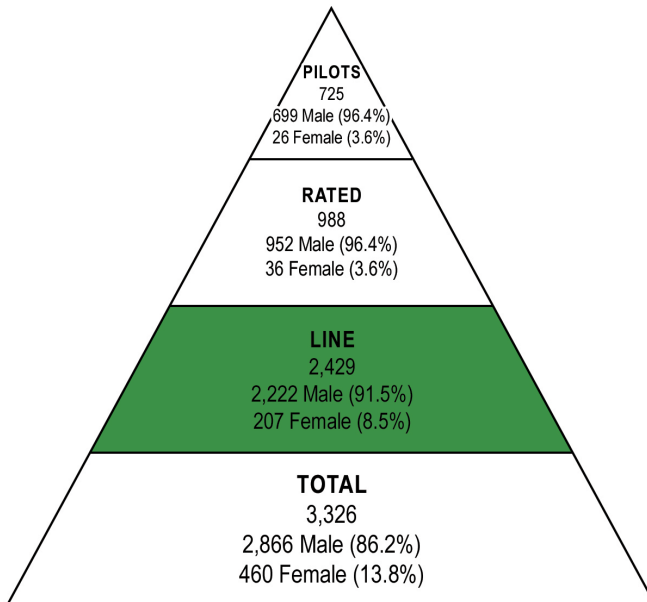


Figure 14.5. Total US Air Force active duty O-6 force, January 2017

Figure 14.6 uses the same 2017 data from figures 14.4 and 14.5 but better illustrates how the percentage of O-6s increases for men—and correspondingly decreases for women—when narrowing from total officers to line officers to rated officers and, finally, to pilots.³⁵

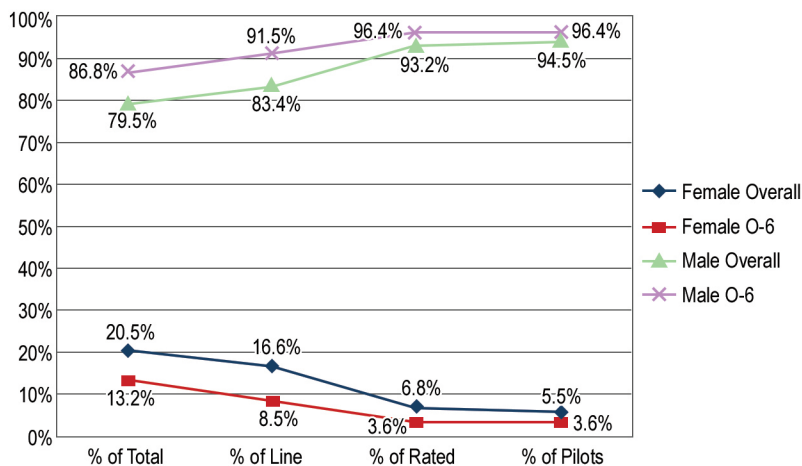


Figure 14.6. Gender percentage of Air Force officer force

Below Promotion Zone – GO Criteria

AFPC’s report tool also provided historical data concerning BPZ rates, a significant indicator commonly used to set officers apart in determining GO potential (see fig. 14.7).³⁶ This chart shows the percentage of overall officers *considered* as well as subsequently *selected* for BPZ promotion to O-6 for rated versus non-rated. Put succinctly, every year from 2011 through 2016, rated officers were a minority of those *considered* for BPZ promotion to O-6 but a majority of those *selected*, reaching its zenith in 2016, with rated officers comprising 75 percent of O-6 BPZ selections and 95 percent of the BPZ selections being men.³⁷

The data between 2011 and 2016 shows that most BPZ selections to O-6 consistently went to rated officers, demonstrating that a key prerequisite for GO selection appears to favor this community. According to General Spencer, “Below-the-zone is where probably 99% of the time general officers come from. . . . Those [BPZ selects] are

your future general officers. That’s when the Air Force, as a system, starts breaking out superstars who have the greatest potential.³⁸

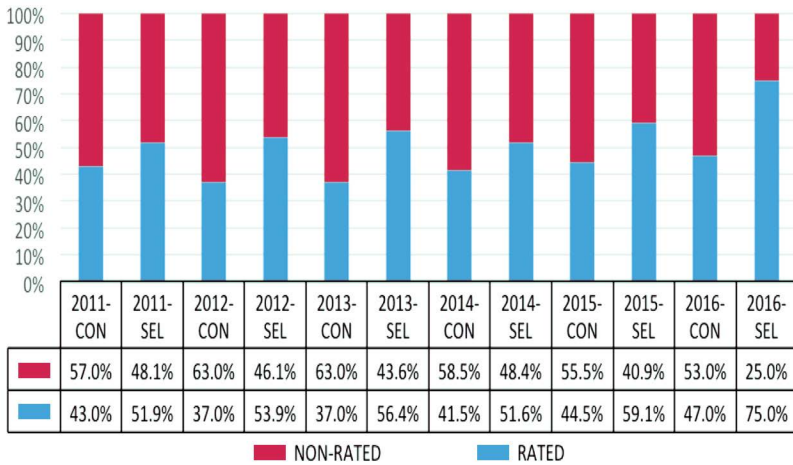


Figure 14.7. O-6 BPZ by function

Command Screening Board – GO Criteria

In addition to BPZ, another significant component in the unofficial GO formula is to command successfully as an O-6 at both the group and wing levels. The body responsible for deciding which officers will be offered such opportunities is the command screening board (CSB), a nonstatutory group that selects eligible officers for command opportunities at the group and wing levels. The board president is a MAJCOM/CC, the AF/A1 serves as the board chair, and board members are MAJCOM vice commanders (CV). The CSB is conducted much like a promotion board; however, BPZ, SDE, and previous commands are not official eligibility factors.³⁹ Instead, board members review and score records using “leadership potential” and “long-range contribution to the USAF” as their subjective criteria.⁴⁰ In the 2016 AF/DPO “Spread the Word” briefing, there is no information provided as to how “leadership potential” and “long-range contribution” are identified in the records reviewed and scored by the CSB. Yet in his analysis of the CSB process and noting that 100 percent of rated wing commanders were promoted early, Lt Col Russell L. Mack stated, “You could make the case that BPZ promotion is the primary consideration

when selecting wing commanders. . . . Command performance, particularly as a [Wing]/CC, is a prerequisite for selection to brigadier general.⁴¹ Command Selection List (CSL) results for wings from the 2016 CSB, by functional status and gender, are depicted in the chart below (fig. 14.8).⁴² Without additional biographic data, the BPZ status of these selectees cannot be determined; the “Spread the Word” briefing did not provide those demographics, stating only that BPZ was not an eligibility criteria for wing and group command. Nonetheless, a similar trend to that seen among BPZ selections is apparent in the 2016 Wing CSL.

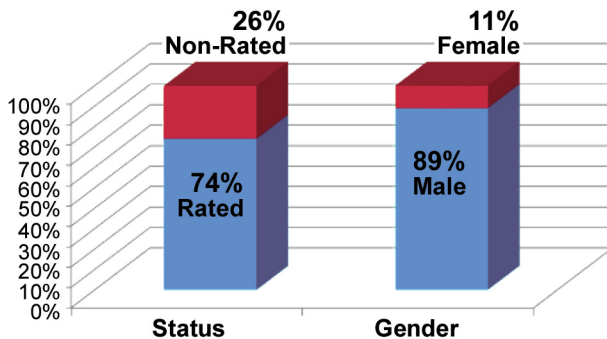


Figure 14.8. 2016 CSB selection for wing-level command, line officer only (does not include AF Office of Special Investigations [OSI] or acquisitions). (Data provided by AF/A1V, Diversity Office, in response to author’s request for information, December 2016.)

Air Force Policy

Regarding command positions, paragraph 10.1 of AFI 51-509, dated February 11, 2016, states only rated officers may command flying units, and the 2023 revision of AFI 51-509 has not changed in that regard.⁴³ However, units with multiple nonoperational missions, such as air base wings (ABW), may be filled by either rated or non-rated line officers. The 2016 CSL demonstrates the consequences of these parameters. In addition to thirty-three flying wings (fighter, mobility, test, and C2 wings) being matched to rated officers (as required by AFI 51-509), of the ten ABWs available to be filled with non-rated officers, two were also filled by rated officers (as were intelligence wings and a space and missile wing).⁴⁴ While leadership experience is often touted as the most

important criteria for GO potential, the average pilot's total leadership experience from flight command up through wing command is approximately seventy-two months. Comparatively, mission support officers, such as those in logistics, engineering, and force protection, average 107 months in command—an almost three-year difference.⁴⁵ According to a former AF/DPG member, the jump between group and wing command is key due to the number of positions available to non-rated colonels, which are extremely limited each year. Further, “the bottom line is without being a graduated wing commander, you won't be a GO unless you have someone pulling you.”⁴⁶ Thus, the USAF has developed a process (intentionally or not), supported by its AFIs, wherein rated officers essentially get “two bites at the apple” for wing command, once competing within the rated community (fighter/mobility/ AWACS), and again competing for all other wings such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and ABWs even though these are the only wing command opportunities open to many non-rated officers. As an inevitable result, the pipeline for GO is filled with more rated officers (again, mostly men) who achieved the unofficial milestones for promotion to O-7.

General Officer Interviews

Between November 2016 and February 2017, the author interviewed eighteen active duty USAF GOs (O-7 through O-10) from a variety of operational and nonoperational backgrounds, including pilots (fighter, test, mobility), ABM, personnel, intelligence, communications, maintenance, supply/logistics, space and missiles, acquisitions, and security forces. Several common themes emerged regarding what they believed allowed them to stand out and were key to their promotion to GO. First and foremost, none sought to be a GO but instead performed their best in every job opportunity provided to them. This mindset extended to special schools such as the Air Force Weapons School and PME, where almost all remarked that they put tremendous effort into the opportunity for in-residence attendance. Their efforts often paid off in garnering DG and top stratifications in Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff College, and Air War College (as well as the National War College and Industrial College of the Armed Forces). Not surprisingly, 100 percent were selected for early promotion to O-4 (until the USAF ended this practice in the late 1990s), O-5, and/or O-6 for an average of 3.5 years BPZ prior to making GO. Additionally,

almost all were identified early on in their careers as HPOs, received high-level awards, and performed well in command at the squadron, group, and wing levels.

Of the eighteen GOs interviewed, sixteen were women, and almost all stated that in addition to performance, both chance and timing played a significant role. More specifically, they were in the “right place at the right time,” and 75 percent believed they would not have been selected for GO had a senior-ranking mentor not intervened to provide them opportunities they would not otherwise have had, be it group or wing command, leading elite task forces and high-visibility projects, fixing critical programs, or attending special schools like the USAF Weapons School. These mentors were male senior officers (mostly three- or four-star generals/flag officers) who took special interest in their continued success and believed they had skills to excel as a GO; they thus intervened so these talented professionals could get noticed, get “the number,” or compensate for career detractors that may have otherwise put them onto a different path.⁴⁷ While few questioned the promotion system itself or their respective paths to GO, if outlying factors were necessary for promotion, one must ask whether the traditional, “typical” GO model is sufficient and equitable. If highly qualified, exceptional leaders needed intervention from senior-ranking mentors, then is the USAF truly a meritocracy? Why do the “best of the best” need more opportunity than the system provides? This is certainly not to say these high-performing individuals received any undeserved special privilege or step up, but in several cases senior-ranking mentors appear to have realized the system might not promote these outstanding leaders without their personal intervention.⁴⁸ If diversity is an Air Force institutional competency and mission imperative at all levels, should the service not consider making changes to its GO model to counter the historically consistent homogeneity across its highest ranks?

Implications – Prisoner of an Old Paradigm?

Groupthink is the worst thing you can have when you have a problem. If there are all male Caucasians sitting around the table, you have groupthink.

—Gen Philip M. Breedlove, USAF, Retired
Former Supreme Allied Commander Europe

As General Breedlove wisely acknowledged, any group that is too homogeneous runs the risk of groupthink. Tension between rated and non-rated “tribes” isn’t inherently dangerous, and there will inevitably be competing ideas striving for worldview dominance, whether it be bomber pilots, fighters, or another community whose views prevail.⁴⁹ However, when those with the predominant perspective continuously secure the senior-most positions at the expense of diversity—be it identity or cognitive in nature—groupthink and lack of innovation can result. In today’s environment and threat landscape, such a propensity is dangerous and may diminish the USAF’s future relevance. In this regard, “as new threats to America’s interest emerge, different tribes will propose different solutions based upon particular worldviews. New technologies will offer new opportunities . . . [, and] an unbalanced, unhealthy organization with the voice of only one tribe in ascendance may not be able to adapt.”⁵⁰ Thus, it is worth considering that when two-thirds of the USAF’s senior-most decision-makers come from the same community—with the same or similar training, thought processes, backgrounds, skills, and experiences—groupthink may well result. Maj Gen Dawn Dunlop, former commander, NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, elaborated on this factor during her interview:

Throughout my career I have seen a perhaps natural but counter-productive bias against working with people outside our own functional expertise. We prefer to work with people who think like us, act like us, and have similar backgrounds and experiences. It brings a familiarity and perhaps comfort when tackling problems on a schedule and lessens potential for “unknown” inputs. Academically we all know the problem with surrounding ourselves with people that think too similarly, and yet we still do it. As commanders we must work hard to promote inclusion and a “truly” open dialogue, not only to drive the best decisions, but to grow our Air Force.⁵¹

Multiple GOs (rated and non-rated) recalled instances of their participation in meetings, task forces, and PME where they had to speak up to pierce through groupthink situations, often when the focus was on the operational effect or “tooth,” with the support piece or “tail” assumed or overlooked. Maj Gen Linda Hurry, then the director of expeditionary support, USAF Installation and Mission Support Center, shared in a 2015 interview that

in the support world, I'm always adding a diverse perspective. The LRS [Logistics Readiness Squadron] absolutely supports the operators and mission generation; yet it's very common that we fail to understand or appreciate the complexity of the support tail that must go with our operational missions. . . . We overlook the fact there is an entire infrastructure that goes with the desire to put lead on a target. . . . We can't forget the critical back piece. For example, in Red Flag, or most exercises for that matter, the focus is on the operational training/effects, and we assume away the huge support/logistical piece. This is a huge fallacy. . . . We think the support will always be there in real life because that is how we've played/exercised. The reality of the situation is that we must consider the logistics and support constraints upfront so that the operational missions are feasible.⁵²

Some senior leaders see the necessity of a paradigm shift away from a pilot-centric GO force. In his interview, Lt Gen Steven Kwast, then the Air University commander, related that the current system for developing leaders must change, or the enemy will continue to have the edge. He stated, "The Byzantine way we develop leaders is no longer relevant in today's asymmetric threat environment. There's no reason a female, African American AFOSI [Air Force Office of Special Investigation] agent couldn't be our CSAF. . . . It's not about the functional badge on our uniforms; . . . it's about what you know and what you can do that matters most."⁵³ Likewise, another GO added during an interview, "If more GO positions were filled with leaders with non-rated backgrounds, it would be a huge, positive cultural change we need badly, even if incrementally. Success breeds success. . . . Once we have a more diverse GO force, we'll be a stronger Air Force as a whole and more balanced. The USAF needs to take every senior [leader] and look at him/her for their leadership qualities, not assume they are good because they are pilots and therefore must know how to lead well."⁵⁴

The Air Force proves daily that it does much more than fly aircraft. Non-rated fields are critical to the USAF's evolving mission (e.g., ISR, space, and special operations forces) yet are not well represented in the GO ranks. Current data does not suggest the service is "effectively identifying, grooming, or providing opportunity for some of its most talented people from non-fighter pilot communities."⁵⁵ Beyond fighter or bomber missions, the DOD relies on the USAF to conduct ISR, cyber, space, nuclear, and special operations to deter America's enemies.⁵⁶

To do so effectively, the service must develop the best blend of GOs to lead the force by championing policies that move the service forward and offer equal opportunities to talented, proven leaders with GO potential regardless of technical expertise.

In addition to the risk of groupthink and innovation challenges, the data presents a significant credibility issue. While the current GO force functional composition may well be the best ratio/blend to meet service needs, it is difficult to argue that a 92 percent male GO cadre is in any way aligned with the USAF's vision of an agile, diverse force. Inaction may send an unintentional message—diversity matters only at levels below GO. Justifications for continuing such disproportionate trends, or any enduring requirement leading to less diversity within the GO ranks, are dubious. The DOD has recognized diversity as critical to innovation, relevancy, and the ability to deter and win the nation's wars. In this vein, the USAF has identified some problem areas and taken steps to become a more diverse force by targeting certain communities and lower ranks. However, to solve the broader credibility issue, the Air Force must hold itself accountable, examine its cultural dispositions, and implement process changes within the GO cadre concordant with the sweeping D&I efforts implemented at lower echelons.

Current Perspective and Recommendations

We do not have enough diversity in the GO ranks; we're not capitalizing on the expertise. . . . It sends a message to the lower ranks, [and] we're losing capable Airmen that we've trained because they don't see themselves as having the opportunity for GO.

—Lt Gen Mary O'Brien
Director, Command, Control, Communications and
Computer/Cyber and Chief Information Officer, J6
Interview by author, December 2016

Recommendations for change largely depend on whether senior leadership believes the current GO selection process needs adjustment, and if so, whether to alter the model itself or attempt to engineer the numbers within the existing formula. By maintaining the current model, the Air Force is choosing to perpetuate the status quo in hopes of future change. It is relying on increased recruiting quotas to yield

At the time of the interview, General O'Brien was a major general and the director of intelligence, US Cyber Command.

more female rated officers who will choose to remain in the USAF (perhaps due to recent retention initiatives) and eventually be competitive for GO. An alternative is a genuine paradigm shift focused not solely on numbers but, instead, on altering the GO equation by casting a wider, more equitable net across high-performing officers with diverse skill sets and thought processes. Doing so would increase opportunities to achieve greater gender diversity “up” into the GO ranks, reflective of what is seen “out” across the force.⁵⁷ Despite current D&I initiatives, women may still decide to separate based upon a variety of factors; however, without efforts targeting cultural change at the top echelons, women who do remain will continue to have small numbers of female GO role models to emulate and upon whom they can rely to continue breaking ceilings.

One obvious concern with changing the current model is that it may result in promoting fewer pilots to GO, ultimately sacrificing combat capability in favor of diversity and limiting the USAF’s ability to fight and win the nation’s wars. Some GOs interviewed for this research asked, “What’s wrong with 66 percent of the GOs coming from rated communities?” rationalizing that “the mission of the USAF is to fly, fight, and win. We are a flying force—the majority of our generals should be operators.” Given the unstated reality that the USAF general officer personnel system is designed to fill five specific billets—the CSAF, three combatant command commanders, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—it makes sense to promote those with combat/operational backgrounds to grow the most competitive leaders to fill these high-level positions.⁵⁸ The argument continues that the rated community, pilots in particular, fight for top stratifications among their own—already the USAF’s best and brightest officers—so only the cream of the crop rise through the ranks. Not only are they trained to process huge amounts of information and make quality decisions quickly, but pilots instinctively employ an operational focus on targeting, effects, and mission priorities from which any USAF unit (flying or nonflying) can benefit. Gen Jacqueline D. Van Ovost, currently the commander, US Transportation Command, explained this philosophy in more detail:

As a force, we like to put operational people into management jobs because the output is to support an operational Air Force and that’s why we put a rated officer into non-rated and staff positions. . . . We’re trying to help the staff to think about effects they need to achieve, and operators think this way intuitively/

naturally more than others. Cyber is one example of this. We have intel folks working cyber today; it's an operational platform though so now we're starting to put pilots in cyber. . . . We need people who naturally think about targets/operational effects until we can train, develop, and grow a cyber operator force for the aggressor squadrons.⁵⁹

A direct consequence of the operational focus on air-mindedness at senior levels is the USAF's policy requiring that commanders of wings with flying missions/aircraft be from rated career fields (largely pilots). In total, there are approximately 109 wings across the USAF, sixty-two of which must be filled with rated officers (see fig. 14.9).⁶⁰

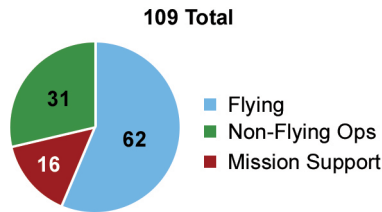


Figure 14.9. Total USAF wings

Since successful wing command is a requirement for GO selection, it logically follows that many GOs are from rated communities. Non-rated leaders are not authorized to fill rated officer command positions, yet rated officers can (and do) fill non-rated group and wing command positions. As noted, this reality stems from the philosophy that pilots are proven leaders with an effects-based mindset that can “plug and play” in any job and that the reverse is not true. By its own structure and policies, the USAF ensures it meets flying unit command requirements with rated officers only and nonflying command opportunities with either rated or non-rated leaders.

While this argument against a paradigm shift alleges diversity will sacrifice combat capability, cultural change need not be a zero-sum game. A more equitable balance would, in fact, provide opportunities to all high-performing officers with GO potential wherein the USAF leverages the best of all its functional worlds and is stronger for it. Though policies prohibit non-rated officers from commanding wings and groups with flying units and missions, by and large these policies do not extend to the GO level, where responsibilities generally involve leading staffs of professional experts and participating in strategic decision-making groups. Thus, unless prohibited by requirements in

the *US Code* (such as chief nurse, The Judge Advocate General, etc.), almost *any* USAF GO position can be filled by *any* GO with *any* skill set or background. While it no doubt makes sense to fill some operationally specific GO billets with those possessing rated skill sets that are critical to mission execution (such as a combined forces air component commander or the 57th wing commander at Nellis AFB, Nevada), most positions warrant scrutiny as to the rationale behind continuously filling them with rated officers, despite no requirement to do so. For example, why have (male) rated officers historically held the Air University commander and USAF Inspector General positions?⁶¹ Additionally, until June 2015, the commandant of the Air War College was always a male pilot.⁶² The author has been unable to find any requirements or position descriptions explaining why certain GO positions are consistently filled by rated officers and, regrettably, AF/DPG denied all requests for such information.⁶³ To date, no empirical evidence has been offered to demonstrate that rated officers inherently make the best leaders; however, data *has* shown the system disproportionately favors the male-dominated rated officer community, sacrificing gender diversity most acutely at the GO level. While it is difficult to change requirements rooted in US law (such as a twenty-two-month joint tour), many aspects of the GO model are under USAF control.

Tie All GO Positions to Requirements – Operator, Enabler, or Generalist

To that end, a complete scrub of all GO positions is necessary to identify where the service can leverage opportunities for diversity; the impact could be immediate, not decades or a generation from now. As no specific position description is tied to GO billets other than “generalist” (90G0), the USAF has flexibility and tremendous subjectivity in how GO positions are filled. Redefining the “generalist” category and identifying those GO positions that may well require specific skills provides opportunity to balance non-rated talent and extensive leadership experience, ultimately achieving a GO cadre more representative of the rest of the force. Such efforts will allow the USAF to determine which of its GO positions require an operator or an enabler and which could be filled with either, a true “generalist” (90G0). Dividing all GO positions into three separate pools would serve as a forcing function to instill greater objectivity into what is otherwise a subjective selection process. Additionally, to ensure balance and provide oppor-

tunity for increased diversity within the GO cadre, these bins should be fenced and competitively filled accordingly. Positions that require an operator will only be filled with an operator, those requiring an enabler will only be filled with an enabler, and “generalist” positions could be filled with either.

In addition to tying positions to basic requirements, other recommendations that will foster cultural change within the GO force include the following: replacing rated and non-rated labels with *operator* and *enabler* categories; intentionally pairing diverse leadership teams across groups, wings, numbered air forces (NAF), and MAJCOMs; updating policy to allow enablers to command flying wings; promoting transparency and accountability; and allowing critically staffed communities to choose leadership or technical paths. Each of these is detailed in the appendix.

Conclusion

The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get the old one out.

—Sir Basil H. Liddell Hart

Over two decades ago, Bruce Danskine wrote his paper “Fall of the Fighter Generals,” whose premise in one article reflecting on diversity and leadership is summarized: “The American People are best served by an Air Force that is led by a professionally diverse senior leadership cadre possessing a wide variety of skill sets, backgrounds, experiences, and worldviews.”⁶⁴ Few people would disagree with Danskine. Unfortunately, since that writing, little has changed to significantly broaden the composition of the GO force; data continues to show a predisposition to provide more BPZ and wing command opportunities to officers from the predominantly male flying (rated) community, resulting in an overwhelmingly male GO cadre for seven decades. Current diversity initiatives are focused on flooding the operational pipeline with more female Airmen and retaining them, with high hopes that more will remain and eventually compete for GO. But does the USAF have the luxury of waiting a generation or more to determine success? If the traditional GO formula generates the same results, women who remain to compete for GO will likely continue to need those senior-ranking mentors to provide well-earned opportunities

to perform—opportunities the system would otherwise not offer despite their formidable resumes. It is time now to move past mere acknowledgment of operational bias to pursue action with genuine change that will not require a generation or more to measure success.

To get from here to there and reap diversity's benefits across the Air Force enterprise, the service's GO cadre must be included in D&I initiatives. It must lead the way in both word and example, taking a much-needed cultural paradigm shift head-on, owning it, and positively promoting impactful change *within* and from the top. By instituting a more deliberate process, rooted in requirements, the USAF will generate more GO opportunities for elite performers in diverse career fields. A diverse leadership will help to armor the force against group-think, unlock innovative ideas, and effectively guide the future force with a wider aperture for viable solutions to wicked problems. Courageous leaders at all levels must continue to challenge paradigms, unafraid of asking tough, probing questions—even if that means potentially offending the sensibilities of the majority. There is no doubt the higher one looks up the USAF ranks, the less that view reflects American society. In the end, however, the issue is bigger than aesthetics and functional demographics; it is not about pilot versus non-pilot or an arbitrary gender “sweet spot” ratio. It is about what the USAF needs to maintain its capability to deter enemies and defend US interests. Diversity does not sacrifice operational capability; it brings strength, agility, and innovation—critical imperatives to retain the service's reputation as the world's greatest Air Force.

The highly agile, networked, diverse and inclusive Air Force of the future will demand a flexible system that can better leverage the variety of experiences, special skills, and exceptional potential of our Airmen.

—USAF Strategic Master Plan, Human Capital Annex, May 2015

Appendix

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation: Replace Rated and Non-Rated Categories with Operator and Enabler

Why define an entire community by what it is not?⁶⁵ Rated and non-rated labels are terms of the past and infer division across functional lines. Yet they are continually used to describe and categorize officers, be it via demographic filters, promotion and command selection boards, or choosing members for key development jobs, such as aide-de-camp, military assistant, and executive officer. Surprisingly, most guidance documents referencing the future force, such as AFFOC 2035, avoid rated and non-rated labels altogether, especially when explaining the need for innovation, integration, and agility to help solve twenty-first-century challenges. By moving away from these anachronistic references and toward categories that instead promote inclusion and recognize diverse skill sets, experience, and backgrounds, the USAF can lay a more fertile foundation for a much-needed paradigm shift emphasizing interdependence and valuing all communities for what they bring to the fight. Rated and non-rated labels are poor descriptors for the talented Airmen serving today. Instead, the USAF should replace them with relevant categories that explain what the vast majority of its men and women do. The USAF does much more than fly, and many other operators are critical to the USAF's mission, including those in the remotely piloted aircraft, cyber, special forces, nuclear, and space and missile fields. Operators are only half the equation, though; none can succeed without key enablers such as acquisitions, AFOSI, security force defenders, ISR, logistics, maintenance, finance, personnel, civil engineering, and professional services (chaplain, medical, and legal). Transitioning from a "pilots versus other" mentality to one that emphasizes mission interdependence and appreciates what all Airmen do for America would be a valuable first step to embracing a culture that welcomes functional and gender diversity as keys to unlocking innovation.

Recommendation: Tie All GO Positions to Requirements – Operator, Enabler, or Generalist

A complete scrub of all GO positions is necessary to identify where the service can leverage opportunities for diversity; the impact could be immediate, not decades or a generation from now. As no specific position description is tied to GO billets other than “generalist” (90G0), the USAF has flexibility and tremendous subjectivity in how GO positions are filled. Redefining the “generalist” category and identifying those GO positions that may well require specific skills provide opportunity to balance non-rated skills, talents, and experiences, ultimately achieving senior leadership more representative of the rest of the force. Such efforts will allow the USAF to determine which of its GO positions require an operator or an enabler and which could be filled with either, a true “generalist” (90G0). Dividing all GO positions into three separate pools would serve as a forcing function to instill greater objectivity into what is otherwise a subjective selection process. Additionally, to ensure balance and provide opportunity for increased diversity within the GO cadre, these bins should be fenced and competitively filled accordingly. Positions that require an operator will only be filled with an operator, those requiring an enabler will only be filled with an enabler, and “generalist” positions could be filled with either.

Recommendation: Intentionally Pair Diverse Leadership Teams across Groups, Wings, NAFs, and MAJCOMs

Again, as a forcing function to instill increased objectivity within a relatively subjective selection process, the USAF should intentionally pair top leadership team members with different functional backgrounds. In other words, if a group or wing commander is an operator, their vice-commander should be an enabler. MAJCOM and NAF positions would also follow this diverse leadership team model: for example, if ACC/CC is an operator, their CV should be an enabler. By intentionally providing more leadership milestone prospects to talented officers from the more gender-diverse enabler community, the USAF will inherently increase the opportunities for women (and other service minorities) to reach the GO echelon. By way of example, between 2012 and 2015 this leadership team construct worked effectively when

General Spencer, a financial manager by trade, served as the vice chief of staff of the Air Force alongside the chief of staff of the Air Force, Gen Mark A. Welsh III (retired), an F-16 pilot.

Recommendation: Change USAF Policy – Allow Enablers to Be Flying Wing/CCs

In all PME, officers are taught that “a leader is a leader,” but in practice, the USAF provides unequal opportunity to operators. As a result, the enabler community and, as the data has shown, gender diversity suffer as a result. Per current Air Force policy, only rated officers command flying groups and wings; however, rated officers may also command nonflying units such as mission support and maintenance groups as well as ISR and air base wings. The 2016 CSB selections demonstrate how this process so often plays out, with numerous examples of rated officers filling non-rated command positions; there are, however, no instances where the reverse is true. With few command opportunities available, the CSB subjectively evaluates O-6 candidates and selects the USAF’s future leaders based on past performance and GO potential. If the CSB selects the USAF’s best and brightest leaders, should it matter whether a group or wing commander is rated? If a mission support officer has more than three years of leadership experience than the average pilot, this criterion would and should favor non-rated officers more often, but it does not.⁶⁶ This factor could be due to Air Force policy requiring rated officers to command units with flying missions. In many cases, rated authorities can be delegated down to group and squadron level, if even necessary. Similar to the GO position binning recommendation, the USAF should update its policy on command of flying units outlined in AFI 51-509 to better align with current realities and, more specifically, reflect D&I intent and vision that embrace diversity. All wing and group command opportunities should be fairly competed across functional communities, and those group/wing commands strictly requiring an operator fill should be so determined by an objective assessment. As this recommendation may be a drastic cultural change for the USAF to implement immediately, the service could test this initiative across a sampling of command positions wherein high-performing officers from enabler communities, whom the CSB already selected for GO potential, are provided the opportunity to command flying groups and wings.

Recommendation: Promote Transparency and Accountability

While I was conducting research for this study, it was striking to experience firsthand the hesitancy by many of those interviewed, especially former AF/DPG members, who were reluctant to talk openly “on the record” about the GO selection process and their thoughts on biases toward certain communities. Additionally, I was unable to obtain historical demographic data or information about the GO promotion process, despite numerous attempts to do so. Data available publicly using the AFPC Interactive Demographic Analysis System (IDEAS) database provided statistics for only officers in grades O-6 and below. The AFPC demographic fact sheet does not mention general officers at all. The information is kept close hold, and several of those interviewed referred to the GO process as highly sensitive; even basic historical demographics without any personally identifiable information were next to impossible to obtain. Why the secrecy? The USAF should consider instituting an objective oversight component to validate results after CSB and GO board processes are complete but before higher-level approval as a check and balance outside the chain of command. Additionally, GO demographic information should be made available to all. While the recent acknowledgment that the USAF can do better in diversity is a positive sign, accountability and transparency should be embedded within implementation plans and include senior-most leadership decisions. As shown, there has been a stark lack of gender (and racial) diversity within the GO cadre for decades, but rather than obscure this reality, the USAF should demonstrate accountability by continuing to champion its milestones, sharing its “as is” data, and promoting a strategy for reaching a “to be” balanced and diverse force across all ranks.

Recommendation: Allow Critically Manned Communities to Choose Leadership or Technical Paths

The military has historically been an “up or out” system wherein officers are either promoted or must separate. One fear of making changes to a GO model that favors pilots disproportionately to the rest of the force is that more pilots may decide to “vote with their feet” and leave after initial commitments are met. However, operational capa-

bility and diversity do not have to be an either-or choice. In 2017, the USAF was approximately 750 fighter pilots short in required inventory (mobility pilots offset this shortage in the aggregate for an overall shortage of 250 pilots), primarily at the field grade officer level; priority staff positions are going unfilled as a result.⁶⁷ For such a critical shortage, the USAF should offer off-ramp options at key gates wherein those pilots who wish to be considered for promotion to O-6 and O-7 commit to follow a leadership path that includes SDE and joint tours. Others could opt to remain in the cockpit, with an acknowledged decrease in promotion potential. Given the estimated cost to produce a combat pilot today is over six million dollars, such a change could also address training and funding issues.⁶⁸ Overall, such a policy could enable the USAF to maintain fighter capability, reduce pilot shortages, allow the service to obtain return on its investment (training such as Undergraduate Pilot Training and the USAF Weapons School), ensure only those interested in leadership opportunities compete for them, and better balance the functional diversity of limited wing command and GO positions by increasing opportunities for the non-rated officer community, and with it, increase the opportunity for gender (and other minority) diversity within senior-level ranks.

Col Tara R. Lunardi, USAF

Colonel Lunardi was deputy commander, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Quantico, Virginia. Previously, she served as the commander of the OSI's 2nd Field Investigations Region (Wing), adjunct professor at the Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy, vice commander of the OSI's 7th Field Investigations Region (Wing), and deputy director of security at the White House Military Office. Colonel Lunardi passed away in February 2024.

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47. Of note, several of those interviewed made a point to mention that their senior officer mentors had daughters of their own.
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51. Maj Gen Dawn M. Dunlop, USAF, Retired (then commander, NATO Early Warning and Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe), telephonic interview by author, December 15, 2016.
52. Maj Gen Linda S. Hurry (then a brigadier general, director of expeditionary support, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center), telephonic interview by author, December 6, 2016. (General Hurry is currently the director of logistics, Headquarters Air Force.)
53. Lt Gen Steven L. Kwast, USAF, Retired (then AU/CC), interview by author, February 7, 2017.
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Chapter 15

Pregnancy Policies at the Service Academies

Proposed Solutions to a Problem of Inequity and Injustice

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Introduction

In the fall of her junior year at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), cadet “Sarah Mattheson” took a pregnancy test, and the results changed her life.¹ She looked at the positive test and felt a flood of emotions: waves of fear, devastation, and anger mixed with a twinge of excitement at the prospect of becoming a mother. Many college students have found themselves facing unplanned pregnancies, but Sarah’s situation was different. As a cadet at a service academy, she was not allowed by law to have dependents. This policy left her with three options: she could terminate her pregnancy, terminate her parental rights by giving up her child for adoption, or be expelled.

Sarah chose to carry the pregnancy to term. She finished the fall semester before going on temporary medical leave for the end of her pregnancy and to give birth. Once her daughter was born, she had hoped to give her up for adoption to her parents, but the father of the child did not consent to this arrangement and instead retained full custody. To maintain her place at the Academy, Sarah spent \$3,000 in legal fees and gave up her child to the child’s father, relinquishing her legal maternal rights. Now without dependents, she was free to return to the USAFA, which she did that summer after missing only one term of school. The goal was to graduate and then file adoption paperwork to regain custody of her child. Sarah worked hard and completed her education, graduating and commissioning in December of the following year, just a few months after her original classmates.

Once she was free of the laws governing Academy cadets that forbade her from having a child, she discovered that the father of her little girl had no interest in sharing custody with her. From a legal standpoint, he has the force of family law behind him. Once a child has been given up for adoption and the parental rights have been severed, the biological parent does not have legal recourse to regain custody of the child without the consent of the legal guardian. Sarah spent thousands of dollars and filed multiple petitions to regain shared custody of her daughter, and these have been denied. The Air Force had given Sarah a choice: she could be a mother or become an officer but not both. She chose to serve her country at immense personal cost. But the legal facts of the situation do not change reality: Sarah is a mother, but one who has lost her child owing to an unjust, antiquated military policy.

The Politicization of Addressing Barriers to Service

As the opening story indicates, questions of policy may be intricately intertwined with the most personal aspects of people's lives, and the effect of poorly conceived regulations can have drastic implications, even when not intended. When it comes to dealing with policies like the one that affected Sarah to such an extreme degree, the military has taken steps to address the barriers to service for minority groups—here, specifically women.² Experiences like Sarah's are life-altering and not merely the slight manifestations of vague demographic trends. Nevertheless, the diversity initiatives that address such problems have come under increased scrutiny because of how they are positioned and interpreted in the broader society.

It is a truism to point to the political polarization of American culture, which has only continued to accelerate in the past ten years. One of the effects of this polarization, however, is that politics becomes a primary lens through which to interpret and sort all aspects of society.³ The issues highlighted through this framework become the grounds on which the so-called culture wars are fought, and these conflicts only accelerate the sense of division and divide. Efforts across many spheres of society to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and foster a sense of belonging are certainly not free of these problems and have become a major locus of political conflict in their own right. Among the many critiques made against such diversity initiatives is that they tend to focus on symbolic action and representation rather than ef-

fectiveness. When such charges are made against military initiatives, they are particularly troubling since they suggest an inversion of priorities, deemphasizing readiness and warfighting capabilities in favor of a politicized aesthetic of diversity designed to increase the feeling of belonging in minority groups.⁴

This chapter is not intended to provide an overarching assessment of diversity initiatives in either the military or American society more broadly. Rather, we wish to highlight what is missing from this highly politicized interpretation. The cultural polarization of issues around diversity tends to produce a knee-jerk reaction for or against policy initiatives on the basis of political affiliation versus a critical assessment of policies as they relate to broader institutional goals. As the opening story highlights, there can be steep personal costs to bad policy. But these issues also tend to ripple outward, allowing cultural and institutional problems to establish tenacious roots when left unchecked by critical evaluation. The goal of critically assessing barriers to access is not merely symbolic; rather, it is consistent with and serves the broader institutional goals for the acquisition and retention of talent for the purpose of greater mission effectiveness. The military has a responsibility to ensure that it treats individuals with dignity and fairness—not only because it is right but also because it is vital to achieving its institutional goals. Safeguarding the apolitical perspective of military leadership requires formulating initiatives this way.

To this end, this analysis highlights historical issues concerning pregnancy in the military and assesses the barriers such policies have created for women in the service. At the same time, it is ultimately optimistic about the potential for change. When we first began our work on the issues discussed here, the ideas we presented were offered as possible solutions to a seemingly intractable problem. Since then, after presenting our findings to senior Air Force leadership in the fall of 2021, all the policies discussed below have been enacted, rectifying a serious injustice and underscoring the value that such work can have on military policy and culture. These reforms began with a change in federal law in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2022 and resulted in Department of Defense (DOD) policy change published November 1, 2023.⁵ We are honored to have had a small voice in correcting a long-standing problem, both in participating in the advocacy for the change in federal law that was already under consideration and in offering further initiatives that have since been incorporated into DOD policy. Most importantly, the work here

represents one step forward in diminishing barriers to service for an up-and-coming set of highly qualified, effective leaders with whom we will be privileged to serve.

Policy History

The military's policy banning cadets and midshipmen from having dependents has a murky origin in the nineteenth century at the United States Military Academy, well preceding the integration of women into military service. At the time, the policy was deemed common sense: an honorable gentleman would not have children out of wedlock or leave a wife or children for four years during his education. Therefore, only single men without dependents could be admitted as cadets. This policy blended well with the stoic ideal of men's total commitment to soldiering.

Paternity at the time was easy to hide and virtually impossible to verify if denied. If a cadet fathered a child, he could simply refuse to acknowledge it, and even his denials would be further bolstered by the misogynistic assumptions of society that would have placed the responsibility for the situation on the woman.⁶ As a result, the policy prevented cadets from marrying, but when it came to children, it also encouraged dishonorable behavior by incentivizing cadets to deny any children that they had fathered before or during their time as cadets. Without a means of confirming paternity, the consequences of the policy were limited and mostly borne by the civilian women who had the misfortune to fall pregnant by male cadets who refused to accept responsibility for their own actions.

While the implications of these policies at the service academies would not shift for over a hundred years until the point when women were first admitted in the 1970s, the issue of pregnancy in the military first came into question during and after the Second World War. During the total war effort, cultural shifts led to the creation of military roles for women. They did not participate in combat, but they could serve at bases in a variety of support capacities. There were 350,000 women brought into service through the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), assisting the Army and the Navy, respectively.⁷

While at the time even the partial integration of women into military service was unprecedented in America, the government enacted

strict regulations to maintain an overwhelmingly male-dominated military. Caps were put on the number of women who could serve and the rank they could attain, and they were forbidden from commanding men.⁸ More pertinent to our discussion, however, is that they were also prohibited from having dependent children and could be dismissed for becoming pregnant.⁹ The underlying logic of this policy is not difficult to piece together. That women were allowed to serve demonstrates a recognition of their competencies, even though the limitations placed on their service underscore the underlying contemporary misogynistic assumptions. But that they were then no longer allowed to serve if they should become pregnant or have children reflects the broader cultural values of the day that defined motherhood (not fatherhood) to be a role incompatible with military life. According to this mindset, once a woman manifested her sexuality and capacity to bear children, her role was at home, not in the service.

To further illustrate the challenges women faced, the partial integration of women in the military proved so controversial in America that it sparked wild rumors that the women of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) were functionally hired to serve as prostitutes for the Army.¹⁰ The presence of women in the service generated fears about "immoral" behavior that fed rumors they were issued prophylactic kits by the military and engaging in public sex. The Army was actually at odds with policy and the media regarding providing contraceptives to WAC members, although ironically (and unsurprisingly) men were issued prophylactics and given sexual education briefings without provoking any public outrage.¹¹ The moral panic around the WAC's sexual conduct was sufficiently widespread that it prompted a Military Intelligence Service (MIS) investigation to determine whether the rumors were deliberately planted by Axis propagandists working undercover to undermine the service of the WACs.¹² What they found, however, was not Nazis. They discovered that the primary sources of these rumors were male military officers who resented WAC officers sharing rank, men who feared they would be replaced, male soldiers who disliked women intruding on their monopoly, and male soldiers who struggled to find dates.¹³ The presence of women in the military, even in only a partially integrated capacity and at a time of national existential crisis with war in two theaters, stirred up misogynistic rhetoric focused on the fear that women's bodies and sexuality would undermine the strength and integrity of the military service.¹⁴

These cultural mores and the fears that resulted from them operated alongside more standard medical concerns about pregnancy in the military. All pregnancy resulted in discharge on medical grounds. Initially, however, WAC regulations made a distinction between pregnancy discharges. A married WAC member who became pregnant received an honorable discharge and was released to give birth and raise her child. An unmarried pregnant WAC member received a dishonorable discharge in keeping with the regulations already established by the Army for female nurses. However, when the first WAC director, Col Oveta Culp Hobby—a woman—was appointed to her position, she forced a rewriting of the regulations to ensure that all pregnancy was treated the same and merely resulted in a medical discharge.¹⁵

The fact that pregnancy would result in a discharge created pressure on the women of the WAC to abort their pregnancies to continue service, though this outcome remained relatively rare. Initially, the government sought to discharge women on the basis of getting an abortion. However, this proposal was rejected on the grounds that the law only prohibited doctors from administering abortions, not women from getting an abortion.¹⁶ The SPARS, the women's auxiliary in the Coast Guard, devised another way of discharging women who got abortions. Although they could not be discharged for having dependents or being pregnant, they could be discharged for breaking the regulation requiring immediate notification of the chain of command when they became pregnant.¹⁷ Ultimately, the WAC declined to adopt this policy owing to concerns from female doctors in the Surgeon General's office.¹⁸ They argued that there was no way to distinguish spontaneous abortion and medical abortion and, further, that such policies would discourage women from seeking proper medical care for any resulting complications. In this way, the military maintained the policies that incentivized abortion, placing pressure on women to choose between their pregnancy and their service.

Where women did not seek illegal, unregulated, and dangerous abortion procedures, the pregnancy discharge policy created a problem for the military since unwed pregnant women were often ostracized and lacked sufficient social care. Some advocated that the pregnancy discharge be removed altogether and women be allowed to convalesce while in military status before being discharged for having dependents. Once again Colonel Hobby intervened, here specifically on the basis that this policy would pressure women to give up their children for

adoption to continue in military service.¹⁹ By drawing the line in the sand on the issue of pregnancy, she sought to prevent a situation where the military exerted its influence to break up families.²⁰ Thus, we return to the issue of service members with dependents and see the beginnings of the debate that only recently was ameliorated with new or revised policies.

Though these questions emerged in a real way during the Second World War, they did not begin to intersect with service academies' policies prohibiting dependents until the integration of women into the academies in 1976. In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed a bill directing all the service academies to admit women to their classes the following year, and in 1976, the USAFA class of 1980 admitted 157 women for the first time.²¹ This same year, the Federal Appeals Court struck down on equal protection grounds the standing military policy that instituted immediate discharges for pregnant women, which had been in place since the initial integration of women into the military during the Second World War.²² Nevertheless, the policy remained functionally in place at the military academies for nearly fifty more years. If a cadet fell pregnant while at the Academy, she could either have an abortion or would be summarily disenrolled, and the only way for her to return would be to reapply after she had divested herself of her children.²³

The policy, as it stood, had the same fundamental options: get an abortion, give up your child, or get expelled. The core of this policy was written into Department of Defense instructions governing all the service academies: "Those appointed as cadets or midshipmen must not have dependents."²⁴ This policy reflected the legal qualifications for admittance and retention as a cadet. While cadets who became pregnant were expelled immediately, they were granted an intervening period of medical and convalescent leave that allowed them to depart the Academy and return a year later. The terms of the return remained unchanged: the cadet could not have dependents, which meant that they must have severed their legal ties to any child to resume their place at the Academy. The articulation of the policy was unyielding: in the case of administrative turnback for pregnancy, legal documentation was required before returning to the Academy clearly showing proof of complete relinquishment of parental duties and rights (i.e., adoption certificate and not powers of attorney, contract for care, etc.) sufficient to permanently extinguish any and all obligations to the child(ren) under the laws of the cadet's state of residence and (or) the United States.²⁵

The United States Air Force Academy instruction on the cadet turnback provision includes a template questionnaire where the returning cadet must prove that she has no legal obligation to the child. If she does not provide the paperwork proving that she has divested herself of her child, her paperwork for immediate dismissal is forwarded to the Judge Advocate.²⁶

Thus, the current service academy policies maintained the same pressure points that Colonel Hobby warned about when women were first brought into military service during the Second World War. The policy established rigid constraints enforcing the notion that military service is incompatible with parenthood and placed significant pressure on cadets to divest themselves of their children—by terminating either the pregnancy or their parental rights. These were the only two options for those wishing to remain in the service; both options are explicitly and by design absolutely permanent.

Pregnancy in Accession Status: A Medical Condition

Given the stringency of how this policy was articulated at the academies, it is helpful to compare the procedures dealing with pregnant cadets' accessions at the USAFA with other pathways into military service. In the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) and Officer Training School (OTS), pregnancy is considered a medically disqualifying condition. This policy is based on the wording of DOD Instruction (DODI) 6130.03, *Medical Standards for Military Service*, which lists it among many other medical disqualifications. In this case, however, the disqualification is considered temporary, only lasting the duration of the pregnancy and the following six months.²⁷

In the instruction, pregnancy is classified as a medical condition, which resituates the policy on more stable grounds. In particular, while current research promotes the benefit of moderate exercise during all stages of pregnancy, strenuous activity is considered risky to the health of the mother and the developing fetus.²⁸ These risks are compounded when the activity in question includes the risk of impact or falling, not uncommon in the exercises, field training, and other physical activities that form a standard part of the curriculum for accessions.

On the other hand, because pregnancy is framed in medical terms in these instances, the effect on accessions is one of delay rather than denial. In OTS and AFROTC, the pregnant woman may return to

training once six months have passed since the end of the pregnancy.²⁹ In the regulations governing cadet training, comparison is explicitly made between pregnancy and a broken leg as examples of medical conditions that may temporarily prevent cadets from meeting the standards of physical fitness but that do not in themselves permanently disqualify them from service.³⁰ The governing issue is whether or not one has the ability to meet physical standards.

In the scenarios addressed in these settings (Basic Military Training [BMT], AFROTC, OTS), pregnancy is dealt with in a manner that balances the requirements of the Air Force (and the career interests of the recruits) with the need to avoid unnecessary medical risk to recruits or to modify the standards at the outset of training. Given the intention of military training to promote the integration of individual members into the team and enculturate cadets to become functioning military officers, the Air Force has compelling reasons for maintaining the fitness standards at the point of accession.

In all these situations, however, the medical disqualification of pregnancy is only temporary, which means that the appropriate way of handling the situation is through deferment rather than permanent disqualification. In this case, the policies that govern AFROTC are particularly clear: "Pregnancy, through six (6) months after completion of pregnancy, is a medical condition that does not meet medical accession standards per DODI 6130.03. Cadets may continue to participate in AFROTC as permitted by medical staff but will not be commissioned until they meet all medical accession standards."³¹ These regulations place the pregnant cadet into a holding pattern without punishment or retribution. She may maintain her academic scholarship and continue her studies or defer both until a later date. Once the pregnancy and subsequent period of convalescence have ended and the cadet is fully medically fit and able to meet the physical standards, she can receive her commission and begin her service in the Air Force.

With this baseline discussion about pregnancy in accession status, we may return to consider how the service academies and particularly the USAFA handled the pregnancy policy. In this case, it is important to recognize that some aspects of the policies outlined above are mirrored in the rules that govern the cadets at USAFA. In all instances, the medical requirements for service are outlined in DODI 6130.03, which does not permit pregnancy in accession status. As we already noted, the medical risks associated with strenuous physical training

justify these concerns and, in our view, warrant the temporary deferral of training and commission until the cadet is returned to full medical health and physical fitness.

However, the requirements of the USAFA (and her sister academies) extended these requirements further. The basis of these restrictions for academy applicants appears to have been derived from federal law, and its policy was framed quite differently, stating that the “applicant must not have a legal obligation to support a child, children, or any other person.”³² This regulation barring cadets from holding the legal responsibility for a dependent (to include marriage in the previous sentence) is curiously situated immediately after the section requiring the cadet to adhere to a particular moral standard. After a list of problematic behaviors, including those resulting in criminal convictions or excessive alcohol or drug abuse, this section of the code concludes with a generic catch-all statement that cites as disqualifying “any behavior, activity, or association showing the applicant’s conduct is incompatible with exemplary standards of personal conduct, moral character, and integrity.”³³ Given the historical concerns about the supposedly detrimental moral effects of the integration of women into the service, the juxtaposition of these policies may not be coincidental.

While in this case indulging in too much speculation about the literary formulation of legal code may be dangerous, it is still worth pointing out that the rules against dependents were not framed in the context of medical disqualification. While “medical fitness” as defined by Air Force regulation is still part of the standards set for all applicants (which includes barring pregnant women from accession status), the policy prohibiting cadets (male and female) from having dependents was set apart from the medical issues related to pregnancy we have examined above.³⁴

Whether or not one is inclined to interpret the barring of cadets from having dependents as a reflection of traditional sexual mores rather than the compelling interest of the government, it is nonetheless important in this discussion to acknowledge those aspects of the policy that are thoughtfully grounded in other needs of the Air Force. It is standard policy that dependents (whether spouses or children) are not permitted at initial military training. While permission may be obtained for accompanied school tours for subsequent professional military education (PME), the intensity of the initial training environment, whether at BMT for enlisted members or at OTS for officers,

does not leave room for families. Training demands one's entire attention. More to the point, the high stress of initial training is designed to force trainees to rely on one another and learn to function effectively as a team, and the presence of family members would doubtless diminish these desirable effects.

In this case, the distinction between ROTC and the USAFA becomes much clearer. Both pathways are initial training environments, but the Academy's initial training does not last for a few weeks or months but (with short breaks excepted) for four years. Even more to the point, unlike the ordinary commitments of an ROTC cadet who has drill days on some weekends and fits in those obligation around the normal schedule of university student life, USAFA training is full time. Thus, the commitments of full-time parenting are impossible alongside life as an Academy cadet. Children cannot be brought into the training environment, but in this case, training lasts so much longer than it does under alternative accession routes that it is nearly impossible for the cadet to maintain their parental responsibilities. It is particularly the case if the cadet already has a dependent at the outset of the program, which is the situation described in the federal law.

A similar logic is clearly operative behind the regulation barring cadets from being married. Their spouses cannot accompany them to the Academy, nor can the cadet take significant time away from the Academy, especially in the first two years. Even though the situation is slightly different in that a spouse of a married cadet is an adult and presumably responsible for themselves, nonetheless, the effect of long-term separation over the period of years is a high-risk factor for the breakdown of the marriage.³⁵ This circumstance, in turn, negatively affects the capacity of the student to maintain focus on academics and military training.³⁶

In light of these factors, the general policy prohibiting marriage and dependents as applicants has a clear rationale from the standpoint of military readiness and family well-being. None of these factors suggests, of course, that married applicants or parents are unfit for military service altogether. The point is rather that potential applicants ought to seek other commissioning sources (e.g., AFROTC or direct commission), which are more adaptable to the demands of their current situation. Married applicants or those with children may still apply and be accepted into these programs by virtue of the different structures and demands of those military training environments.³⁷

Problems with the Academy Policy

With this context, we can turn our attention to a more critical examination of how the Academy's policies on pregnancy and childbirth affected the broader culture and climate of the USAFA and the Air Force more generally. Here it is important to recognize that the disproportionate effect on women due to issues around pregnancy at the Academy until the end of 2023 resulted from two corresponding policies versus a singular one. As is still the case, pregnant cadets were immediately medically disqualified from participation in the Academy's training environment due to the pregnancy itself. Increased medical risk to the mother and fetus makes a pregnant cadet's participation in the required strenuous physical activity and higher-risk activities (e.g., combative training, field exercises, or airborne qualification) untenable from a medical perspective, as discussed above.

However, once the medical convalescent period has expired, the policy barring dependents immediately came into play. The functional result of the dovetailing of these two policies is part of what was responsible for generating unequal pressures on female cadets since the consequences of pregnancy began immediately and did not stop until the situation was resolved through abortion or adoption. The drastic consequences not only of childbirth but of pregnancy generated an extraordinary amount of pressure on pregnant cadets to terminate their pregnancies immediately.

The unique pressures these policies placed on women deserve a more thorough examination. Some of the consequences of pregnancy at the Academy may be necessary from a medical standpoint, but it is still worth pointing out how they only affected women. While the policy about cadets not being allowed to have any dependents ostensibly would have affected both male and female cadets without distinction, the hard reality was different and began during pregnancy due to the medical standards that governed accessions. Thus, if a male and female cadet were to have had sex and the woman became pregnant, the consequences of their decisions would have come into immediate effect but only for the woman, who (if she did not immediately terminate the pregnancy) would have been sent home and deferred for a year until she could rejoin the next class year. Meanwhile, the male cadet could continue his education and professionalization, progressing toward graduation and commissioning unimpeded by the circumstances he directly precipitated.

If these events occurred in the final year of the two cadets' time at the Academy, the man could graduate regardless of the decisions of the woman regarding her pregnancy. If she chose to give birth to the baby and retain legal custody, the man retains legal responsibility for the child and gains a dependent, but only after his graduation, which means that his career would have still been unaffected by the policy. The female cadet, however, was not merely deferred for a year. Because she was sent home for the duration of her pregnancy and the convalescent period afterward, she would still have needed to complete her final year at the Academy. But at this point, her decision to maintain a legal relationship as the child's mother meant that she would be dismissed from the Academy. To make matters worse, because she had completed the third year, she now would have been obligated to repay the fees corresponding to the education she had received since she had no open pathway toward receiving her commission and fulfilling her service obligation to the Air Force. Thus, the combination of policies—one evaluating pregnancy as a medical condition and the other prohibiting dependents—together create an unequal burden on women. From the moment she becomes pregnant, she faces consequences. Meanwhile, the father may bide his time (and potentially finish his degree) while awaiting the results of a paternity test. The unevenness of the timing of the consequences of pregnancy is compounded by the delay in continuing at the Academy while pregnant, making finishing the school year before birth impossible.³⁸

However, the unequal burden on women extended beyond the bounds of this hypothetical scenario. If a female cadet became pregnant, she obviously could not hide her own relationship to the child as the mother. The father's identity, as we indicated, may be hidden until after the birth pending the results of a genetic test. This circumstance, however, placed a crushing decision on the shoulders of the woman. If the father was also a cadet, she also carried his future on her shoulders. If she were to identify the father, then she potentially would destroy his career as well as her own. If she kept his identity confidential, she could preserve his career while still losing her own.³⁹ If the woman (or, for that matter, the couple) decided to keep the baby, the woman alone had to bear the psychological burden of the child's parentage to preserve the father's USAFA degree, commissioning, and future career. If she chose instead to identify the father for whatever reason (e.g., to claim child support), she had to do so knowing that she was destroying his future prospects as a military officer, which

could also affect his capacity to provide child support payments on the basis of his income. She carried the burden of their mutual actions alone, in this case specifically to prevent the same consequences that were unavoidable for her from falling on him.

In addition to the pressures exerted by the threat of expulsion from the military, there is an additional financial threat that once again compounds the problem. Once Academy cadets have completed two years of training and education, they are liable for the cost of their education should they drop out of or be expelled from the program. This policy on its own is justifiable given the significant financial investment the government makes in the cadets on the basis of their fulfillment of the service obligation. When students are expelled or dropped from the program due to violations or other disqualifications, they are obligated to repay the government for the financial investment made in their education.⁴⁰ The first two years are the most psychologically and physically taxing due to the extremely limited privileges afforded to the cadets. The policy allows cadets to drop out of the program without financial liability up to that point, which provides sufficient flexibility for students to determine that they have made the wrong choice. However, once students have entered the third year, they incur the responsibility for their entire education up to the point they leave the program.

Therefore, if a cadet became pregnant during her third or fourth year and was inclined to keep the baby as a dependent, she would have been faced with the prospect of a financial liability for approximately \$60,000 per year of her education, which she incurred without having achieved a degree, let alone the commission that would have provided her with the anticipated income.⁴¹ This problem would be additionally compounded if the father of the child was also an Academy cadet. If both were sent down because they chose to keep the child, the government would then bill them a combined total of \$240,000 or more, depending on how many years they attended the Academy.⁴² This possibility exerted enormous financial pressure on cadets to resolve the pregnancy by avoiding the legal obligation, whether through abortion or adoption.

Here, too, the disparity of the timing of consequences between the male and female cadets increased the pressure on the woman to terminate the pregnancy—as we noted above, not merely to preserve her own career but to preserve the father's as well. The policy placed the psychological burden of the pregnancy resulting from the man's sexual

activity on the woman, unjustly putting her in the position where she must decide both their fates. Were this situation further complicated by romantic entanglements, the pressure only increased. Because a cadet's choice to keep the child would also affect the father, her decision to seek an abortion may have been driven by her desire to rescue the father's career rather than to make the best choice for herself as determined by the exercise of her personal autonomy.

To demonstrate the inequitable implications of the policy, we might consider what would have happened if a male cadet impregnated a woman not affiliated with the Academy. Because he is under the same legal restrictions against having a dependent while in accession status, one might suppose that the situation would have been the same, at least once the pregnancy ended in the birth of a child. However, here the raw biological facts of pregnancy create a convenient loophole for him to escape the consequences of his decisions in a way that would simply not have been available to the female cadet. If the mother does not identify him as the father, he has no immediate legal obligation to his child. The male cadet would be violating the honor code if he hid the birth of his child knowingly, but it is also plausible that he could proceed unknowingly after a casual encounter or breakup. He would still be able to continue his studies, graduate, receive his commission, and then file a paternity suit to be named as the legal father at a later date after he has graduated, functionally claiming a deferred legal right. Even if he knows that he is the father, he does not necessarily risk losing the child permanently since the paternity test will remain an available means to verify his legal status.⁴³

In contrast, if a female cadet got pregnant by a man outside the Academy and then chose to relinquish her legal right to the child to the father or someone else, she had no legal basis on which to reclaim those rights that she has given up once she has graduated. She cannot regain custody without the legal guardian's consent, at which point she would have had to go through the lengthy and expensive process of legally adopting her own biological child.

The disparity between these two pathways was stark. The male who impregnates his non-Academy girlfriend relies on her declining to file a paternity claim for the child support that would legally obligate him through a court-ordered genetic test. If she agrees to wait to name him as the father, then he has no dependents; he can graduate, commission, and subsequently seek legal recognition as the father by taking a paternity test. In this scenario, his Academy post does remain at risk

should she force the disclosure of his status as the father before graduation. Conversely, if the female cadet gives up her baby for adoption to the non-Academy male in the hope that she will graduate and adopt back her own child, she risks losing her child permanently.⁴⁴

This discussion of the policy implications is intended to show how what appears at first glance to be a nondiscriminatory blanket policy can affect women far more severely than it does men. Whether or not the policy is designed to shield men and punish women, the natural biological facts of pregnancy create the conditions for an inequitable application of these rules. This policy in turn shapes the cultural environment of the USAFA and the military at large.

The unequal distribution of consequences for childbearing already shifts the burden of responsibility for family planning far more onto women than men. While some aspects of this reality may be unavoidable due to the medical implications of pregnancy, the punitive measures embedded in military policy and federal law created an extra layer of consequences that were discriminatory in application, if not intentional. These kinds of policies create a broader cultural climate in which women are set at a disadvantage.

This environment affected women at the USAFA regardless of pregnancy. One cadet, “Margaret Green,” recounted a story of a pregnancy scare in her fourth year at the Academy.⁴⁵ She drove off base to a local Wal-Mart to purchase pregnancy tests to avoid suspicion by making inquiries at the medical clinic at the Academy. She locked herself in the bathroom of a local restaurant chain to take the tests in private before going out to sit in her car waiting for the results. Margaret recalled those moments as being among the most isolating and lonely times of her life and felt like the walls were collapsing around her. Even after the results came back negative, she went back to her room and laid on the floor and sobbed. In those moments, she was the only one facing potential consequences. Her fiancé, also a cadet, would be unaffected either way. Under these policies, to be a woman at the Academy was to carry the psychological weight of the additional responsibility and threat of consequences not shared by male cadets.

Women have been a notable minority in the Academy population since they were first admitted in 1976. Their numbers at the Academy have increased significantly since then. In the first class to include women, just under 10 percent of the class of 1,600 were women.⁴⁶ The class of 2025 included 325 women of the total 1,113 cadets admitted,

just under 30 percent of the class.⁴⁷ While these improvements are pronounced, the current numbers still indicate that a supermajority of the Academy population is male. Nevertheless, these statistics are, in fact, higher than those in the Air Force, where women compose 23.3 percent of the active duty officer corps.⁴⁸ A wide variety of complex, intersecting cultural and sociological reasons underlie these discrepancies, and military policy may not meaningfully address or resolve all of them. However, where these discrepancies are creating unnecessary barriers that prevent qualified talent from joining or continuing service, the military has a vested interest in addressing the problem.

The issue about pregnancy in accession status—and especially pregnancy while a cadet at a military academy—is one such barrier that reflects and perpetuates these problems. The issue up until the overturning of these policies in 2023 was not merely that otherwise highly qualified female cadets were being expelled from an academy due to an antiquated and unjust policy. This was undoubtedly true, even if the numbers of those potential officers affected remain small. What is in some sense more concerning is how these policies created a climate that reinforced the stigma against pregnancy in the workplace, contributing to the misguided notion that women are thus inherently less valuable as officers because they can become pregnant.

In the military environment, the overwhelmingly male population already establishes an unspoken norm. Military equipment, for example, is manufactured based on average size—historically the size of an average male. Even where women are factored into establishing weapons system requirements, the disproportionate demographics mean that women tend to fall toward one end of the spectrum and are thus at a disadvantage. As mentioned in the discussion above, some of these issues may be unavoidable in an environment that prioritizes operational readiness over equal access. Nevertheless, the policies we have addressed here helped to reinforce those norms and establish a culture where men are the standard and women are the partially acceptable deviation. Pregnancy and motherhood—both as a temporary medical condition and as an experience loaded with cultural expectations—are not seen as norms of military service. Instead, the work culture of the military officially *allows* a woman to become pregnant. Research has shown that pregnancy among female military members has been viewed as being selfish, avoiding standards, and falling behind her male peers who do not manifest the same limitations of pregnancy as a condition.⁴⁹ In the case of cadets in accession status, as noted, the

military did not until 2023 allow pregnancy. In this way, the military enshrined in policy its most pronounced version of these cultural problems at the premiere entry point into military leadership in the officer corps.

The implications of the minority status of women in the military are far-reaching, and many lie well beyond the scope of this study. Among the most frequently addressed, however, is the problem of sexual assault in the military. We can be clear at the outset that no one is attempting to suggest that these problems can be traced to origins in the policies dealing with pregnancy or dependents at the service academies. Nevertheless, the general cultural climate that imagines women to be at best lingering on the margins of the norm rather than belonging to its center still feeds into an environment where the assailants themselves may make for themselves a home. In particular, the ways in which these policies transformed a woman's body and her sexuality into the very means of her potential disqualification from service helped to reinforce the perception that she by nature could never truly belong. Thus, even though it would be wrong to blame the military for manifesting the ills of society at large, we still have the responsibility to acknowledge the areas where the military's antiquated or misguided policies undergird these social problems in the ranks.

Expedited Transfer as a Viable Path Forward

It is significant that the military had taken steps in recent years to address the problem of sexual assault in the military as a whole and particularly within the service academies. One measure the military implemented in 2011 is the Expedited Transfer policy, allowing victims of sexual assault to seek immediate reassignment to another installation.⁵⁰ This policy is designed to mitigate the aftermath of sexual assault, not to address the problem itself. By seeking expedited transfer, victims of sexual assault may elect to move via a permanent change of station to another base, enabling them to avoid an encounter with the perpetrator and escape the unwanted visibility particularly likely to accompany accusations of assault within a military unit. The entire process is designed to circumvent any dependence on the outcomes of potential legal proceedings, meaning that regardless of whether or not the Airman chooses to pursue a legal case and regardless of whether a case

is successfully prosecuted, the Airman can appeal to their chain of command to ensure they are removed from the situation.⁵¹

This policy was recently adapted and written into the regulations governing each of the service academies. The circumstances in the lengthy accessions period change some of the dynamics of the process since a cadet cannot simply be moved to another base of assignment. Instead, the regulation stipulates that victims of sexual assault may “request a transfer to another military service academy or enroll in a Senior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps program.”⁵² Here too, as is the case in the broader military policy regarding expedited transfer, the process is designed to mitigate the effects of the hardship the cadet is suffering while attempting to provide some degree of autonomous choice to the victim.

This implication of the Expedited Transfer program is important on two levels. First, it is crucial to recognize, given the reality of sexual assault in all military academies, that situations will continue to arise where female victims of rape are impregnated by their male assailants. The transfer program allows victims to seek reassignment to another academy or placement into an ROTC program for the reasons outlined above. It ensures separation from the alleged perpetrator and removes the victim from the location and social environment in which the assault occurred. However, the policies on pregnancy we are discussing did not provide the victim who had become pregnant through sexual assault with the same range of options. The pregnant victim could not continue training at the USAFA for the duration of her pregnancy on medical grounds, nor could she be reassigned to the academy of a sister service. But more importantly for the purposes of the present discussion, she could not re-enroll or be enrolled in a sister academy at all if she chose to keep the child who was the product of her assault.

Many pregnant victims of sexual assault choose to terminate these pregnancies or immediately give babies up for adoption rather than carry them to term or keep custody of the child.⁵³ However, the policies up until 2023 removed the autonomy of this choice from the pregnant victim. Military regulation provided females at the academies with few options: she could leave the military academy system altogether, terminate the pregnancy, or give up custody of her child at birth. She was not allowed to keep the child and continue to pursue her career in a military academy despite her child resulting from a crime committed against her. In this way, intentionally or not, military policies robbed the victim of her ability to make her own decisions as a direct result

of the crime committed against her that likewise robbed her of her autonomy. The assailant forced himself upon her, and military regulation responded by forcibly limiting her options in the aftermath. The circumstances described here are a grave injustice but are neither improbable nor unprecedented.⁵⁴

The situation described above represents the most extreme version of the injustice enacted by the policy and sheds a harsh light on the severe implications of the policy under discussion. Here the discussion of the history of the policy is particularly instructive. In this case, the rules that could lead to such a terrible miscarriage of justice far preceded the integration of women into the military. No one wrote these regulations with the express intention of oppressing women in general or sexual assault victims in particular. Nevertheless, the fact that the policies remained in place without sufficient critical assessment for nearly fifty years after women were admitted to the Academy shows how the military has at times ignored the severe challenges its policies inflict on its service members simply by virtue of maintaining the status quo.

The Expedited Transfer program provided one possible model that could be extended to better handle pregnant cadets. In the initial version of this research, we suggested to senior leadership the ways in which this program's structure could be utilized to address these inequities. The program allowed victims to transfer from a service academy to a Senior ROTC program and thus maintain a degree of continuity in their service obligations, educational opportunity, and resulting commission. If this program were explicitly extended to pregnant cadets, they could avoid the competitive application process for ROTC scholarships, particularly at a time when they are considered medically disqualified from service. Instead, they would be able to move directly from the academies to government-supported education at another school. This policy would offer pregnant cadets an option that did not take them wholly outside the military trajectory on which they had already embarked or force them to reapply from the outset.

This appropriation of the Expedited Transfer program's pathway for pregnant cadets into ROTC had a distinct advantage since it did not require a change in federal law. Because pregnant cadets would be moving out of the Academy system, they no longer fell under the federal law that serves as the foundation for this military policy.⁵⁵ Dispensing with the policy altogether requires a literal act of Congress, while opening a new pathway into an alternative route of commission-

ing can be overseen by a shift in DOD and Air Force policy simply by broadening the applicability of existing paradigms.

Nevertheless, in our view, this solution is at best a temporary one to a more difficult problem. While the ROTC program is a major commissioning source for all branches of the military by virtue of its status as a reserve program, it does not offer the same opportunities for professional development or networking unique to the service academies, which is why a disproportionate number of senior leaders hail from the academies. In this way, the rules regarding pregnancy create an undue burden on women that may present a substantial barrier to their career success and full integration. They also promote a culture that fosters the perception of women's secondary status in the officer corps, especially among the cadre of officers coming from the Academy, which can have a disproportionate effect on the culture of the Air Force as a whole.

The CADET Act as a Viable Proposal

On July 15, 2021, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) introduced a bill to committee entitled the CADET Act, an acronym for Candidates Afforded Dignity, Equality, and Training.⁵⁶ The bill was designed to ensure that the policies under discussion were revised in such a way to protect “parental guardianship rights of cadets and midshipmen consistent with individual and academic responsibilities.”⁵⁷ To thread this needle, the CADET Act created a provision that allows cadets who become parents while at the Academy to appoint a temporary legal guardian who holds the power of attorney over the child for the duration of the cadet's time at the Academy. The CADET Act itself was folded into the National Defense Authorization Act of 2022, Sec. 559A, and passed into law on December 27, 2021 (NDAA 2022).⁵⁸

The core architecture of the bill is borrowed from the framework where single parents who are deployed are responsible for securing a guardianship for their child while they are gone. These family care plans are required by regulation and enforceable as an order under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), Article 92. Their purpose is to ensure that service members fulfill their legal obligations as parents to care for their dependents while also assuring that they remain ready for worldwide mobilization.⁵⁹ In the family care plan, a single

service member with dependents appoints a temporary guardian to care for those dependents for the duration of the deployment. The guardian has legal power of attorney over the child, freeing the parent from potentially being called away from their duties to care for the child during the deployment. It is incumbent upon the parent to find a willing and able guardian as part of their responsibility to ensure that their dependents receive proper care.

The CADET Act used the same legal logic and applied it to cadets.⁶⁰ The time in accession status and military training is portrayed as a long unaccompanied tour. Like a deployment, though, cadets who become parents do not lose their rights. Instead, specifically because of their legal responsibilities to the child, they are required to find a willing party to serve as the legal guardian for the child when they return to the Academy for the duration of their training. Upon graduation, they resume their legal role as the caretaker of their own child.

The CADET Act and its final passage as part of the 2022 NDAA made significant strides to rectify some of the injustice of the policy. By removing the most draconian of the requirements—demanding that cadets terminate their pregnancies or permanently divest themselves of their children—the act ensures that cadets are no longer forced to choose between military service and their families. More to the point in terms of our discussion about unequal enforcement between men and women, the act also advances shifting an equal share of the burden of responsibility back onto men. A pregnant cadet still faces the challenge of being held back a year while on medical leave for the duration of her pregnancy. But in terms of having children, both male and female cadets are given the same responsibility to ensure that the child has adequate care for the duration of their academic training at the Academy.

We should acknowledge that the solutions put forward in the CADET Act are hardly perfect and still present challenges to cadets who become parents. The emotional or psychological toll that may come with temporary suspension of parental responsibilities and the inability to spend significant time with one's own children for what could potentially be years cannot be taken lightly. Extended family separation may result in feelings of guilt over the effect that career decisions have on children, not to mention the emotional distraction generated by natural parental desires.⁶¹ The policy does not and cannot fully rectify these difficulties inherent to the situation due to the intensity of the military training environment that makes it distinctly unsuitable for

children. Indeed, the intrinsic difficulties presented by the family care plan pathway are reflected in the 2022 NDAA's explicitly declining to adjust the Title 32 law regarding academy admission requirements; those with dependents remain ineligible to enter the academies.⁶²

In light of these challenges that remain even in the solution provided by the CADET Act for cadets separated from their children and the cascading detrimental effects on career satisfaction and retention, the military still had reason to develop the additional pathway outlined above, giving cadets the option of moving from an academy into an ROTC program. If a cadet is unable to provide long-term care for their child, the military can accommodate by allowing them direct access into ROTC scholarships. If the Air Force's goal is to retain quality candidates, it may be advisable to create a less expensive pathway out of the academy setting that does not lead to the self-elimination of officer candidates dissatisfied with the long-term family separation entailed by the CADET Act program. To our great satisfaction, when the Pentagon finally released its updated policy guidelines as mandated in NDAA 2022, the proposal we had outlined for a pathway into the Senior ROTC program was also adopted and codified.⁶³

The overarching discussion of these amendments to current policy makes it clear these solutions still present substantial challenges to the cadets. That they remain is not in itself inconsistent with barrier analysis. The government has an interest in disincentivizing pregnancy and dependents while cadets are in accession status to maximize the effectiveness of their training program. Typically, cadets share this interest with the government. Student pregnancy and childbirth are not normally planned during one's undergraduate years because of the obvious difficulties they raise for one's academic development and the accelerated transition they bring into another stage of life with additional responsibilities.⁶⁴ While these two interests are often completely aligned, more complex situations occasionally emerge.

The military has a compelling interest to address these kinds of complex situations with the more nuanced solutions they deserve. The blunt instrument of the DOD policy creates its own set of unintended consequences that we have explored above. In particular, the policies created a drastically unequal burden of consequences that fell on women rather than men. This circumstance in turn fosters a cultural climate where women's bodies are perceived as the deviation rather than the norm. The issues around pregnancy and childbearing in the military continue to be wide-ranging and often difficult. However,

where obvious inequities may be eliminated and injustice corrected, the military has a responsibility to act decisively.

Conclusion

This discussion of the policies around pregnancy and childbirth at the service academies illustrates how apparently blanket policies can result in inequitable structure and enforcement. Additionally, as we saw, these questions are not new; they have lingered since women were first accepted officially into military service during the Second World War. The integration of women raised these same questions around pregnancy concerning how policies were incentivizing abortion or adoption as the price of military service. These policies remained until 2023, indicating that broader cultural change is still needed. The Academy policy itself was egregious, even if fairly narrow in scope concerning the numbers of women affected. Nevertheless, as we have tried to argue, it is connected to historically grounded but ongoing cultural problems rooted in assumptions about women and pregnancy in the military.

We argued in support of the CADET Act's implementation. By allowing cadets to create family care plans rather than terminate their parental rights altogether, the military can maintain its commitment to the integrity of the training environment without potentially derailing the careers of some of its officers because of their ability to become pregnant. Similarly, we proposed that the military create a pathway—which has only just now been established—from an academy to ROTC where cadets can obtain scholarships if they cannot utilize the CADET Act's family care plan. These changes are significant. Aside from the obvious benefits to those cadets who might otherwise be directly affected by these harsh policies, these shifts also help improve the overall climate of the academies and the military more generally by signaling a desire to promote the well-being of families and the autonomy of individuals over their own bodies.

The academies and the military as a whole have a compelling interest in abolishing unnecessary barriers to women in the service. Where those institutional barriers remain, they hold back high-quality talent from entering or remaining in the military. The policies are unjust and severely affect the individuals directly involved, as we have seen, but

they also affect military readiness by negatively affecting the organization's ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest women.

We return, then, to the problem of the politicization of diversity initiatives, often criticized for privileging symbolic action or individual comfort over institutional effectiveness. It is instructive here to recognize that the solutions to this policy problem in the academies are intended to remove barriers to women in service. These solutions do not equate to lowering the standard. For example, concerns around medical risks for pregnant cadets in a training environment have not been addressed by exempting pregnant candidates from the demands of physical training but through providing access to medical leave. Taking a year out from school is not ideal for the individual officer candidate; instead, the policy reflects the interest of the military in producing an elite cadre of leaders. The cadet bears the corresponding cost. So, too, the significant challenges in store for pregnant cadets who choose to give birth—either through a family separation plan or transfer into a Senior ROTC program—reflect the fact that the government preserves its overriding interest in maintaining high standards for officer training. Notably, under the new pathways, the career and familial burdens of pregnancy and childbirth will still fall disproportionately on female cadets over their male counterparts, not as a result of policy but rather of biology. These pathways are neither symbolic nor comfortable.

At the same time, a critical evaluation of the policies regarding cadets having dependents while at an academy highlights the detrimental effect of such policies on individuals and the military culture. Under the unmodified policies, female cadets were faced with extreme choices regarding the outcomes of pregnancy. But these choices—abortion, dissolution of the parental bond, or expulsion—do not in themselves serve the interests of the government. Candidates who feel compelled by the government to terminate their pregnancies or give up their children are likely to have their confidence in the military's institutional support severely shaken. Cadets who are sent down are removed from leadership positions altogether. The government wishes to produce effective officers, which means maintaining the high demands of the training environment. By evaluating the policies critically, alternative pathways were developed using existing architecture from military policy (both family care plans and Expedited Transfer) to correct the injustice without compromising the standard. Maintaining the status quo, in other words, is actually detrimental to the govern-

ment's interests because it sacrifices valuable, highly qualified, motivated candidates and contributes to an overarching hostile culture that makes these candidates less likely to be commissioned and retained.

At times, addressing issues related to diversity may seem particularly fraught given the political tensions in society. However, the recent changes to pregnancy policies discussed here portray a more hopeful perspective. The issue of abortion emerged in the earliest stages of the integration of women into military service during the Second World War, and it continued to resurface throughout this analysis. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that despite the highly charged national political debate on this issue, these DOD and academy policies created the conditions that brought both sides together in a rare moment of mutual agreement. From a position of conservative opposition to abortion, the policies created a hostile environment for pregnant women that actively encouraged cadets to terminate the pregnancy rather than face the consequences of giving birth.⁶⁵ On the other hand, from the liberal perspective concerning women's rights, the psychological pressures on the woman to end the pregnancy deprived her of the autonomy that ought to be granted to her to make her own free decisions regarding her body. In that respect, even though we repeatedly discuss abortion, the arguments in our analysis take a path that remains firmly situated outside the entrenched disagreements. This position is ironic given that we have framed the analysis in terms of the polarized political climate surrounding DEI initiatives.

As wildly divergent as the two poles of the national abortion debate remain, a critical assessment of these policies was necessary to break through political gridlock and find common ground. In this case, it led to a recognition of the fundamental injustice of using government policy in a threatening manner to pressure women into making profoundly personal decisions against what might be their own will and convictions. The policy created an environment that was simultaneously pro-abortion and anti-choice. The fact that such discourse remains possible even across such apparently irreconcilable sides of a broader acrimonious political and cultural debate should encourage those of us in the military's pluralistic environment to seek out further constructive conversations on issues related to diversity in the military. We must not retreat behind the walls of our individual cultural enclaves or look elsewhere for raw political power to effect change.

When reflecting on diversity initiatives for the military, it is critical to maintain a clear view of the goals of the program. Military service

is demanding and selective; it involves personal risk and discomfort, physical fitness, and mental fortitude as well as personal and relational challenges. Many of these issues—notably here, the exacting standards of the training environment—are unavoidable because of the military's mission. At the same time, the government must carefully evaluate the demands it places on service members to ensure that it maximizes the attraction and retention of qualified personnel. It is essential that the necessary standards be maintained, but they should not be needlessly erected or inflated. Unnecessary barriers—exemplified by the prior academy policies on pregnancy and children—undermine military readiness and mission effectiveness.

The recently withdrawn pregnancy policy at the service academies is obviously not the only example of how the military can create a climate hostile to women, particularly as it relates to pregnancy. The length of time it took for the drastic policy at the USAFA to be reviewed and overwritten indicates that the Air Force has not undertaken a sufficient comprehensive review of its regulations. Thus, in addition to the policies we have proposed above, we also believe that it is important for the Air Force to reconsider other policies related to pregnancy in the service. The examples are numerous.

We might note how the current officer evaluation policy does not create any leeway for maternity leave. Typically, maternity leave lasts twelve weeks, nearly a quarter of a year, but the annual performance reviews do not reflect this factor. When a woman gives birth and goes on leave, her scheduled annual evaluation occurs at the normal time, potentially forcing her to be evaluated for a full year using three-quarters of a year's work. The performance report could be adjusted to reflect the amount of time that she was actually rated, or the date of the annual report could be pushed back to account for the amount of maternity leave taken. These are small but critical adjustments to ensure that women's work is not reviewed and recorded more poorly than their male counterparts.

As another example, there are expected milestones and requirements for pilots meeting their boards, though the military accommodates certain nontraditional pathways into airframes. Thus, pilots may be revectoring back into the training school as a first-assignment instructor pilot, which impedes their ability to complete the expected milestones by the time they reach their majors board. The military recognizes this constraint and accommodates these adjusted schedules to ensure that well-qualified pilots are not passed over because they have

not met the expected criteria over the ordinary timeline. Similar accommodations might be created for female pilots prevented from flying for some or all of their pregnancy.⁶⁶ By noting pregnancy-related non-flying status and accommodating it in the pathways to promotion, the military would prevent women from being held back in their career for having children. Doing so is especially crucial given that these operators are expected to meet critical benchmarks at the precise time in their careers when many people choose to start families. Again, aside from the potential injustice of these current policies, the military has a compelling interest in retaining experienced pilots. Such mitigating measures would allow women to continue to serve honorably without forcing them to choose between the military and their families.

The Air Force rightly prides itself on taking care of the families of its members.⁶⁷ We have highlighted these two additional areas simply to signal the kinds of policies that might be reevaluated in the future to create an Air Force culture that more genuinely meets these needs. Our greatest asset is our people—including women. Where current policies create a dichotomy between service and family, the military will continue to lose valuable talent. These problems surface in the early stages of accession as exemplified by the Academy's policies, but they continue throughout women's careers. Left unaddressed, they will diminish our ability to retain some of our best talent and foster a hostile climate for women in the service. Beyond the costs to military readiness and talent acquisition, barriers to women's full access undermine the military's moral authority, further underscoring the need for a deliberate review and adjustment of our policies. As evidenced in this discussion, even unjust policies originating long ago have solutions available to us now; we need only to choose to act on them.

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Captain Timmerman is a KC-46 pilot at Seymour Johnson AFB, where her joint-spouse husband is a weapons officer/instructor pilot in the 15E. Her previous assignment was as a KC-135 instructor pilot and wing executive officer at RAF Mildenhall, UK. They both commissioned from the US Air Force Academy. She is the mother of two beautiful children.

Notes

(In lieu of a bibliography, all references are fully cited the first time they appear in each chapter.)

1. This story is factually accurate, but the name of the cadet involved has been changed to protect her privacy. While the outcome of this story is particular to the individual situation, the overarching narrative has been repeated numerous times. For another similar account, albeit with a different outcome, see Maggie BenZvi, “Academy Cadets Who Have Kids Must Legally Give Them Up—The CADET Act Would Change That,” *Coffee or Die*, September 5, 2021, <https://www.coffeeordie.com/>.

2. Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-7001, *Diversity and Inclusion*, 9, § 2.13, February 19, 2019, <https://www.af.mil/Portals/>.

3. See Robert Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy: Why We Must Put Politics in Its Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), especially 71–127.

4. For example, see Thomas Spoehr, “The Rise of Wokeness in the Military,” *Imprimis* 51, nos. 6/7 (June/July 2022), <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/>. It is worth noting that such a reversal of priorities would itself run explicitly counter to the Air Force’s own diversity and inclusion policies, which seek “an inclusive culture to enhance mission effectiveness” and “to leverage the diversity of the nation for strategic advantage.” See AFI 36-7001, *Diversity and Inclusion*, secs. 1.1 and 1.2.

5. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, S.1605, Sec. 559A, 117th Congress (2021–2022), December 27, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/>. See also Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1322.22, *Military Service Academies*,

September 24, 2015, incorporating Change 1, November 1, 2023, Enclosure 3, § 3(e)4, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/>.

6. For example, Ruth Reed comments on the dearth of information about unwed fathers during the early twentieth century in records of social care. Many pregnancies resulted from casual encounters, while others resulted in abandonment. The existence of the father was therefore essentially ignored. Reed quotes a social worker from the time: “We ask no questions about the father. He is of no importance to the situation.” Ruth Reed, *The Illegitimate Family in New York City: Its Treatment by Social and Health Agencies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 157. The social marginalization of unwed mothers was stark, as illustrated in the distribution of social care. Theda Skocpol notes, for example, “Consequently in 1931 over 80 percent of those receiving mothers’ pensions were widows; very small proportions of clients were deserted mothers or divorced mothers, while only fifty-five beneficiaries in the entire country were unmarried mothers.” See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 467.

7. This early history is recounted in Agnes Gereben Schaeffer et al., “History of Integrating Women into the U.S. Military,” in *Implications of Integrating Women into the Marine Corps Infantry* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 7–16, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1000429.pdf>. The WAAC was incorporated into active duty as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in 1943 (Schaeffer et al., 7).

8. Mattie Treadwell, *The Women’s Army Corps* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1991), 264, <https://history.army.mil/>.

9. Treadwell, 264.

10. For a detailed account, see Treadwell, “The ‘Slander Campaign,’” in *Women’s Army Corps*, 191–218.

11. M. Michaela Hampf, “‘Dykes’ or ‘Whores’: Sexuality and the Women’s Army Corps in the United States during World War II,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 27, no. 1 (2004): 16–17, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2003.12.007>.

12. Treadwell, “‘Slander Campaign,’” 205–6. The MIS had to get special permission from the FBI to conduct investigations into American civilians to attempt to locate Axis agents (Treadwell, 205–6).

13. Other key sources of these rumors included the civilian wives of Soldiers, who were jealous of WAAC proximity to their husbands; civilian women frustrated at their perceived disadvantage in the dating scene compared to WAAC members; fanatics who believed that a woman’s place was only in the home; disgruntled WAACs who had been dismissed; and general gossips. Almost all of these revolve around the supposedly detrimental moral effects of women’s bodies in the masculine space of the military. Treadwell, *Women’s Army Corps*, 206.

14. It is ironic that for all the moral panic about the immorality of women in the service, the women of the WAC had rates of venereal disease approximately one-sixth to one-ninth the rate of their male counterparts in the service and considerably below that of civilian women in the United States. Treadwell, *Women’s Army Corps*, 398.

15. Treadwell, 501.

16. For a more detailed discussion of abortion in the WAC, see Treadwell, 502–3.

17. Sandra J. Reinke and Randall D. Miller, “Women in the U.S. Military,” in *Women in Public Administration: Theory and Practice*, ed. Maria J. D’Agostino and Helisse Levine (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Barlett Learning, 2011), 21, <https://samples.jbpub.com/>.

18. John H. Batts et al., “The Roles of Women in the Army and Their Impact on Military Operations and Organizations,” US Air War College Military Research

Program Paper (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, May 23, 1975), 22, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA016998.pdf>.

19. Treadwell, *Women's Army Corps*, 508.

20. Colonel Hobby was also concerned that these policies would give the impression that the United States was running Nazi-style baby farms, where women were recruited to give birth. Although Colonel Hobby supported the pregnancy discharge, she specifically advocated for military medical care to be administered to pregnant veterans so that they would not be abandoned by the service. See Treadwell, 508.

21. Military Procurement Bill, Pub. L. No 94-106, 89 Stat. 537, Sec. 803 (1975), <https://www.govinfo.gov/>. For an analysis of the cultural challenges that came with the integration of women into the very masculine environment of the USAFA, see Lois B. DeFleur, David Gillman, and William Marshak, "Sex Integration of the U.S. Air Force Academy: Changing Roles for Women," *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no. 4 (1978): 607–22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45346097>.

22. *Crawford v. Cushman*, 531 F.2d 1114 (1976), <https://case-law.vlex.com/>. For an analysis of the ruling, see for example Donald I. Marlin, "Reviewability and Constitutionality of Military Pregnancy Discharge (*Crawford v. Cushman*)," *St. John's Law Review* 51, no. 2 (1977): 334–48, <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/>.

23. Earlier policies did not have a pathway for readmittance, leaving cadets and midshipmen with the choice between abortion and dismissal. See Amy Argetsinger, "Pregnancy Policy Eased at Academy," *Washington Post*, August 22, 1995, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

24. DODI 1322.22, *Military Service Academies*, Enclosure 3, § 3(e)4, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/>.

25. United States Air Force Academy Instruction (USAFAI) 36-2007, *Application for and Administration of Cadet Turnback Program*, April 18, 2007, certified current December 9, 2020, sec. 3.3.7, 3, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>.

26. USAFAI 36-2007, Attachment 4, 13–14. Of note is that the legal process need not necessarily be complete for the cadet to be readmitted so long as she can demonstrate she is actively pursuing the separation. See USAFAI 36-3504, *Disenrollment of United States Air Force Academy Cadets*, August 15, 2022, sec. 26.1.7, 22, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>. The academies do not allow this to be used as a loophole to avoid finalizing the legal divestiture; one cadet interviewed attempted to drag the process out until after graduation in order to cancel the proceedings and retain custody but was informed he would not be permitted to graduate until he had the paperwork in hand.

27. DODI 6130.03, *Medical Standards for Military Service: Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction*, Vol. 1, May 6, 2018 (with change 4, November 16, 2022), sec. 6.13(l), 28, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/>.

28. For example, see W. Brown, "The Benefits of Physical Activity during Pregnancy," *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* 5, no. 1 (2002): 37–45, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1440-2440\(02\)80296-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1440-2440(02)80296-1). See also Raul Artal and Michael O'Toole, "Guidelines of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists for Exercise during Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period," *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 37, no. 1 (2003): 6–11, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bjbm.37.1.6>. Here, too, Artal and O'Toole note the benefit of some physical activity to promote the health of the mother but also draw attention to the risks associated with rigorous physical activity in pregnancy due to cardiovascular, respiratory, and thermoregulatory changes as well as the significant risk incurred by impact sports.

29. This is the case only when the pregnancy has progressed past twenty weeks and then regardless of whether the pregnancy is carried to term or ends in miscarriage or abortion.

30. Here, these two conditions are grouped together as examples of Medical Recheck Status, which Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 36-2032 details:

Medical Recheck Status—A status allowing cadets to retain benefits, specifically scholarship and stipend, while they are temporarily not medically qualified, for example, broken bones, joint (knee, shoulder, etc.) problems and pregnancy. During Medical Recheck Status, cadets cannot participate in physical fitness training or other physical activities but continue to receive scholarship and stipend if they are still taking classes for their degree unless they choose No-Pay Period of Non-Attendance (PNA) when they are not able to attend classes. Cadets cannot commission until removed from Medical Recheck Status and AETC/SGPS provides certification of medical clearance for commission.

See AFMAN 36-2032, *Military Recruiting and Accessions*, September 27, 2019, 273, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>.

31. AFMAN 36-2032, para. 6.5.2.1.3.2, 139–40.

32. National Defense, 32 C.F.R. § 901.4 (f), July 1, 2016, <https://www.govinfo.gov/>.

33. 32 C.F.R. § 901.4 (d)(6).

34. 32 C.F.R. § 901.4 (g).

35. For an exploration of the family stressors produced by military service including deployment, see Amy Reinkober Drummet, Marilyn Coleman, and Susan Cable, “Military Families under Stress: Implications for Family Life Education,” *Family Relations* 52, no. 3 (2003): 279–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00279.x>. It is perhaps worth noting that for all service members but Air Force officers, longer military deployments have been counterintuitively associated with outcomes of greater marriage longevity. See Benjamin R. Karney and John S. Crown, “The Direct Effects of Deployments on Marital Dissolution,” in *Families Under Stress: An Assessment of Data, Theory, and Research on Marriage and Divorce in the Military* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), 147–60, <https://www.rand.org/>. Nonetheless, the factors involved in producing this effect are less likely to be reproduced under these specific circumstances. For example, younger marriages are associated with worse outcomes in marriage longevity, while immediate long-term separation during formative years is liable to drive a couple apart.

36. We can compare this policy more generally with the military’s prioritization of care for families that the military has attempted to implement. Care for military families, while it can be understood as an ethical policy or a benefit of military service, is typically still explicitly framed in terms of ensuring warfighter readiness. If Airmen are concerned about what is happening at home, their attention is not directed toward the mission. Thus, for example, in the regulations governing family resilience, the purpose of these services is justified in their order of precedence to the mission: “Military family well-being contributes to retention, resilience, readiness, and quality of life.” See Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 1342.22, *Military Family Readiness*, August 5, 2021, para. 4.1, 14, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/>. In other words, if the family is not adequately able to adapt to military life, the service member is liable to quit the service, be unable to adapt to the stressors of military life, be unfit for the mission, and have a poor quality of life.

37. The demands of the training environment are likewise the basis for other limitations imposed on applicants to the USAFA. Thus, for example, applicants cannot be younger than seventeen years of age or older than twenty-two by July 1 of the year of their entry into the Academy (32 C.F.R. § 901.4 a). ROTC candidates, on the other hand, may be several years older.

38. Here the commandant has some latitude to allow cadets newly pregnant shortly before graduation to continue, overriding the DODI that would otherwise prevent this. This policy is, however, notably the exception rather than the rule.

39. This situation assumes she does not terminate the pregnancy or give the child up for adoption.

40. Armed Forces, 10 U.S.C. 9348 (f), <https://www.govinfo.gov/>.

41. Estimates are based on the official memorandum, which lays out the expected costs of education provided by the government to cadets for the fiscal years 2016–19. See Alicia Ward, HQ USAFA/FMF, lead cadet pay technician, to Cadets and Parents of Cadets, memorandum, subject: Cadet Scholarship and/or Educational Investment Plan Proceeds, October 9, 2020, <https://www.usafa.edu/>.

42. Cadets are also offered the option of repaying their obligation by enlisting as an Airman first class and working for the Air Force for the number of years of service required by their time at the Academy.

43. Depending on the state, if he has not yet notarized his standing on the Putative Father Registry, establishing his potential legal status as the father, the mother could give up the child for adoption without his being informed or consenting. Colorado has no such registry. For a discussion of this caveat to the law, see Erik Smith, “Putative Father Registry Deadlines and the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA),” *Air Force Law Review* 60 (2007): 175–98. If the male cadet did register as a putative father, it could be interpreted as a tacit acknowledgment of the child’s status as his dependent, which could result in him being expelled.

44. This situation was precisely that of “Sarah Mattheson” described in the introduction.

45. “Margaret Green” is also a pseudonym to protect the officer’s privacy.

46. DeFleur, Gillman, and Marshak, “Sex Integration of the U.S. Air Force Academy,” 608.

47. Demographic Profile of the Incoming Class of 2025, Headquarters United States Air Force Academy A9O, July 8, 2021.

48. Air Force Personnel Center, “Military Demographics,” March 31, 2023, <https://www.afpc.af.mil/>.

49. Sarah J. McCreight, “Leader Attitudes toward Pregnancy in the Military and Female Integration into Formerly Closed Units” (PhD diss., Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, 2017), 87, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1064279.pdf>.

50. This program is outlined in Department of the Air Force Instruction (DAFI) 90-6001, *Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program*, July 15, 2020, 59–66, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>.

51. The wording describing the purpose of the program in the relevant DAFI is generic, noting only that the program is designed to provide a change of assignment or station “to a location that will support healing and recovery” (DAFI 90-6001, 11.1, 59). However, the regulation specifies that only sexual assaults where “the alleged sexual assault offender is a Service member or if the alleged offender or alleged sexual assault has a military nexus (e.g., adult military dependent, works for DoD as a civilian employee [appropriated and non-appropriated fund employees, or is a government contractor]), or the alleged sexual assault occurred on a DoD installation or facility” (DAFI 90-6001, 11.1.2, 59). These qualifications make it clear that the policy is designed to separate victims from alleged perpetrators, mitigating the potential ineffectiveness of legal avenues to obtain convictions and force separation through incarceration.

52. DAFI 36-3501, *United States Air Force Academy Operations*, May 9, 2022, para. 4.21.1, 40, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>.

53. See Melissa M. Holmes et al., “Rape-Related Pregnancy: Estimates and Descriptive Characteristics from a National Sample of Women,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 175, no. 2 (1996): 321–25, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-9378\(96\)70141-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-9378(96)70141-2).

54. See, for example, the reporting on a court-martial trial for rape held at the US Coast Guard Academy where a cadet was raped and (according to testimony) subsequently had “an operation” that violated her “moral” beliefs. William Yardley, “Coast Guard Cadet Accused of Rape and Other Assaults at Academy,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/>. See also Michelle A. Mengeling et al., “Reporting Sexual Assault in the Military: Who Reports and Why Most Servicewomen Don’t,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 47, no. 1 (2014): 17–25, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.03.001>.

55. 32 C.F.R. § 901.4 (f). Although this law covers eligibility for “applicants,” the underlying principle appears to be that it lays out the *eligibility* for training at the Academy. Thus, for example, 32 C.F.R. § 901.4 (e) notes that the “applicant must be unmarried” but immediately follows up that “any cadet who marries is disenrolled from the Academy,” showing in no uncertain terms that the eligibility criteria hold during the cadet’s time at the Academy.

56. See the press release from Senator Cruz’s office: “Sen. Cruz Introduces Bipartisan Legislation to Protect Parental Rights of Military Academy Cadets,” September 15, 2021, <https://www.cruz.senate.gov/>.

57. The CADET Act of 2021, 117th Cong., 1st. sess., <https://www.cruz.senate.gov/>.

58. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, S. 1605, Sec. 559A, 117th Congress (2021–22), December 27, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/>.

59. DODI 1342.19/DAFI 36-2908, *Family Care Plans*, March 10, 2023, <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/>.

60. This is true with the important caveat that the CADET Act explicitly avoids revoking the current federal law against admitting pregnant cadets or cadets who already have dependents. The program outlined by the CADET Act creates provisions that take effect on the first academic day of academy training.

61. Much of the literature on family separation in the military focuses on the effects that parental absence has on children during deployment. While the effects are often negative, they can be significantly mitigated if the children’s care is provided for by the other parent, who in turn manages the emotional toll of the absence well. See, for example, Angela J. Huebner et al., “Parental Deployment and Youth in Military Families: Exploring Uncertainty and Ambiguous Loss,” *Family Relations* 56, no. 2 (2007): 112–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00445.x>. On the other hand, family separation and the guilt it generates have also been explicitly mentioned as a key factor in women’s separation from military service. See Kirsten M. Keller et al., *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 15–18, <https://www.rand.org/>. These factors are also mentioned in the study of existing research summarized by the Government Accountability Office’s study *Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, May 2020), 28–30, <https://www.gao.gov/>.

62. “Nothing in this section shall be construed to change, or require a change to, any admission requirement at a military service academy.” National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022, Sec. 559A (c).

63. DODI 1322.22, *Military Service Academies*, Enclosure 3, § 6(f)8.

64. See, for example, the discussion of student preferences for preventing pregnancy in Mary Prentice, Chelsey Storin, and Gail Robinson, *Make It Personal: How Pregnancy*

Planning and Prevention Help Students Complete College (Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges, 2012), <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/>. With the desire to avoid pregnancy so high even in community colleges, it is easy to extrapolate toward much higher numbers in an environment like the service academies, even aside from the particular policy issues under discussion.

65. It is worth noting that despite the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, all the service academies are in states that have laws allowing for abortion. See, for example, the law governing USAFA cadets in Colorado, Colo. Rev. Stat. § 25-6-401 to 25-6-406, <https://reproductiverights.org/>.

66. Pilots flying in ejection seats who are also normally subjected to dangerous levels of gravitational force are barred from flying for the duration of pregnancy due to obvious medical risks for the fetus and the mother. Mobility pilots, on the other hand, can fly during the second trimester, though they are still grounded for the first and third trimesters.

67. See, for example, the priorities outlined by Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense, to Senior Pentagon Leadership, Commanders of the Combatant Commands, and Defense Agency and DOD Field Activity Directors, memorandum, subject: Taking Care of Our Service Members and Families, September 22, 2022, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

PART 5

HARD DISCUSSIONS

DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE CULTURE

Chapter 16

The Moral Emotional Experience of DEIA Initiatives at Work

Tara B. Holmes

Abstract

Although most of today's organizations report having diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, studies and reports consistently show that progress in DEIA has been slow and that some employees continue to resist these organizational efforts. Employees from both underrepresented groups and majority groups have been found to resist DEIA efforts for a variety of reasons, making it incredibly difficult to determine how best to implement DEIA strategy and practice in the workplace. This study theorizes that a vein of morality underpins DEIA initiatives in organizations and influences some employees' emotional experiences. Taking a holistic perspective of the pressures society exerts on both organizations and employees, it suggests that a common thread of moral evaluation influences organizations to adopt DEIA initiatives and informs the way employees may feel and react as a result of their moral emotional experiences. By better understanding the emotional component of DEIA initiatives, organizational leaders may be able to target interventions to help prepare employees for potential negative emotional reactions, address the complexity of the moral considerations involved in these initiatives, and possibly avoid negative outcomes for employees and organizations.

Introduction

Nested within a society keen on understanding and confronting enduring social justice and inequality issues, today's organizations are continuously seeking to improve conditions for historically underrepresented and marginalized groups of people.¹ "Diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) (although some discourse, and this study, includes "A" for accessibility, "B" for belonging, and "J" for justice) has become an increasingly recognized term in today's workforce and in academia.²

It is reported that in 2020 corporate America spent \$7.5 billion on DEIA, which is expected to double by 2026.³ These efforts often take the shape of DEIA initiatives, consisting of policies, practices, and strategies whereby an organization commits time, human capital, and resources to improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.⁴

Although most of today's organizations report having DEIA initiatives, studies and reports consistently show that progress in DEIA has been slow and that some employees continue to resist these organizational efforts.⁵ DEIA initiatives often result in unintended consequences like backfire, false progress, and negative spillover and negative reactions such as backlash, which includes negative behavior and attitudes.⁶ These unintended consequences and negative reactions are counterproductive for organizations and cause harm to groups and individuals.⁷ Furthermore, employees from underrepresented and majority groups have been found to resist DEIA efforts for a variety of reasons, making it incredibly difficult to determine how best to implement DEIA strategy and practice in the workplace.⁸

To better understand negative reactions to DEIA initiatives and their consequences, this study investigates the motivation behind DEIA initiatives in organizations and the emotional processes tied to them. Doing so requires considering the pressures that stem from society to leaders of organizations and from organizational leadership to individual employees, who, in turn, are also members of society subject to its pressures outside the workplace. By reviewing and integrating extant literature on morality, organizational legitimacy, and emotions, this study provides a theoretical model of how DEIA initiatives emerge in organizations and how some employees come to experience them emotionally.

This study argues that the shared artery extending from society through an organization's DEIA initiatives to individual employees is morality or that which is considered to be morally good, acceptable, and worthy of pursuit. It suggests that the leaders of organizations pursue DEIA initiatives as a means of gaining organizational legitimacy, specifically, moral legitimacy. When an organization's leaders establish and communicate DEIA initiatives grounded in moral pursuit, employees who experience negative emotions are confronted with a dissonance between what they really feel and how they "ought to" feel according to society's expectations. Specifically, this study suggests that employees faced with DEIA initiatives experience *moral emotions*, associated with society's norms and values and focused on the welfare of others beyond the self.⁹ Society's norms and beliefs are reinforced to employees by the very

decision to establish and promote DEIA initiatives. Some employees will experience dissonance between how they “should” feel and how they really feel, resulting in efforts to hide their true emotions out of fear of negative evaluation by others in the workplace. The fear of negative evaluation results in emotional labor, which, when caused by dissonance or inauthenticity, is known to be harmful to employee well-being and can cause negative outcomes for organizations.¹⁰

Theory Building

A Note on Morality

While philosophers and scholars have debated the definition of “morality” for centuries and debating the nuances of the various arguments and perspectives is beyond the scope of this chapter, a common theme arises from the literature. Moral issues concern those that are in the best interest or welfare of society or, at the very least, those impacting others outside of oneself; moral motives are “spoken of as the ‘highest’ and ‘noblest’ motives.”¹¹ Though the particular foundations people construct their moral systems upon vary, as does the weight of each foundation with respect to others (i.e., the moral foundations hypothesis), scholars suggest there is general agreement that morality concerns matters of justice, rights, and welfare.¹² The development of free will and choice and the evolution of a society dependent on others outside the self logically link one’s endeavors to make “good” choices and one’s attempts to behave in alignment with that which is broadly accepted as morally virtuous.

Likewise, it is in organizations’ best interest that their audiences view them as moral actors.¹³ In this study, “audience” and “society” are interchangeable and will intentionally be used nonspecifically. “Society” as it is used here, therefore, can be construed as narrowly as a community, city, political party, or religion, for example, or as broadly as the nation or world. It is important to state that depending on what “society” is being used to interpret the proposed theory, different arguments can be made for the moral weight DEIA initiatives hold. Regardless of which audience’s perspective is being used, organizations aligning their communications and behaviors with what society generally values and expects do so in an effort to seek legitimacy. Which audience an organization seeks legitimacy from may differ. This study

argues that DEIA initiatives in today's organizations are manifestations of a desire to gain or maintain a specific type of legitimacy: moral legitimacy. In so doing, organizations reinforce the general values and beliefs of society to their employees. In this way, society directly influences an individual's sense of morality, but it also pressures individuals indirectly via the organizations they work for.

What Makes DEIA Initiatives Emotional?

Legitimacy theory. The organizational legitimacy approach maintains that organizations are motivated to operate in congruence with the value system of the social systems of which they are a part.¹⁴ "Legitimacy" is defined as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions."¹⁵ The audience (e.g., society, shareholders, customers, clients, consumers, etc.), therefore, evaluates an organization's legitimacy. Social norms and values drive organizational change and act as pressure for organizations to continually seek legitimacy.¹⁶ Indeed, organizations that find their values, outputs, procedures, techniques, or methods at odds with social norms and values tend to alter their behavior to conform, as legitimacy has been found to be vital to organizational survival and success.¹⁷

There are two main approaches to studying organizational legitimacy: strategic and institutional.¹⁸ The strategic approach focuses on legitimacy from a managerial perspective and considers how organizations intentionally use and adjust symbols to win society's support.¹⁹ Research using the strategic approach to legitimacy often assumes that managers have a high level of control over the legitimation process.²⁰ The institutional approach takes a broader view, considering the structural dynamics that foster cultural pressures inflicted on organizations.²¹ In contrast to the strategic approach, institutionalists perceive little to no managerial agency over legitimacy and, indeed, view legitimacy and institutionalization as virtually synonymous.²² These approaches represent both evaluative (strategic) and cognitive (institutional) dimensions to organizational legitimacy, both of which must be incorporated in legitimacy research.²³

Mark Suchman identifies three primary forms of organizational legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive.²⁴ Pragmatic legitimacy is conceptualized as an exchange legitimacy where support for an organization's policies is based on the expected value to the audience.²⁵

Moral legitimacy essentially means “the right thing to do” to promote societal welfare, defined by society’s value system.²⁶ Finally, cognitive legitimacy, divided into comprehensibility and “taken-for-grantedness,” refers to passive acceptance of an organization due to being seen as necessary or inevitable or both “based on some taken-for-granted cultural account.”²⁷ Cognitive legitimacy operates at the subconscious level, making it difficult, if not impossible in some cases, for an organization to directly manage.²⁸

These three forms of legitimacy are often examined in association with corporate social responsibility, business ethics, marketing, and social accounting, among other topics, but little empirical work has been done to disentangle which types of legitimacy are achieved or sought by organizations via DEIA initiatives.²⁹ Val Singh and Sébastien Point investigated online diversity statements from 174 top European companies, which they analyzed and evaluated according to the three forms of organizational legitimacy identified by Suchman.³⁰ They conclude that diversity statements issued by these companies on their websites are associated with pragmatic and moral legitimacy. However, the researchers were unable to identify a relationship with cognitive legitimacy, aligning with Guido Palazzo and Andrea Georg Scherer’s assertion that cognitive legitimacy often operates subconsciously.³¹

DEIA initiatives are unique instruments that organizations use to help them achieve pragmatic and moral legitimacy, as shown by Singh and Point. However, it is important to note that the audience may not always perceive pragmatic legitimacy based on DEIA initiatives if a certain initiative is not meant to serve them or members of their group. For example, an initiative meant to create equal access for all demographics to promotions may not generate pragmatic legitimacy as perceived by members of the majority population in the audience because it is not designed to afford them any additional expected value. In fact, the majority may perceive it as a loss in value. However, equal access to promotions can still be considered the right thing to do for a society valuing equality and, therefore, may help the organization achieve moral legitimacy. In this way, DEIA initiatives are unique as compared to other types of organizational change because often the goal of a DEIA initiative stems from moral foundations.

Proposition 1. Society exerts pressure on organizational leaders to match its moral values and norms through the decisions (e.g., policies, strategies, communications etc.).

Proposition 2. Organizational leaders pursue decisions in alignment with society's norms and values with the goal of obtaining moral legitimacy from society.

Proposition 3. DEIA initiatives represent a moral good and have moral value to society.

DEIA initiatives as vehicles for an organization's moral legitimacy. While several types of legitimacy are acknowledged in the literature, DEIA initiatives are well suited to communicate intent for organizations seeking moral legitimacy. Moral legitimacy is "sociotropic," meaning the activity under evaluation is judged by whether it is "the right thing to do" in the sense that it promotes social welfare.³² The goals and outcomes of DEIA initiatives are generally accepted to have moral value or are considered to be morally "good."³³ Organizations adopt DEIA initiatives as means to achieve a variety of ends, but they are fundamentally grounded in dimensions of morality. Regardless of the specific policy, practice, or strategy under consideration, DEIA initiatives inherently communicate an organization's attempt to align itself with societal norms and values, if even just at face value. This communication signals not only an organization's alignment with societal moral values and norms to the audience outside of the organization but also internally to employees and prospective employees, who are also members of society.³⁴ Thus, DEIA initiatives act as a vehicle for moral considerations. They are influenced by society, and organizations use them to gain moral legitimacy from society. These initiatives also act to reinforce society's moral values and ethical ideals for organizations and their members. The employees take part in society and the organization, as members of both, and are being influenced by and contributing to both.

Proposition 4. One way organizational leaders seek moral legitimacy for organizations is through pursuing and adopting DEIA initiatives.

Proposition 5. Organizational leaders reinforce society's moral values to employees through DEIA initiatives.

Moral emotions and DEIA initiatives. Moral emotions are those that are "linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent."³⁵ They consider what is right or wrong or what ought to be or should be.³⁶ The distinguishing feature of moral emotions is that they are other-focused in contrast to other emotions, which are concerned with how events directly affect the self.³⁷ Jonathan Haidt further classifies moral emotions into four main "families": other-condemning, self-conscious, other-suffering, and other-praising.³⁸ To be considered a moral emotion, an emotion needs

to meet two criteria: (1) It is triggered by a disinterested elicitor, and (2) it motivates action tendencies that benefit others or uphold or benefit the social order.³⁹ The more a moral emotion is generated by events that do not directly affect the self (i.e., disinterested elicitor) and the more someone's actions taken as a result of the emotion benefits others over the self (i.e., prosocial action tendencies), the more prototypical the moral emotion is considered. Although scholars have debated which emotions should be classified as moral emotions and on manners of organizing them, Haidt's categorization is valuable for discussing the relationship between moral emotions and DEIA initiatives precisely because it evaluates the elicitor events and prosocial actions associated with the moral emotions. These are key considerations when evaluating one's perspective of DEIA initiatives, which may or may not benefit the self.

Other-condemning moral emotions include anger, disgust, and contempt, and they are concerned with the actions or character of others.⁴⁰ Self-conscious moral emotions include shame, embarrassment, and guilt and focus on one's own behavior in concert with what is considered socially acceptable and in line with social norms.⁴¹ Importantly, self-conscious moral emotions are contingent on two cultural variables: whether the self is seen as independent or interdependent and whether the social structure is egalitarian or hierarchical.⁴² Other-suffering emotions center on being motivated to help others who are suffering, like compassion, for example.⁴³ Finally, other-praising moral emotions include gratitude and elevation, which are those emotions solicited by good deeds and moral exemplars.⁴⁴

It is helpful to also consider other characteristics of these emotions beyond which families they belong to. Other-condemning, self-conscious, and other-suffering moral emotions are negatively valenced, while other-praising moral emotions are positively valenced.⁴⁵ Each moral emotion is also distinguished by specific prosocial action tendencies.⁴⁶ Action tendencies are described in terms of whether the emotion gives rise to approach or avoidance behaviors (i.e., movement toward or away from stimuli).⁴⁷ Generally, emotions vary in their degree of arousal and the extent to which they motivate approach-oriented, avoidance-oriented, or neutral behaviors.⁴⁸ Notably, the behaviors associated with moral emotions share the common goal of upholding social order or benefiting others over the self, meaning they are prosocial in nature. Even avoidance-oriented prosocial actions, such as ostracism as a result of disgust, serve to oust those with perceived moral deficiencies for the betterment of the group or society.⁴⁹

Table 16.1 summarizes Haidt's framework of moral emotion families and includes associated valence and motivation orientation compiled from James Russell and Lisa Barrett, Andrew Elliot, D. Lance Ferris, Ming Yang, Vivien Lim, Yuanyi Chen, and Shereen Fatimah.⁵⁰

Table 16.1. Moral emotions families and characteristics

Moral Emotion Family	Elicitors (not exhaustive)	Valence/Activation	Motivation Orientation	Prosocial Action Tendencies (not exhaustive)
<i>Other-Condemning</i>				
Anger	unjustified insults to self or others; goal blockage; frustration; betrayal; unfair treatment	Unpleasant/ Highly activated	Approach	attack, humiliate, vengeance
Disgust	physical objects; another's social violations; another's moral depravity	Unpleasant/ Activated	Avoid	avoid, expel, break off contact, purify, ostracize, exclude, condemn
Contempt	feeling morally superior to another; looking down on another; another not measuring up to the position he/she/they occupy or level of prestige claimed	Unpleasant/ Close to neutral activation	Neutral	neither avoid or approach; object of contempt often treated with less warmth, respect, and consideration
<i>Self-Conscious</i>				
Shame	the appraisal that something is wrong or defective with one's core self (generally due to a failure to measure up to standards of morality, aesthetics, or competence)	Unpleasant/ Activated	Avoid	reduce social presence, hide, withdraw, disappear, less likely to move or speak
Embarrassment	violation of a social-conventional rule	Unpleasant/ Activated	Avoid	reduce social presence, hide, withdraw, disappear, less likely to move or speak; repair/ restore face

Table 16.1 (continued)

Moral Emotion Family	Elicitors (not exhaustive)	Valence/Activation	Motivation Orientation	Prosocial Action Tendencies (not exhaustive)
<i>Self-Conscious (continued)</i>				
Guilt	violation of moral rules and imperatives that cause harm/suffering to others (appraised as the action was bad, not the core self)	Unpleasant/ Activated	Approach	treat others well, desire for punishment/suffering, apologizing, confessing, desire to restore or improve relationships
<i>Other-Suffering</i>				
Compassion	perception of suffering or sorrow in another	Unpleasant/ Activated	Approach	helping, comforting, alleviating suffering of others
<i>Other-Praising</i>				
Gratitude	perception that another has intentionally and voluntarily done a good deed for oneself	Pleasant/ Activated	Approach	thanking, returning a similar favor, friendliness, superficial concession to uphold self-presentational norms
Elevation	moral beauty; charity; kindness; self-sacrifice	Pleasant/ Activated	Approach	follow the example of the moral exemplar, desire to become a better person, helping, donating, receptive to lessons from the moral exemplar

Sources: Jonathan Haidt, "The Moral Emotions," in *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003): 852, 860, <https://www.overcominghateportal.org/>; James A. Russell and Lisa Feldman Barrett, "Core Affect, Prototypical Emotional Episodes, and Other Things Called Emotion: Dissecting the Elephant," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, no. 5 (May 1999): 810, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.76.5.805> 805–19; Andrew J. Elliot, "The Hierarchical Model of Approach-Avoidance Motivation," *Motivation and Emotion* 30, no. 2 (2006): 111–15, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-006-9028-7>; and D. Lance Ferris et al., "An Approach-Avoidance Framework of Workplace Aggression," *Academy of Management Journal* 59, no. 5 (October 2016): 1777–1800, <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0221>.

If the goal of a given DEIA initiative is to improve equity among people in an organization, there is an implication that equity did not exist in the first place. Fairness, equality, equity, and justice are arguably moral values, at least in some cultures. At the very least, they are ethical ideals valued by nations, governments, and societies that espouse equal civil and human rights for all people. Morality, according to David Loye, is “everything that, based on the experience of the past, we have collectively agreed to be ruled by. It is the norms, the rules, the customs, the laws, the commandments whereby out of the power of caring, the power of reflection, the power of language, and the power of habit, we establish social expectancies for moral sensitivity, moral intelligence, and moral agency.”⁵¹ There is an important distinction between being morally sensitive to others or feeling their pain (i.e., compassion or sympathy in moral emotion parlance) and actually acting on behalf of moral sensitivity and of others, which Loye calls being a “moral agent.”⁵² At their core, DEIA initiatives are an attempt by an organization’s leadership to convince its audience to see the organization as a moral agent, acting in congruence with what society expects or demands and on behalf of those experiencing pain, suffering, or injustice.

Experiencing an emotion counter to what society and the organization expect, therefore, introduces, at minimum, a question about the merit of one’s own moral agency. For example, feeling angry that the organization is pursuing a strategy to hire more people of color, regardless of specifically why it triggers anger (there could be many explanations), could be evaluated by oneself and by others as nonsupport of DEIA in part or in whole. If someone is not supporting DEIA, it might suggest that they do not believe equity in representation is worthy of pursuing. It might further suggest that their moral values are not in alignment with society’s view of the issue, assuming in this case that society values equity in representation. This is especially so if signals from society, including the initiative coming from the organization, suggest that equity in demographic representation is the “right thing to do.” Many scholars have recognized the influence of moral intensity, contextual factors, and social consensus on ethical decision-making in organizations, and it bodes well for employees to act consistent with the way moral agents would.⁵³ Otherwise, they may risk having their character questioned.

Proposition 6. DEIA initiatives represent an attempt by an organization to act with moral agency.

Proposition 7. Employees strive to be moral agents.

The moral emotional experience. The connection between moral emotions and an organization’s DEIA initiatives is best explained through the multiple appraisal model created by Hanah Chapman and Adam Anderson.⁵⁴ “People may feel elated, terrified, despairing, or furious about moral issues—but they are never just ‘aroused;’ ” they explain.⁵⁵ They elucidate the roles that emotional appraisals, moral judgments, and moral emotions may play in the moral emotional experience. Additionally, they distinguish between emotional appraisals and moral judgments by suggesting that moral judgments assess moral value (i.e., right or wrong, praiseworthy, blameworthy), whereas emotional appraisals are “automatic evaluations of the situation (e.g., cause, motive, stability, etc.) that support distinct emotions, but have no intrinsic moral valuation.”⁵⁶

Chapman and Anderson developed three possible models of the relationships between moral-emotional appraisals, moral judgments, and moral emotions to consider, and in every model the relationships among the variables are bidirectional.⁵⁷ Based on previous research by Ira Roseman, Ann Antoniou, and Paul Jose, appraisals must come first, as they have been found to activate moral emotions.⁵⁸ In the first model, moral emotional appraisals trigger moral emotions, and moral judgments follow. In the second model, appraisals cause moral judgments and moral emotions, both of which can influence secondary moral-emotional appraisals. The final model suggests that moral-emotional appraisals could lead to moral judgments, which would then lead to moral emotions. Figure 16.1 depicts the three models.

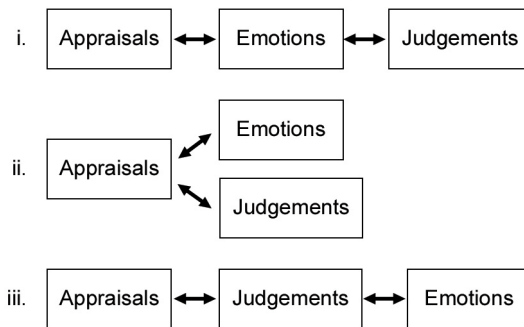


Figure 16.1. Three possible models of the relationship between appraisals, emotions, and judgments. (Reproduced from Hanah A. Chapman and Adam K. Anderson, “Varieties of Moral Emotional Experience,” *Emotion Review* 3, no. 3 [2011]: 255–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073911402389>.)

Chapman and Anderson conclude that there is still work to be done to determine which emotions are evoked by which appraisals and how other processes and behaviors are influenced in terms of reactions to morally relevant events.⁵⁹ They call for further research to this end. DEIA initiatives in organizations provide an opportunity to further investigate these relationships and better understand the connections between these variables in negative reactions to these initiatives in the workplace.

Proposition 8. DEIA initiatives set the conditions for moral emotional episodes to occur, which consist of moral-emotional appraisals, moral emotions, and moral judgments.

Fear of negative evaluation. The fear of negative evaluation (FNE) is defined as “apprehension about others’ evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively.”⁶⁰ David Watson and Ronald Friend assert that fear of loss of social approval is the same as FNE.⁶¹ Additionally, FNE does not necessarily imply that one must evaluate oneself negatively or that one views oneself as inferior.⁶²

Irene Zhang, Deborah Powell, and Silvia Bonaccio find that FNE relates positively with interview anxiety and social-evaluative workplace anxiety. While not indicative of job performance, the finding suggests that those who tend to fear negative judgment in social situations would also be likely to feel anxious in workplace settings.⁶³ This occurrence is especially true in situations where social judgments are likely to happen. Therefore, while individuals may vary to the extent they experience FNE and how it impacts them, there is a theoretical basis for suggesting that FNE occurs at work and in settings that involve discourse around subjects of social relevance. As such, there is reason to suspect that expressing undesirable emotions or those contrasting with what is expected might trigger FNE.

Proposition 9. Experiencing socially undesirable or inappropriate moral emotions (or both) at work triggers FNE in employees.

In his expectancy model of fear, Steven Reiss identifies FNE as one of three fundamental fears (or sensitivities) along with fear of injury and fear of anxiety.⁶⁴ Reiss’s expectancy theory holds that people avoid objects and situations they fear, which is a function of two variables: expectation and sensitivity.⁶⁵ Expectancy relates to what someone thinks will happen when they come in contact with the feared object or situation, and sensitivity concerns the reasons a person holds for

fearing the anticipated object or event.⁶⁶ Reiss's model recognizes a wide range of individual differences in expectations and in sensitivities but argues that, generally, humans will be motivated to avoid that which triggers FNE.⁶⁷ Therefore, individuals who experience moral emotions considered inappropriate by those around them or by society would be motivated to avoid situations that trigger those emotions or expressing them in front of others.

Proposition 10. An employee experiencing FNE as a result of a moral emotional experience that contradicts what is expected by society will seek to avoid expressing these emotions in front of others.

Emotional labor. A likely outcome of needing to manage one's feelings is emotional labor. While its definition has evolved over the decades of research on the topic, the literature contends that emotional labor concerns the management of emotions as a part of work.⁶⁸ It has been described as "the emotional regulation required of the employees in the display of organizationally desired outcomes."⁶⁹ J. Andrew Morris and Daniel Feldman include the effort, planning, and control needed to display emotions desired by an organization during interpersonal relationships in their definition.⁷⁰ Additionally, Alicia Grandey and Allison Gabriel define "emotional labor" as the management of emotions to create a public facial and bodily display, which has exchange value because it is sold for a wage.⁷¹ Their research includes the concept of emotional labor in terms of construct development and measurement, chronic and momentary determinants, prediction of employee well-being, and impact on organizational performance.⁷²

Emotional labor has three components: emotional requirements, emotion regulation, and emotion performance.⁷³ While early emotional labor research focused on emotional requirements pertaining to how employees interact with customers, Joyce Bono and Meredith Vey suggest that not only do some types of jobs (e.g., service jobs) require certain emotions to be displayed, but some organizations at large do, too.⁷⁴ They define "display rules" as "social norms regarding the appropriate experience and display of emotions."⁷⁵ Display rules may be explicitly stated or derived from observing others in the workplace.⁷⁶ Emotional labor research also indicates that employees regulate their emotions to satisfy organizational display rules by quelling genuine emotions and pretending to have more acceptable emotions they are not really experiencing.⁷⁷ Individuals do so because when confronted with a discrepancy between felt emotions and display rules, emotion regulation can help reduce the dissonance they feel.⁷⁸

Given the three components of emotional labor, an organization with expectations around employees' emotion expression pertaining to DEIA initiatives (i.e., emotion requirements) would likely drive employees who feel alternatively to find ways to regulate conflicting emotions (i.e., emotion regulation) and to display desired emotions instead (i.e., emotion performance). Though emotions research addresses in depth a variety of strategies one might use to regulate emotions, such as deep acting and surface acting, it is outside the scope of this chapter to explain or advocate for a particular strategy. However, consistent with extant findings from this stream of research, regulating one's emotions such that inauthenticity is required is expected to lead to negative physical and psychological outcomes for the employee and negative consequences for the organization. Prior research has shown significant negative relationships between emotional labor and individual-level variables, such as job burnout, stress, reduced job satisfaction, lower individual performance, withdrawal behavior, emotional exhaustion, and poor physical health along with organizational-level variables, such as turnover (see fig. 16.2).⁷⁹

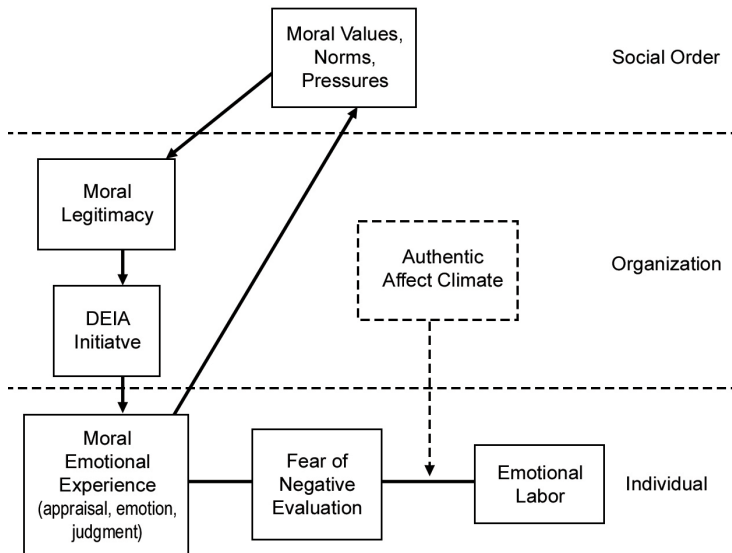


Figure 16.2. Theoretical model of the moral emotional experience of DEIA initiatives at work

Proposition 11. When a moral emotional experience at work results in FNE, an employee will experience emotional labor.

Proposition 12. Emotional labor resulting from the dissonance between display rules and felt emotions leads to negative outcomes for employees and organizations.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

This project began with a research question about what makes DEIA initiatives emotional for some people and not for others. During the endeavor to explain why some people feel strongly in favor of or against DEIA initiatives, it quickly became apparent that this research question could branch into multiple research projects. Instead of narrowing the topic to investigate, for example, individual differences that might account for varied emotional reactions, (i.e., which employees experience negative emotions) or to test which DEIA efforts are more or less likely to result in negative reactions, I decided to pursue the broader perspective. Doing so allowed me to theorize about what forces act upon organizations and employees that shape their responses.

As a result, this study lacks depth in that it does not account for the variance known to exist at the different levels of analysis. For example, many individual differences in lived experience—like status, identity, and personality—among employees can explain their negative emotional reactions to DEIA initiatives. I also expect there to be variance in the strength of negative emotions experienced. Additionally, variance across and within organizations and their approaches to and implementation of DEIA initiatives can influence how employees feel about these efforts. However, by theorizing broadly, there is likely some explanatory power that generalizes across cultures and societies. Future researchers should keep these limitations in mind, test the propositions of this study, and take care to define which societies or audiences are relevant in the context of their work.

Conclusion

This study theorizes that a vein of morality underpins DEIA initiatives in organizations and influences some employees' emotional experiences. Taking a holistic perspective of the pressures society exerts on organizations and employees, it suggests that a common thread of

moral evaluation influences organizations to adopt DEIA initiatives and informs the way employees may feel and react as a result of their moral emotional experiences. By better understanding the emotional component of DEIA initiatives, organizational leaders may be able to target interventions to help prepare employees for potential negative emotional reactions, address the complexity of the moral considerations involved in these initiatives, and possibly avoid negative outcomes for employees and organizations.

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Notes

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Chapter 17

Disability Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force

Assad S. Pharr

Introduction

The United States Air and Space Forces are adaptive organizations that continually strive to improve for the benefit of their service personnel. For instance, these two forces recently changed their physical testing procedures to support a more diverse force. Due to these shifts, the Department of the Air Force (DAF) has seen the evolution of physical training requirements from a one-size-fits-all model to a more practical model that includes numerous duty positions with variable fitness requirements.¹ As part of the requirement for creating a more inclusive DAF, US Air and Space Force senior management has committed to collaborating with the military's internal and external stakeholders for a strategic, education-based technologies development that supports various group needs. However, while doing so, there have been major concerns about the diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities in the DAF.²

Establishment of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force

Plans to establish a DAF office dedicated to diversity and inclusion began with the stand-up of the Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Task Force on June 9, 2020, reflecting the US Air and Space Force emphasis on having a more inclusive culture.³ The task force's objective was to identify and change policies, procedures, barriers, and other challenges that could lead to the underrepresentation of Air and Space personnel. Nine days later, the secretary of defense issued a statement charging

For simplicity and readability, the terms "Airman" and "Airmen" encompass all Department of the Air Force members, including US Air Force service members, US Space Force Guardians, and civilian and military personnel in all job titles and positions from entry-level to top leadership.

the Department of Defense with the responsibility of taking a “direct and deliberate posture to address D&I issues.” He aimed to “thoroughly assess D&I within the Armed Services and develop actionable items for immediate, mid- and long-term implementation.”⁴

The Department of the Air Force officially formed its Diversity and Inclusion Office on January 11, 2021, with the goal of cultivating an “equitable environment for all Department of the Air Force personnel.”⁵ The office planned to assess procedures and policies to eliminate or revise those that negatively impacted underrepresented troops.⁶ It would also examine factors that could impede the careers of Air and Space Force service members. The Secretary of the Air Force news release on February 2, 2021, acknowledges “the D&I task force and Office of Diversity and Inclusion” for their contribution to the DAF’s “crackdown on potentially offensive heraldry and honors and new disciplinary data tracking requirements.”⁷

The team’s acting senior advisor on diversity and inclusion at the time, Tawanda R. Rooney, stated that the “office would lead this charge and continue doing all the good work the Task Force initiated.” She described diversity and inclusion as “warfighting imperatives” and highlighted “the need to capitalize on all available talent by enabling a culture of inclusion where every member is respected and valued for his or her identity, culture, and background.”⁸

Use of Appropriate Language when Addressing Disability Inclusion

When referring to people with disabilities, the language we use matters. It should show a fundamental respect and uphold their integrity and dignity. Focusing on the person first before the disability is commonly termed as “first person” language. This language encompasses the idea that one will first “affirm and define the person” before focusing on the disability or impairment associated with an individual.⁹ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Christian Blind Mission, and many developing countries thus prefer the term “people/persons with disabilities” and is the term used here. However, in other countries, such as the UK, the preferred phrase is “disabled people.” Their rationale is that the term “people with disabilities is considered mixing impairment with disability.” That is, “people do not have disabilities, but rather impairments which become

disabling, due to society not being comprehensively accessible and inclusive.”¹⁰ Thus, both terms are used depending on the societal and organizational culture and context.

When championing disability inclusion in the Air and Space Forces, Airmen and Guardians must likewise ensure they use the appropriate language. For our context, one should not refer to someone as physically disabled, impaired, or handicapped but as a person with a disability, impairment, or handicap. Similarly, someone with other types of disabilities cannot be identified as “mental” or “mad”; appropriate language might include a person with mental issues or suffering from a psychiatric impairment or psychosocial disability. Individuals using a wheelchair can be described as wheelchair-restricted or people who use a wheelchair. Ideally, the goal is knowing the appropriate words to choose when dealing with people. Thus, a knowledge of how language can formulate the perception of persons with disabilities and influence their integration in the DAF and larger society is fundamental. It provides a basis for acknowledging the person first, not their disabilities or impairments.

Disability-Inclusive Development

Among the major discussions in disability-inclusive development is the complexity of making international and humanitarian programs accessible to people with disabilities. However, humanitarian programs and international development approaches need not be complex or costly. The Department of the Air Force, along with other DOD departments and organizations, can incorporate international development approaches, such as mainstreaming, geared toward making their programs more accessible to people with disabilities.

Mainstreaming

One aspect of disability-inclusive development is mainstreaming disability. The practice of mainstreaming disability is described as the developments and humanitarian approach that lead to the inclusion of people with impairments or disabilities that allows access to information without much struggle. Efforts in this area seek to include the needs of people with disabilities in almost all humanitarian areas. Ideally, the practice calls for considering disability in budgeting programming. Doing so would ensure that every program accounts for

disability and sets aside resources for people with disabilities. However, due to budgeting programming needs, specific actions such as accounting for the type of disability and what their special needs are could be required in this regard.

Mainstreaming plays a central role as a tool and policy for enhancing social inclusion. It helps to ensure that there is a practical pursuit of opportunity equality and nondiscrimination. The mainstreaming disability approach recognizes persons with disabilities as rights-holders and equal society members whose active engagement in all development sectors—whether private, government, or military—must be achieved irrespective of impairments or any other status, including language, political orientation, color, sex, race, and sexual orientation.

This approach also establishes that the basic needs of people with disabilities are common with others in society. As such, mainstreaming has been recognized as a cost-effective method of achieving equality for people with disabilities. The DAF needs to recognize that incorporating people with disabilities into the organization will not generally lead to complex issues concerning how to care for or address this population since their needs are the same as for all people. According to studies, experience shows that approximately 80 percent of people with disabilities would not require additional intervention when being incorporated or adopted in development programs or in most sectors.¹¹ The studies also suggest that any additional requirements can be achieved at a low cost, and only simple, community-based interventions would be required for specific expertise that might be necessary. Consequently, the DAF would generally inject simple interventions into its operations to accommodate people with disabilities.

Adopting a mainstreaming approach requires careful analysis. The analysis would include identifying and assessing barriers to ensure thorough planning. Studies have shown that mainstreaming disability fails primarily owing to insufficient efforts and poor designs.¹² The DAF needs to plan effectively to incorporate mainstreaming disability. Planners in the DAF need to address barriers to effective implementation before instituting organizational policies. The Air and Space Forces also need to map out all phases that would require intervention before the inclusion of people with disabilities in those career fields. The services should ensure that the self-determination for the equality of people with disabilities is rewarded by providing them with inclusive opportunities where they can advance their careers. When there is

Careful planning, mainstreaming disability becomes an effective tool for disability-inclusive development in any military organization.

Creating Awareness and Attitude/Behavior Change

Another way to promote inclusion is creating awareness about the need for including people with disabilities. The first step toward any change in disability inclusion is transforming the perceptions of organizational and community members toward people with disabilities.¹³ When creating diversity and inclusion programs, little can be accomplished without a shared awareness of the necessity and benefits of disability inclusion. Fostering more interactions with people with disabilities can engender a positive change in the behavior and attitude toward them. From this foundation, the DAF can tailor services that will meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Addressing disability inclusion at the political and social levels can also be productive. Where political and social discourse encompasses disability, those at the community, organizational, and institutional levels understand it better, promoting positive attitudes toward disability inclusion. Promoting disability inclusion at these levels will lead to a greater awareness that will encourage the identification of the types, incidences, and impacts of disability. The adoption of disability inclusion in the political and social discourse enables recognizing the experiences that people with disabilities have. It would also lead to a social model for understanding the barriers people with disabilities are forced to face. As such, the DAF is responsible for assessing how it can create awareness about disability inclusion.

Fostering Participation

Another aspect of disability-inclusive development is participation. It is among the best practices for providing the opportunity for a collaborative, active, and meaningful involvement of people with disabilities in all matters of policies and program-forming processes.

Participation calls for involving all impairment groups. In considering their inclusion, a key element is the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and age, among other factors that comprise exclusion or discrimination.¹⁴ It becomes vital to include persons with disabilities from marginalized groups, including those with psychosocial impairments and intellectual disabilities. Insights about such marginalized

groups help to ensure that emphasis is not on just a “small selection of the most articulate and least isolated disabled people.”¹⁵

Furthermore, disability-inclusive development needs to involve Disabled People’s Organizations (DPO). DPOs are a disability movement with the motto “nothing about us, without us.”¹⁶ It signifies that the affairs of people with disabilities should not be discussed or solutions reached without their involvement in the deliberations. The disability movement seeks to promote organizations providing the necessary services with the involvement of people with disabilities rather than providing the services for them.¹⁷ The DAF should know that DPOs play a significant role, and their input is vital in knowing how to best address the needs of people with disabilities. Humanitarian and development programs should consider the involvement and leadership of DPOs because their intervention is critical to ensuring that community institutions and activities better approach the concerns of people with disabilities. Doing so, in turn, fosters a greater appreciation of people with disabilities in the community and a consideration of their unique capacities and skills within the organization.

Initiating Organizational Change

Another practice that signifies disability-inclusive development involves organizational change. Efforts need to move beyond discussions on the need for disability inclusion to organizational action that results in measurable milestones of change. Tangible results mean that Airmen and Guardians are moving toward disability inclusion.

Organizational change is necessary for incorporating all other established practices of disability-inclusive development. The success of these practices depends on the respective organizations’ willingness to change their structure, process, and management for disability inclusion.¹⁸ For instance, mainstream disability inclusion calls for effectively training organizational staff on social model principles. Other measures (like the involvement of DPOs) call for a change in a design-inclusive budget, while other practices call for more commitments from staff in top management, strict organization targets, and collaboration with other stakeholders. As a result, an organization may incur unplanned costs for the inclusion of people with disabilities. However, the DAF should aim at looking for cost-effective ways to adopt practices for disability inclusion.¹⁹

Barriers to Disability Inclusion

While organizations may be willing to adopt disability inclusion, obstacles may impede their success. Existing barriers may result in some sectors, such as the military, finding it difficult to include people with disabilities in their programs. In adopting a disability inclusion policy, commanders need to identify and address these barriers.

Attitude Barriers

The first barrier to successfully implementing a disability inclusion policy is attitudinal barriers. Negative attitudes toward people with disabilities lead to discrimination and stigmatization, denying them their dignity and potential by creating obstacles to achieving equal opportunity and social integration.²⁰ These negative attitudes often lead to an environment where people with disabilities cannot express themselves. Those without disabilities fail to see beyond the impairment, leading to discriminating, bullying, and having low expectations from people with disabilities. Consequently, people with disabilities find it difficult to be incorporated into “normal” society.

In other instances, negative attitudes toward people with disabilities lead to more adverse effects. In some countries and communities—particularly low- and middle-income ones—misconceptions, folklore, and stereotypes exist that link disability to witchcraft, misfortune, or even punishment for sins committed in the past.²¹ Such perceptions may also contribute to difficulties that people with disabilities have in integrating into society.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers also are a challenge to disability inclusion. These barriers pertain to laws, procedures, strategies, policies, and practices disregarding people with disabilities. Certain requirements exist for some jobs that people with disabilities cannot meet, limiting their involvement in these areas. However, some of these requirements do not translate to an individual’s ability to do that job.

In some instances, the electoral laws do not consider the political rights and privileges of persons with some mental disabilities.²² While the discrimination may not be intentional, some systems indirectly disregard people with disabilities by not accounting for their needs, hence becoming a barrier to disability inclusion.

Cost Barriers

Another common barrier to disability inclusion is cost concerns. Some institutions argue that the reason for not considering people with disabilities is the perceived cost.²³ The argument is that their inclusion will require more funding since there needs to be a stringent process for including them. Some institutions face inadequate funding and challenges with implementation plans and policies. These funding challenges prevent successful disability inclusion.

Another cost concern pertains to implementing special programs, such as training or workshops for successful disability inclusion.²⁴ Some organizations may not be prepared to incur this cost. The additional programs could also make organizational members feel they are being subjected to additional tasks in which they would not be willing to participate.

Environmental Barriers

Environmental concerns also affect disability inclusion. Physical barriers in the built or natural environment may prevent accessibility or active participation.²⁵ Even after successful implementation of disability inclusion in the DAF, environmental barriers may prevent people with disabilities from participating in some activities.

Environmental barriers also include the lack of adequate services or the challenges of a service's delivery that may affect the participation of people with disabilities. For example, persons with walking impairments are disadvantaged when the services they require are offered only at a specific location.²⁶ If the environment has poor communication systems, there are challenges in the accessibility of information, opportunities, and knowledge, which may limit the participation of people with disabilities.

Psychological Barriers

Psychological barriers, also referred to as internalized barriers, may pertain to the psychological effects that people with disabilities face due to the stigma from society. Psychological barriers adversely affect the functionality and participation of people with disabilities in community projects or activities.

Because people with disabilities experience stigma from society and exclusion from societal interactions, they may also view themselves as

not fitting into society. Consequently, they develop inactive behavior in claiming their rights or expressing their views on certain subjects because they are afraid of further exclusion. Society's low expectations of people with disabilities affect their aspirations and confidence, which hinders effective disability inclusion.

Impact of Disability Inclusion

Increased Labor Productivity and Earnings

Due to a lack of data, the economic benefits of adopting a development strategy that includes people with disabilities are complex and challenging to quantify. Including persons with disabilities in the workforce can increase economic self-sufficiency and reduce the need for social support, although there is not much evidence of this in the military. With the right job matching and accommodations, employees with disabilities can be as productive as any other worker.

More Inclusive and Supporting Military

The campaign for disability inclusion promotes creating an environment that supports including all people. Disability-inclusion development fosters an accessible environment that will benefit a broad range of people, including those with disabilities. Accessibility ensures that people with disabilities engage fairly in community projects and activities.²⁷ It also provides an opportunity for people with disabilities to show that they can perform in highly demanding jobs and tasks and deliver results that meet or exceed requirements.

Improved Family and Individual Well-Being

Disability inclusion improves the well-being of individuals with disabilities and their families. Exhibiting a regard for people with disabilities and giving them a voice in societal, defense, and national affairs positively affect Airmen, Guardians, and their families. It engenders an inclusivity that means they feel more appreciated and less fearful of being discriminated against or excluded from affairs that affect them. For example, a study by Jody Heymann, Michael Ashley Stein, and Gonzalo Moreno found that including people with disabilities in labor market issues reduces stigma due to the promotion of inclusion.²⁸

Including people with disabilities in militaristic opportunities also contributes to the family's wellness. Considering people with disabilities for employment positively impacts their feelings of ability, self-determination, and self-worth.²⁹ They are also motivated to give their all to signify that they are responsible and can deliver as the job requires. As a result, they become the pillars of their households and society.

The Invisible Disability

What Is an Invisible Disability?

The invisible disability has been a concern in many public and private sectors. People are aware of the outward signs of disability, such as someone using a wheelchair or other assisting device. However, some disabilities are not obvious, hence the term "invisible" disabilities. The term refers to neurological, physical, or mental conditions that a person cannot see. One cannot tell that the person they are interacting with has a disability. Nevertheless, like visible disabilities, invisible disabilities may impede a person's activities, movements, or senses.

What Are the Effects of an Invisible Disability?

The invisibility of some disabilities affects how people perceive the nature of disability, as it unintentionally omits some people from target groups. Thus, practitioners and policymakers may not consider this population in disability-inclusion efforts. This exclusion is also perpetuated by a lack of data on all forms of disability for consideration during policymaking.³⁰ The absence of data has contributed to an unintended false impression that the people who need to be considered for disability inclusion compose a narrower group than the actual target group. Thus, intervention plans are formulated to fit persons with visible disabilities and may be insufficient for those with invisible disabilities.

The DAF has been largely affected by invisible disabilities. According to the Hearing Review, the general public is unaware that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffered from invisible disabilities of hearing impairments and other related tinnitus problems. A Department of Veterans Affairs study revealed that as a result of their service, 70,000

troops deployed in the two war zones had a tinnitus disability, and more than 58,000 troops had a hearing loss disability.³¹ Advances on the technological front have improved hearing aids and devices. However, the department needs to implement other programs to assist those with invisible impairments.

How Do We Address Invisible Disabilities?

Ensure people are comfortable disclosing their disability. As established earlier, stigmatization and exclusion are among the challenges people with disabilities face in the community. Accordingly, when battling an invisible disability, most will likely prefer to keep the situation private and consider nondisclosure as a measure of protecting themselves against discrimination and exclusion. As such, disability inclusion programs should work toward ensuring that people with invisible disabilities can disclose their disabilities comfortably. The programs should ensure an inclusive environment that will not ignore the special needs of Airmen and Guardians should they share their disabilities.

Offer support and services to people with invisible disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) entitles reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. According to Claire Odom, senior program manager at Understood, “People with disabilities, invisible or not, can perform their job at or above expectations if given a way to do it that meets their needs.”³² The DAF should provide accommodations to personnel with a disability, which generally is not difficult or expensive. For instance, if someone struggles with memory due to a learning disability, their supervisor can provide written instructions instead of expecting that they will execute what is required of them from verbal discussions or instructions. People who observe that their organization considers the needs of those with disabilities tend to be more willing to disclose their disability, as they perceive that they will not be discriminated against or ignored by peers or leadership.³³

As noted earlier, the Air and Space Forces have taken the steps to create a resource group that focuses on the disability of some personnel. It empowers those with disabilities to participate actively and create allies to network and raise their concerns. Organizations can also support people with invisible disabilities by including mental health coverage in their insurance plans. Programs can also be tailored

to promote free services as part of the benefits package, such as health coaching for people with invisible disabilities, which reduces stress.

Disability Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force

DAF Commitment to Disability Inclusion

As established so far, the department is committed to diversity and inclusion. Gen John Raymond, the first chief of space operations, sent a letter to the men and women of the Air and Space Forces stating, “We must build diversity and inclusion into our ‘cultural DNA’—make it one of the bedrock strengths of our service.”³⁴ The leadership of the Air and Space Forces supports an all-inclusive policy for individuals with visible and invisible disabilities. This support can be seen at all levels, including the various disability empowerment leaders in the department.

Disability-Inclusive Leaders

Lt Col Rebecca Emerson, USAF, Retired. Colonel Emerson is a United States Air Force veteran who served for twenty-three years.³⁵ A military advocate who works closely with the DAF, she is the executive associate director at a not-for-profit organization, Exceptional Families of the Military. She has received awards for her passionate work advocating for people with disabilities in the DAF and beyond. Her work has been and continues to be instrumental in shaping how the military includes persons with disabilities in the DAF.

Kendra Shock. Before moving to the Office of Accessibility and Accommodation (OAA), Ms. Shock served in the Department of the Air Force as a disability program manager and implemented the DAF Disability Action Working Group. The group is charged with “retaining and developing current employees and military members with a disability, recruiting new talent, and removing barriers to advancement.” Her team provided DAF leadership a resource “regarding the interests, needs, and policies affecting Airmen and Space Professionals with disabilities.”³⁶ Another aim of the team was to increase the participation of persons with targeted disabilities in the Air Force.

Conclusion

The United States Air and Space Forces continue to adapt and improve in ways that benefit those who serve in these forces. One way the DAF has progressed is creating more diversity by changing the process for physical fitness testing that aims to assess individuals' physical abilities and match them with the right jobs. The physical assessment changes allow for establishing a practical model that allows service personnel to perform duties in positions requiring varied fitness requirements. Another notable advancement toward increased diversity for service personnel is forming the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force. The DAF includes a task force responsible for advancing the inclusion and diversity agenda. The roles of the task force include policy and procedural changes and other pro-diversity practices, such as creating diversity awareness among service personnel. The task force is also responsible for removing obstacles, such as discriminatory acts, that would hamper the career growth of people with disabilities. Policy changes on the "use of appropriate language when addressing individuals with a disability" are evidence of inclusiveness initiatives.³⁷ The disability-inclusive program plans to make international and humanitarian programs accessible to service personnel with disabilities. Other approaches that advance the disability inclusivity aspiration are mainstreaming disability and creating awareness and attitude or behavior change. Fostering awareness and appropriate behavior toward people with disabilities is a stepping-stone toward the beneficial inclusion of people with disabilities. Other initiatives, such as promoting participation, changing organizational culture, and tearing down barriers that people with disabilities face benefit service personnel and the department in general. The benefits of disability inclusion include increased service productivity, as the skills and experiences of people with disabilities become utilized as appropriate; the realization of a diverse and inclusive military society; and improved well-being for service personnel with disabilities and their family members. Airmen and Guardians are supported by empowered disability-inclusive leaders who will offer support and guidance through the journey toward realizing a disability-inclusive force.

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Notes

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Chapter 18

Everyone Is Valued

A Mission-Focused Approach to Inclusion

Kevin Parker

Ideally, theory informs practice. The observation of practice can also spur the development of theory. But often, practice remains blissfully unaware of theory and vice versa. Practitioners without theory plod along, improving only as fast as their own individual circumstances' trial-and-error process allows. Conversely, theorists without the benefit of practice conceptualize but never benefit from having their ideas tested by reality. The intersection of theory and practice is where accelerated organizational learning can occur—where we can leap in progress. And when it comes to diversity and inclusion in the Department of the Air Force, we need to leap.

Recent in-depth studies provide ample evidence of areas for improvement in diversity and inclusion within the service.¹ Improving is not just a matter of social justice; it is necessary for future mission success. Whether the focus is on helping those already serving to contribute to their full potential or the follow-on effects on retention and recruiting, the need for improvement is compelling. US Air Force Academy superintendent Lt Gen Richard Clark identified building a culture of respect and dignity as “a strategic imperative for our Air and Space Forces.”² He further stated,

Our cadets come from increasingly diverse communities across our nation, and our graduates must be prepared to lead increasingly diverse Airmen and Guardians. Our graduates must enable and empower the diversity of thought that can be derived from this uniquely American strength. They must be able to relate to other cultures and excel in partnerships and coalitions with allied nations as we navigate the complexities of expanding joint and collaborative combat operations. In order to outpace and outthink our adversaries, we must fully employ the diverse creative, innovative, and problem-solving capabilities of our people. If dignity and respect [are] not ingrained in our culture, we will

not only fail in these collective efforts, but we will also fail in the proper development of future leaders.³

Developing a sense of organizational community is key to building the culture of dignity, respect, and inclusion General Clark described as necessary for the future. By focusing on the important mission of the armed forces, leaders in the military have a unique ability to foster organizational community. My personal experiences in three separate command tours reinforce this idea. My observations as a practitioner match the theory on organizational community laid out by Howard Ross in *Reinventing Diversity*.⁴ My intent is to share my own anecdotes and observations, connect that experience to Ross's theoretical perspective, and offer leaders at all levels an approach to building a more inclusive culture and better mission performance along the way.

I offer my experiences as a practitioner, a commander in the field, with full recognition that my experience is limited to my individual circumstances and my own trial-and-error process. I offer this account in first-person view, placing myself at the center of the story. This position is uncomfortable since it risks the appearance of vanity, overstating my role, ignoring my faults, and disregarding evidence counter to my conclusions. Protagonists also find themselves as the target of criticism from others who are at the center of their own story. I realize, for example, that when “2 out of every 5 black enlisted, civilians, and officers [in the Air Force] do not trust their chain of command to address racism, bias, and unequal opportunities,” there is a statistical 40 percent chance Black Airmen in my units felt the same way about me.⁵ I will add more on humility and criticism later but ask for the reader's indulgence in my first-person view while I open myself to potential criticism for the sake of organizational learning.

My Approach

As a deployed squadron commander, I had the privilege of leading rotational forces on six-month tours. During my year in command, all Airmen in my unit rotated home as fresh faces replaced them—twice. As each new batch arrived, with the usual rotation spread over several weeks, I would address them directly as part of a newcomers' orientation. Each time, I would describe our mission, organization, and my expectations.

This unit is a family. In this family, everyone is valued. Everyone has a seat at the table. No one gets banished to the kids' table or has to take their dinner to another room because they are not worthy to sit at the table with the rest of us. Everyone has their seat because everyone is valued. It does not matter where you came from, what your accent sounds like, your gender, your sexual preference, the color of your skin, or your religion or lack of it. What does matter is that you are a part of this family, and we have a job to do together. Our business is serious—it is life or death serious. Each of you stood in front of the same flag and swore a solemn oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. Because ours is a serious business, we cannot afford to have any member of our family distracted from the mission because they feel like they do not belong or are not welcome. We need everyone contributing to their fullest potential toward our important mission. Do not create a distraction by losing sight of this perspective. Everyone is valued.

No matter how many times I repeated these words, I always tried to ensure the delivery carried my sincere conviction behind them. This was not a façade of an obligatory diversity statement. I actually believed it—then and now. I also took every opportunity to highlight to my Airmen significant events in ongoing combat operations and how they contributed to mission success. Continuously elevating the importance of the mission strengthened the idea that our serious business required everyone's full contribution devoid of distraction. The words in my message are not magical but coupled with consistency in behavior and reinforced by leaders at all levels of the unit, they did produce results.

Results

I do not recall my unit having a single instance of discrimination, harassment, or assault (based on race, gender, national origin, sexual preference, or similar factors) reported to the inspector general (IG), my higher chain of command, or me during my tenure. A lack of negative reports does not definitively prove there were no instances of discrimination. Was I aware of everything that was going on in a unit with over 300 people? Of course not. Were there acts of discrimination, harassment, or assault that I was unaware of? Very likely, yes. While acknowledging I do not know everything that occurred, there were no notable instances of any Airman in my unit being distracted from

the mission by an issue of discrimination, harassment, or assault from within the unit. And there were no instances that rose to the level of attention outside the unit. Further, our monthly and quarterly awards programs produced winners from all demographic categories without consideration of those factors.

In subsequent commands I took a similar approach. My second squadron command was an overseas long tour with Airmen on two- to four-year tours, so unit turnover was not as frequent. But to each newcomer, I still delivered the same message, summarized as “Everyone in our unit is valued. Our mission is important. We cannot afford to have anyone among us distracted from the mission by thinking they do not belong.” The results of this approach were similar to my first squadron command. When I later took command of a group, I continued delivering the same message through different venues. I introduced and reinforced this message in my first commander’s call with the entire unit, with smaller groups of the squadron and group leadership, and at monthly breakfasts with rotating small groups of Airmen, noncommissioned officers, senior noncommissioned officers, and civilians.

Just like my first squadron command, my second squadron and group command tours saw positive results. Again, over each two-year command, I recall no instances of discrimination, harassment, or assault reported from my unit. The single exception was a race-related discrimination grievance that was raised and resolved with a moderated civil conversation. Airmen-to-IG sessions during inspections and anonymous unit climate assessments never exposed related concerns. And again, our quarterly and annual awards programs produced winners from all demographic categories without consideration of those factors. Each of my units had a large display with framed photos of our award winners posted in a prominent location. Having never tried to influence the award boards to include diversity as a factor, I would often observe the faces on display with great satisfaction as they represented a cross-section of our diverse workforce. Over the years, my units had award winners of different skin color, gender, native language, national origin, and sexual preference. Some of these characteristics were not observable in the photos, and I only knew them from personal knowledge of the Airmen. But the physical manifestation of diversity shown by the awards board photos led me to a clear conclusion: in this environment, everyone had an opportunity to succeed and be judged on their performance alone.

Everyone Is Valued—Equal Opportunity

Equal opportunity did not always seem guaranteed during my career. As a lieutenant civil engineer officer in 1997, I was tasked to deploy and lead a construction team of twenty-one Airmen. I remember mid-level leaders within my unit asking me if I would allow a female to deploy on our team. I was advised that the next plumber due to deploy was a female Airman (E-2) with one stripe, but if I chose an all-male team, I would get a two-striped Airman first class (A1C, E-3). I asked how skilled each was. To their credit, the same mid-level supervisors described the A1C as being unable to find a pipe wrench behind his back with both hands (phrasing cleaned up for public presentation), and the female Airman (E-2) was one of the hardest-working, quickest-learning plumbers in the shop. My reply was simply, “Then, what’s the question?” We deployed with her on the team, and she lived up to their description. But the fact that the question was asked at all made clear that opportunities were at least being subjected to filtering by gender.

In the group I commanded more than twenty years later, gender was no longer a discriminator for career opportunities. We had males and females in squadron command, in flight commander positions, and nominated for special duty opportunities and programs like Officer Training School and instructor duty. One memorable example of fairness in opportunities came from the fire department. Numerically, firefighting is a male-dominated career field. Of the three fire departments I supervised over five years, I never remember seeing more than two female firefighters assigned at a time. One of those female firefighters joined the department straight from her initial training, and her physical stature created a logistics problem. She was under five feet tall with a petite frame, and we had no bunker gear small enough to outfit her for duty. Fire-resistant personal protective equipment was necessary for her to train and respond to emergencies. After calling several other departments in our theater, the logistics team was able to source an appropriately sized set of bunker gear—size extra small. Through existing partnerships with a German volunteer fire department in the local area, they even sourced extra-small boots from a youth firefighter training program. The shipped gear arrived, and she was outfitted and ready to start her training within the department.

Firefighters do a lot of training to be ready for an emergency but also to add skills as they progress in their careers. Some training is

internal to the department, and some training includes going to formal training courses at other locations. Managing the allocation of these training opportunities is a full-time job for each department's training officer. After a few months, it came time for our extra-small female Airman to attend an external course.

The Rescue Technician Course involves confined space maneuvers, rappelling, and other technical skills, which are difficult on their own but even harder when the objective is to retrieve another person (played by a rescue dummy) and move them to safety. If training opportunity selection were based solely on physical stature, our extra-small Airman would never have been picked for this physically demanding training. Fortunately, everyone was valued in our unit, and everyone got the opportunity to advance their training as they progressed in their careers. At the end of the course, students have to successfully perform several of their newly learned skills in a standard timed scenario to earn their certification as a rescue technician. Proving the adage that "good things often come in small packages," our extra-small Airman impressively set a new training site record in her timed trial. The same Airman who would have been quickly dismissed for this opportunity years ago based on her gender and physical size had performed better than everyone in her class—better than every Air Force firefighter in Europe who had attended this course in the last several years. By having an equal opportunity, she discovered strengths she did not know she had. And we discovered we had a very capable asset to call on if the mission ever demanded that skillset.

Not giving everyone an opportunity guarantees you will miss strengths within individuals that you would never know about. These may also be strengths of which even the individuals are unaware. As equal opportunities bring everyone's strengths into the light, individual strengths can be celebrated and leveraged with a focus toward contributing toward the collective mission.

Everyone Is Valued—Capitalizing on Strengths

Recognizing differences gives leaders the ability to match strengths to opportunities. While I was stationed overseas, my base leadership was meeting with a delegation from the host nation during a period of tense negotiations. At that time, my unit had an unusually high number of extremely tall Airmen. Knowing her people, my group

commander directed me to station my tallest Airmen at each door the host nation delegation would walk through during their visit. As a result, everywhere the foreign officials went, they had a door opened for them, displaying respect and a willingness to cooperate. But each of those doors was opened by a stern-faced Airman in uniform standing at least six feet, four inches tall, representative of our military strength and sending an unspoken message through their physical stature: you want us on your side. We will never know if that message was received in the way it was intended, but the results of the negotiations were favorable for us. If we as leaders had been blind to the physical differences in our Airmen or failed to consider how those differences might benefit the mission, the opportunity to leverage diversity would have been squandered. I recognize capitalizing on physical diversity of tall members is not trailblazing leadership in the area of diversity and inclusion, but it outlines a concept that can be replicated with other backgrounds, characteristics, strengths, and talents.

For another example, as a group commander, my unit hosted the spouses of the wing and other group command teams for a unit and mission overview. This group of spouses had similar immersions with all of the wings' groups. We planned to include a stop at the fire department, which is always a fan favorite for visitors. My squadron commander over the fire department decided to have a female firefighter lead that portion of the tour. Since the vast majority of firefighters were male, this Airman was not the most representative of the group, but the commander thought she would make the best impression. Knowing all the visiting spouses happened to be female, she thought they may relate better to her. And that is exactly what happened.

As the visiting spouses engaged the recently assigned, young, female Airman with questions, her personality came out. We all discovered that not only did she have an enthusiastic and likable demeanor with good presence and public speaking skills, but she also had an amazing personal story of tragedy, struggle, and triumph that began with her reaction to a medical emergency in her family at the age of five. Her story drove her passion for her chosen profession as an emergency responder.⁶ She was undaunted in pursuing her dream, even as she was so outnumbered by male peers and flight leadership. Those leaders gave her an opportunity by choosing her to lead the tour. This choice deliberately leveraged her demographic uniqueness based on the makeup of our visitors. But this was not just an opportunity for her. It was an opportunity for us. We learned what an incredible Air-

man she was and that the power of her energy, drive, and positive outlook—fired by the passion of her story—made her a great spokesperson that inspired many visitors that day (including me) and beyond. We had built a climate where everyone got opportunities, and we sought out opportunities to leverage diversity for positive effects.

In both examples, Airmen across the unit remained focused on the mission. None complained that they did not have the opportunity to serve as a door guard because they were too short. None griped about being cheated out of the opportunity to lead a spouse tour because of their gender. They knew they were valued first as members of our organizational community, that they would be given opportunities to match their strengths when the time came, and that the mission always came first. Their faith in these beliefs was set up by some of the first words they heard from me in their newcomer orientation and reinforced by messaging at every natural opportunity. More importantly, their faith in these beliefs was sustained by their consistent observations of the actions taken and decisions made throughout the unit. To maintain a sense of organizational community, leaders must ensure there is no daylight between their words and deeds because Airmen are adept at spotting inconsistencies in leadership.

Theory—Organizational Community

So far, I have only discussed practice based on my own experiences. It is time to connect that experience with theory. I am introducing theory later here because I was blissfully unaware of it until after my squadron command tours. I was introduced to Howard Ross's *Reinventing Diversity* in a strategic leadership class at the US Army War College. Because his writing resonated with my experience, I attempted to apply his theories more deliberately during my group command. In addition to several books based on his experience as a diversity practitioner, Ross has published his work in several high-profile outlets, taught at prestigious schools, and provided consulting services for Fortune 500 companies.⁷ I found his 2011 book *Reinventing Diversity* intriguing, as it levied criticism on well-intentioned “best practices” of corporate diversity and inclusion efforts while offering a different approach based on organizational culture and community.⁸

What is organizational community? Ross explained, “It is so important to create environments that fundamentally change the way

people relate if we are to get the most out of our people, and if people are to have the best chance to participate in their organizations. That is . . . organizational community.”⁹ Creating this type of community means moving away from an events-based diversity and inclusion program that focuses solely on highlighting a specific minority culture with a special day or luncheon. These are well-intentioned and often fantastic events, but more is needed. According to Ross, achieving sustainable results requires a shift toward systems thinking and focusing on an organization’s culture.¹⁰ He described eight “key elements of organizational community”:¹¹

1. Clear vision of the future state of the organization. My vision is to have everyone feel valued and contribute to their full potential to our important mission. Few organizations have reached this state, so this vision creates helpful tension as the unit struggles to get there. Ross observes, “If we are merely correcting problems, we have missed the inescapable observation that there is something that is causing the problems that must be addressed. Many leaders have gotten so good at fixing problems that a problem-free environment offers no satisfaction.”¹²
2. Financial security and results. “Community breaks down when people are financially insecure,” in Ross’s view.¹³ Financial security may seem less important since military pay is based on rank and universal pay tables, but the concept should not be wholly dismissed. Ross elaborates on how to achieve greater buy-in by “build[ing] the business case for diversity, inclusion, and cultural competency in a clear, concise, and viable way that speaks to the concerns of the dominant cultures within the organization.”¹⁴ In an all-volunteer force, all have some level of commitment to the mission of national defense. So, rather than a business case, a mission case should be the focus.
3. Common values and behavior norms. Ross conveys that “organizational community values should be clearly articulated and understood by all members of the organization.”¹⁵ They cannot just be words on a poster on the wall or at the bottom banner of a presentation slide. They have to be observable in members’ behavior. Collective behavior and social validation produce norms across an organization.¹⁶

4. Leadership. Ross observes “within organizational community, leaders learn to conquer fear and embrace change, and to see the past and present as stepping-stones to the future, not a limitation of it.”¹⁷ Leaders need to create a vision with built-in tension, describe it, get members to buy in, act consistent with the vision, hold themselves and others accountable to behaviors consistent with the organizational vision and values, and manage relationships to reinforce positive behaviors and change. Leadership by the head of an organization is important, but it is also vital for leaders at all levels to achieve real change and organizational community.
5. Communication. To feel a part of the community, members cannot be left in the dark. In addition to the message of inclusion and mission focus, all members need access to the information they need to perform their jobs well. It helps to include them in conversations about how the organization is performing and any potential challenges it faces. All members must also feel free to raise concerns as well as potential solutions to challenges or improvements. Otherwise, the uninformed quickly grow disenfranchised while they remain incapable of contributing beyond what they are directly asked for.¹⁸
6. Service. Businesses serve clients while government agencies serve populations. Ross states that the service orientation of organizational communities “requires both the focus and the information to meet the needs of the community members.”¹⁹ Most organizations need cultural competence to understand their customers’ needs and anticipate how different races, cultures, or other backgrounds may view their products. With the exception of recruiting, the military’s customer is widely accepted to be the American public writ large, and service is performed on their behalf. Cultural competence is still important for internal workings of the military, but the key to service in relation to organizational community is never losing sight of the fact that the job is completely an act of service.
7. Knowledge sharing. Sharing knowledge heads off rumors and misunderstandings. Ross notes “the human mind abhors a vacuum, and when presented with a vacuum of information, we will try to fill it.”²⁰ Transparency is critical in informing members of the actual facts and keeping them engaged. It is even better

when that transparency helps them see how their work contributes to organizational success, leading to higher levels of commitment and trust. The military, just like some corporations, often holds information that cannot be shared with all members—usually due to classification. The default position should be to share everything that can be shared, limit what cannot be shared, and speak plainly about why.

8. Inlusiveness, collaboration, and conflict. We are all connected. What we do in one part of an organization impacts other parts of the organization and overall results. Good ideas can come from anywhere, and improvements are often introduced by outside members who come at problems free of assumptions already accepted by the group. Ross contends, “Structure creates behaviors in organizations. In organizational communities we build structures for collaboration. People are engaged in regular dialogue in which they inquire into areas of importance rather than simply being informed in such areas. Feedback practices are developed, and people are encouraged to give their input.”²¹ Not everyone will agree with every decision, but some conflict is expected and accepted in an organizational community. When members have the sense that they are involved, can provide input to decisions, know their leaders are listening, and receive the reasoning behind decisions, they are more likely to support decisions. And the decisions tend to be better because they are informed by a broader set of perspectives from members uninhibited in providing their input.

Taken out of the context of diversity and inclusion, the list above may simply sound like axioms for good leadership. In short, it is. Very little on the list is focused on active measures to reach specific diverse populations within an organization. Instead, its focus is on reaching everyone in an organization. Does this mean it is best to ignore differences in a diverse workforce?

Blind to Differences

For a leader, color blindness is an asset and an impairment. When it comes to welcoming and valuing every member of the team regardless of their demographic background, color blindness is essential. Declaring “everyone belongs on this team and is a valued member”

without caveat or exception is the first step to organizational community. It sets an expectation echoing Dr. Martin Luther King's dream that his children would "not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."²² The usefulness of color blindness ends once a leader earns the team members' belief in that declaration. Beyond that point, color blindness is an impairment.

Within a team where everyone is accepted and valued, choosing to ignore the diverse differences of team members shortchanges each individual and the team. In their article "Color-Blindness Is a False Panacea," two Marine officers offer the criticism, "Ultimately, proclaiming racial color-blindness as a solution to racial disparities absolves leaders of their responsibilities to unlock the potential of diverse teams."²³ I use skin color here only as one example of many facets. Considering only an individual's race or gender oversimplifies that person's distinctive identity, which is influenced by so many more factors. As Gen Anthony Cotton proclaimed, "We welcome diversity and inclusion with an open, comprehensive discussion focused on more than just gender, race or ethnicity; this conversation includes personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, education, language abilities and physical abilities, as well as philosophical and spiritual perspectives."²⁴ All facets bring strengths, talents, and perspectives capable of unique contributions to the team's success.

It may seem duplicitous to claim an ability to see past any differences while also declaring to appreciate those differences. The key is not to downplay them but to elevate something greater than those differences. It is not that differences do not matter—in fact, they do. Because everyone is valued, they are valued for the unique contributions they bring. Elevating focus on the mission does not mean suppressing differences. You can still value, celebrate, and leverage diverse characteristics. Diversity can still be elevated, but focus on the mission needs to be on a higher plane.

The key is to build a collective identity that transcends differences rather than negating them. Consider the way a grade-school girl may think boys are "icky" but still loves her brother. Or how the older brother may insist his little sister stay out of his bedroom but would instantly come to her aid if anyone were picking on her at school. These attitudes and behaviors could be labeled cognitive dissonance or chalked up to immaturity. However, they illustrate in a simple way how each of us has different components of our identity that we hold to more

closely than others. The actions of the brother and sister described above demonstrate how they view their family ties as stronger bonds than their disdain for the others' gender or age. The transcendent identity as family causes them to put aside their lower-level differences. This concept is the model for organizational community—a sense of common belonging taken on as a collective identity that transcends differences in a diverse workforce.

Transcendent Mission Focus

The military has a unique advantage in creating a transcendent identity based on several factors. All members, at least those in uniform, have volunteered to serve, taken a similar solemn oath, and gone through some form of initial entry training. These common experiences serve as equalizers that initially dampen the significance of differences and set conditions for “a unique form of trust that occurs between groups or individuals brought together in temporary groups or teams to accomplish specific tasks, often under certain time constraints.”²⁵ Since the tasks for a military organization connect directly to defense of the nation that all volunteers have sworn an oath to, leaders have a head start in not only building trust among members but also in forming a collective identity. With the constant urgency created by the need to be ready to go to war at a moment's notice, leaders can elevate their members' focus on the mission. If marshaled effectively, common identity, swift trust, and a transcendent mission focus converge to create organizational community.

Lt Gen Stephen Davis concluded a yearlong, chief of staff of the Air Force–chartered study in 2018 titled “Improving Air Force Squadrons—Recommendations for Vitality,” which reinforces this approach in relation to mission focus, individual member satisfaction, and results. From vast interviews, surveys, and other input sources, the study identified ten leverage points for ensuring squadron vitality, all depending on the single fulcrum of clarity of purpose. For military units, the purpose is the mission. The report concluded, “In life, work, or war, people receive their meaning from seeing how they fit into a higher purpose. For that to happen, first, a higher purpose must exist; second, it must be known. The Air Force has abundant higher purpose to offer its Airmen. Unfortunately, they don't always know it.”²⁶

The study observed that a sense of purpose was more palpable in deployed environments with high operations tempos where the mission remains in the forefront and individuals' actions are more obviously connected to the unit's overall purpose and outcomes. The report described that in these types of environments, "Airmen have little problem connecting to purpose and sensing their membership in a valued team doing meaningful work—the prerequisites for esprit de corps."²⁷ There is an important step between focusing on the mission and getting good results. That interim step is captured in the phrase "sensing their membership in a valued team."²⁸ This sense of belonging to something greater than themselves—to a collective purpose and identity shared by other members of the group and appreciated for what they accomplish together—is organizational community. Davis claims this step is a "prerequisite for esprit de corps."²⁹

Esprit de corps is not the end goal, but it is a key ingredient for mission success. Esprit de corps is not just an individual feeling; it is a shared feeling among a group that identifies as a community. Where there is esprit de corps, there is a sense of community. If that identity as a community is transcendent, good things happen. Individual differences are played down as distractions and played up as strengths fitting for the circumstances and mission needs. Members default to assuming the best intentions of their teammates. They dole out grace, rather than guilt, when others fall short of ideals for inclusion. In doing so, they create a path for individual improvement, organizational learning, and organizational culture norms that reinforce inclusion. That type of environment is where the power of diversity can thrive and achieve better results. Davis's report outlines how clarity of purpose, with its natural boost to esprit de corps, "will increase the vitality of all squadrons, resulting in more cohesive, ready, agile, and capable units required by the Nation to successfully defend its vital interests in complex operating environments, now and in the future."³⁰ That is the end goal.

Reflections and Advice

When I first read Ross's work, including the concept of organizational community, his theoretical perspective seemed to match my experience. It not only explained what I had observed, but more importantly, it also gave me a way to explain my experience to others. I can only hope the explanatory power of his theory, coupled with my approach,

anecdotes, and results shared here and a concerted focus by leaders at all levels, can help us take the needed leap in the right direction. The chart included in this chapter's appendix is an aid for leaders to assess their unit's status, anticipate expected outcomes, and craft effective messaging to improve mission results.

Can a few minutes of speech change the culture of an entire unit and the attitudes of each member? In short, no, but it is a start. No matter how hard leaders try, they still may not reach everyone. But not trying to influence the culture leaves everything to chance. Further, it cannot just be a few minutes of speech. The message has to be reinforced often by the commander and key leaders in the unit. And it must be more than mere words. Airmen have to see actions that are consistent with the rhetoric before they will fully believe it. Observable positive actions include awards, promotions, prominent job selections, and pushes for programs like Officer Training School or other special programs. Observable negative actions include administrative disciplinary actions—both the choice to pursue them or let them slide and the severity of the punishment.

The commander cannot be everywhere. The decision to pursue disciplinary action is initiated at the first-line supervisor level, often several layers down the chain from the commander. Similarly, what Airmen hear said by their peers or supervisors in their shops, on the flightline, or after hours, is exclusively beyond the earshot of their commander. These facts make it imperative that commanders endeavor to have their finger near the pulse of the unit. First sergeants, senior enlisted advisors, and trusted leaders throughout the unit can provide insight with value that cannot be overstated. Deliberately meeting with small groups of Airmen and having conversations with them while walking through unit workspaces also provide indicators of attitudes and unit culture. When a conversation exposes a worrisome detail, a follow-on conversation with the supervisor or flight chief can often head off an issue. Utilizing the experience and relationships of a senior enlisted advisor to feel around a potential issue can not only provide clarity on the substance and scale of a problem but also inform an approach to influencing it.

I am happy to recount my approach in hopes of helping other leaders, but I do not profess to have all the answers. My command tours were all in units that were either deployed or overseas, where Airmen were further away from their own families and familiar surroundings. This environment creates a natural tendency to draw together and develop a sense of community. It is also much easier to draw a line

between what an Airman and a unit do when their work directly impacts combat operations, notable peacetime missions, or deterrence operations during times of heightened international tensions. With these advantages, some might say I had an easier task in creating unit cohesion.³¹ That could be true.

Knowing the results I observed are unlikely to be the whole story, I should state plainly that I am not so naïve as to believe there were never any issues of race, gender, or other forms of discrimination, harassment, or assault in any of my units over five years of command. There were surely instances that just never made it to my attention. Undoubtedly, there were some who chose to suffer in silence or those who raised concerns that were squelched by an intermediate supervisor. If such instances did occur, I humbly welcome the opportunity to learn about them now, not to try to reverse the clock to make them right but so I can learn to be a better leader and we can improve as a service.

Is creating a sense of organizational community based on a mission focus enough to transcend all differences in a diverse workforce, capitalize on the strengths of every diverse individual, and enhance mission performance across the board? Maybe not. But theory and practice show that a mission-focused approach to inclusion is powerful and can create impressive results.

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Notes

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Appendix

Leadership Approach

Recognition of Differences	High	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differences become distraction <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drama - Problem fixing <p>Leadership message to move to better status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone is valued and gets an equal opportunity - We need everyone contributing - Don't create distractions 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differences leveraged toward mission <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transcendent mission focus - Great mission results - Growth <p>Leadership message to sustain status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Constantly reinforce messages from all other stages
	Low	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indifference <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apathy - Frustration <p>Leadership message to move to better status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our mission is important 	<p>Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differences ignored for mission focus <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Blind to differences - Good mission results <p>Leadership message to move to better status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone is valued as a member and for their unique strengths - We need to match opportunities to individual strengths
		Low	High

Figure 18.1. Leadership Approach

Chapter 19

Leveraging Diversity to Unlock Organizational Innovation

Brittany L. Pinney

Organizations are experiencing mounting pressures to rapidly adapt to uncertain, dynamic, complex, and increasingly diverse environments induced by globalization.¹ Optimizing organizational performance is critical to securing sustained growth and competitive advantage in this globalized era, and innovation is widely accepted as a key factor in achieving these objectives.² Diversity is described as the blueprint for innovation.³ Therefore, organizations should leverage workforce diversity to unlock organizational innovation and realize their goals.⁴ However, convoluted conceptualizations of diversity elicit varying understanding among policymakers and authorities that translates into organizations struggling to harness this transformative concept.⁵

This literature review seeks to promote an understanding of workforce diversity and how to leverage it for organizational success by developing the research agendas proposed by Shatrughan Yadav and Usha Lenka regarding further exploring the relationship between diversity management practices and organizational outcomes.⁶ It investigates the moderating effects of leadership, leadership behaviors, and the inclusion of employees on workforce diversity and organizational innovation and performance. It also discusses the evolution of diversity from its origins of legal compliance to its cultivation as an organizational resource as well as shifts in its conceptualizations. Additionally, it explores the connection between innovation and diversity and its moderating and mediating variables. Finally, it addresses barriers to diversity, such as bias and discrimination, and analyzes the role of managing workforce diversity and its intersectionality with innovation and leadership.

Method

The research method assessed several disciplines, including applied psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, and management. Literature was located using the academic search engine Google Scholar

and the multidisciplinary research databases Emerald Insight and ProQuest Central as well as searching within the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, which enabled the discovery of other applicable articles. Keywords for search queries included “workforce diversity,” “diversity management,” “innovation,” “inclusion,” “leadership,” and “organizational performance.” Inclusion criteria comprised publications dated within fifteen years or less, limited to full text, peer-reviewed results available in English. Evaluation of the literature focused on information addressing the relationships among workforce diversity, organizational innovation and performance, and leadership.

Discussion

Diversity is generally perceived as differences in characteristics and attributes among individuals.⁷ Accordingly, workforce diversity encompasses the collective composition of these salient variables among members within an organizational context.⁸ Diversity can expand access to knowledge, skills, and perspectives and is positively associated with measures like productivity, sustainability, creativity, and innovation, indicating that a diverse workforce is essential to increasing organizational performance and securing competitive advantage.⁹ However, heightened emphasis on the representation of differences through the assembly of diverse teams is on its own insufficient to catalyze the aggregate potential to generate innovative output and enhance organizational outcomes.¹⁰ Failure of an organization to implement strategies to negotiate differences within diverse teams may engender dysfunction and posture diversity as a liability. Alternatively, proactively establishing diversity management practices can create synergies and leverage diversity as an organizational asset.

Evolution of Diversity

Diversity-related research emerged during initial efforts to better understand organizational management and behavior.¹¹ The primary focus was assessing group dynamics and occupational stereotyping in specific circumstances rather than critically examining the underlying compositional differences and perspectives among individual members and how the presence of those differences interacts to influence organizational outcomes and sociocultural contexts.¹² However, the grow-

ing demographic participation in the US workforce along with the institution of key legal documents increased attention to diversity and its implications within the workplace. These enactments included the Civil Rights Act and subsequent amendment establishing the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Act, implementing legal protections against discrimination for specific attributes—such as race, sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, and age.¹³ The term “workforce diversity” originated in the early 1990s following EEO laws and emphasized compliance with legislation and affirmative action, assimilation, and tolerance. It has evolved to include deliberate efforts to manage diversity to cultivate equitable, inclusive environments regardless of social identities and subsequently secure organizational competitiveness.¹⁴

The emergence of diversity as a distinct research objective extensively integrated theories and research across multiple related disciplines and fields including organizational management and behavior as well as sociology and psychology.¹⁵ Specifically, the study of workforce diversity involves analyzing the interrelationships among numerous constructs. This conceptual framework consists of sociopsychological elements, such as intergroup relations, social identity and categorization, social information processing, and team cognition. It also comprises sociological factors, such as culture, demography, discrimination, and status and power characteristics. Other organizational research aspects also contribute to diversity research and involve organizational climate, human resource management, and the roles of ethics and laws.

Conceptualizations of diversity and its associated dimensions have shifted as research matures in this field.¹⁶ Initial perspectives of diversity were concerned with vocational variety and personal interests and eventually progressed to the investigation of variables affecting group performance and relations in particular functional areas. The increasing prominence of workforce demographics prompted scholars to expand diversity research and consider individual demographic characteristics with reference to group heterogeneity and the influence on organizational outcomes. Continued advancement witnessed the inclusion of other individual attributes beyond demographics into an analysis of group effectiveness and performance. Two prominent conceptualizations are premised upon variability in identity-based traits and informational-based traits among individuals within groups.¹⁷ These traits are often further delineated between observable, high-visibility, surface-level variables (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, age) and underlying, low-visibility, deep-level variables (e.g., education, skills, abilities,

personality).¹⁸ Other important dimensions of diversity involve subjective, perceptual attributes connected to psychological and ideological conceptualizations and encompass attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, values, and ethics. Additionally, a compounding consideration in diversity assessments is the existence of variables modifiable by individuals, such as marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, income, nationality, and organizational affiliations.¹⁹

The advancement of diversity conceptualizations was further enabled by the development of a typology that supplemented categorical approaches through affiliation with three types of dispersion within groups—separation, variety, and disparity.²⁰ Separation characterizes positional differences regarding singular attributes, variety denotes differences regarding categorical attributes, and disparity represents differences that qualify as inequalities. Ultimately, distinguishing diversity through both categorical variables and specific classification increases the rigor of its conceptualizations. Consideration of individual differences and the interactive effects of those differences within groups is vital to increase understanding of a diverse workforce and synergize it to enhance organizational outcomes and contribute to innovation.²¹

Innovation through Diversity

Organizations are encountering distinct challenges in response to an operating environment catalyzed by globalization that is progressively more opaque, volatile, and complicated.²² Generating innovative solutions for optimized performance and sustained success is imperative, and organizations increasingly rely on a diverse workforce to meet this demand.²³ Capitalizing on the diversity of human capital by leveraging it as an informational resource is essential to invoke innovation and develop capabilities that propel performance.²⁴ A single approach to innovation does not exist. However, key practices identified for mobilizing diversity and promoting the development of novel ideas for application toward organizational goals include the generative and elaboration processes.²⁵

The heterogeneity in knowledge, perspectives, and ideas among other individual characteristics inherent in a diverse workforce contributes to a more robust range of information available for consideration, which may foster creativity.²⁶ The generative process allows the

accumulation and integration of new and existing information to enhance knowledge and understanding, subsequently eliciting unique, original ideas otherwise difficult to obtain from homogeneous groups with similar thoughts and attitudes.²⁷ The potential for generating innovative ideas is more likely to originate from individuals whose inputs diverge from organizational norms. However, traditionally dominant groups usually possess tenure, thorough organizational knowledge, and other task-relevant perspectives that can benefit innovative output. Therefore, their involvement in generating organizational knowledge and learning should not be discounted.²⁸

The collective combination of organizational knowledge is amplified among a diverse workforce. Propagating this knowledge throughout an organization enhances learning and facilitates innovation and performance by fortifying decision-making and problem-solving skills.²⁹ Additional analysis of generative knowledge that entails not only the exchange of information but also constructive evaluation and integration of relevant inputs constitutes the elaboration process.³⁰ Engaging in elaboration stimulates information processing vital to thinking creatively and transforming knowledge into organizational learning and innovation. A mechanism that further promotes creativity within diverse groups is perspective-taking, or the deliberate effort to understand attitudes, motives, and beliefs in an unbiased manner. Analyzing alternative perspectives through this process may elicit elaboration by exposing new insights or opportunities to integrate disparate perspectives.³¹ Notably, perspective-taking is not recommended in homogenous teams since it may constrain the exploration of alternative approaches by reinforcing existing viewpoints and encouraging premature consensus, consequently hampering creativity. Additionally, the presence of diversity does not automatically engender information sharing, knowledge generation, or information elaboration and may impede performance if organizational barriers are not eliminated.

Barriers to Diversity

Workforce diversity in an organizational environment that has not been deliberately developed to accommodate heterogeneity can incite dysfunction and destructive conflict that ultimately hampers collaboration and adversely impacts organizational innovation and perfor-

mance.³² Several social-psychological theories serve as theoretical foundations for diversity and illustrate the adverse effects of social identity and categorization on diversity dynamics, including elevated bias and discrimination.³³ Moreover, a widespread misunderstanding of the concepts of diversity, equality, and inclusion as interchangeable versus distinct constructs with interrelationships encourages a misplaced focus on bolstering diverse representation in organizations without regard to long-term viability.³⁴

Social identity theory, self-categorization theory, the similarity-attraction paradigm, faultline theory, and the categorization-elaboration model are identity-based theories that provide conceptual foundations for the field of diversity.³⁵ These theories involve how individuals relate to their social environments and entail associating oneself with group memberships premised upon categorical attributes (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation) and deriving self-definitions from these memberships. This inevitably leads to the creation of in-group and out-group dynamics differentiating those with similarities to self from those whose attributes are subjectively dissimilar, promoting stronger identification with a subgroup while diminishing collective team identity.³⁶ Such social categorizations influence intergroup relations and can potentially trigger biases that disrupt team performance and minimize innovation. Biases, or rigid perceptions regarding specific categories of people, lead to reduced information exchange, cohesion, and trust, which subsequently decrease commitment and satisfaction.³⁷ Uncorrected bias may lead to discrimination that subjugates individuals to disparate treatment and exclusion, making them feel devalued, disrespected, and underappreciated.³⁸

Organizations recognize the strategic importance of diversity, equality, and inclusion to innovation and performance but sometimes fail to realize that each term distinguishes a separate yet interrelated concept.³⁹ This misunderstanding creates an exaggerated emphasis on generating diverse representation throughout the workforce through hiring practices such as quotas without mechanisms in place to train and retain acquired diverse talent. This haphazard application of diversity within organizations increases the risk of tokenism for targeted minority groups and does not address systemic issues within an organizational culture.⁴⁰ Increasing the employment of specific demographic groups does not equate to a heightened opportunity for those individuals to have a voice in contributions to organizational matters. Additionally, failure to invest in these individuals through the intentional

development of knowledge, skills, and abilities hinders their ability to add value through quality contributions in information elaboration and decision-making scenarios, which leads to feelings of low self-esteem and value.⁴¹ Furthermore, organizations that treat everyone the same premised upon equality but deny relevant differences codify bias that leads to disparity and inequity.⁴² Organizations without cultures deliberately designed for diverse workforces and lacking intentional diversity management strategies risk exacerbating issues manifested by diversity and adversely affecting organizational performance.

Managing Diversity

Workforce diversity is an invaluable resource for organizations seeking strategic competitive advantage. Effectively managing this manpower is as vital as properly investing in and managing tangible organizational assets.⁴³ Strategic implementation of diversity management practices is an effective solution to ensure that workforce diversity remains an asset to realizing organizational innovation and enhancing outcomes—not a liability that unravels intergroup relations and abates performance.⁴⁴ Managing diversity is a core function of leadership.⁴⁵ Effective diversity management is associated with transformational, charismatic, servant, and innovation leadership. Moreover, these leadership types directly influence other strategies identified as significant for managing diversity and multiplying its positive effects throughout an organization. These strategies include facilitating involvement opportunities through the deliberate development of knowledge, skills, and abilities and cultivating an inclusive organizational culture.⁴⁶

Leadership style has been identified as a moderating variable between diverse teams and innovation and performance.⁴⁷ The transformational, charismatic, servant, and innovation leadership styles just mentioned involve individual-level dispositions found to positively influence individuals. These types of leadership stimulate social interaction, boost motivation, foster cooperative behavior, and increase constructive conflict, enabling creative synergy by mitigating disruptive effects to information processing.⁴⁸ Leaders who employ these styles are visionary and inspirational. These attributes allow them to align diversity with organizational goals by focusing on shared understandings versus differences.⁴⁹ Such leaders mitigate cognitive biases associated with

social categorization by bolstering the collective level of team identity through establishing a superordinate social identity. This identity is predicated on a common vision that promotes the internalization of a shared purpose and inspires the achievement of shared goals.⁵⁰

Increasing opportunities for involvement can improve the effect of workforce diversity on organizational outcomes.⁵¹ Explicitly, intentionally enhancing knowledge, skills, and abilities ensures that individuals can access quality information to generate valuable inputs during information exchange and elaboration. The ability to participate in meaningful ways and influence organizational outcomes increases motivation and, in turn, enhances future information-processing efforts. Securing broader participation through structured interactions and involvement opportunities reduces barriers and increases accessibility to information that can overcome cognitive limitations associated with homogeneity. It also enhances the utilization of individuals' knowledge and skills to achieve optimal organizational solutions.⁵² Increased involvement empowers individuals and promotes inclusion.

A diversity climate consists of shared perceptions of the value of diversity within an organization.⁵³ Organizational policies and practices are one way to promote this shared understanding and influence attitudes and engagement within groups.⁵⁴ Organizations should proactively manage diversity climate perceptions and ultimately leverage their diverse workforce to achieve innovation and performance by cultivating an inclusive culture within the workplace.⁵⁵ Inclusion consists of the purposeful incorporation of diversity that encourages authentic acceptance and equal participation.⁵⁶ An inclusive culture acknowledges and responds to differences and alters its policies and practices to affirm and support diversity and eliminate inequities.⁵⁷ Inclusivity begets innovation.

Conclusion

Managing workforce diversity is key to leveraging diversity to unlock organizational innovation.⁵⁸ Diversity management extracts benefits from differences. Organizations can harness diversity to achieve organizational goals while simultaneously enabling the realization of an individual's full potential by eradicating exclusionary dynamics. Managing diversity is a core function of leadership, bridging a diverse workforce and organizational innovation.⁵⁹ Organizations must take

informed action and proactive steps to capitalize on workforce diversity and expand access to knowledge, skills, and perspectives.⁶⁰ Leveraging diversity as an asset to invoke innovation and develop capabilities that propel performance is essential to securing competitive advantage.⁶¹

This literature review aimed to foster a more comprehensive understanding of workforce diversity and how to leverage it for organizational success by exploring Yadav and Lenka's recommendation to further investigate the relationship between diversity management practices and organizational outcomes. Specifically, it included the moderating effects of leadership, leadership behaviors, and the inclusion of employees in workforce diversity and organizational innovation and performance. The evolution of diversity and the connection between innovation and diversity were discussed. The review also identified barriers to diversity and analyzed the role of managing workforce diversity and its intersectionality with innovation and leadership.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future diversity research should continue to focus on the emerging topic of workforce diversity, diversity management, and performance within the context of globalization. It should also expand to include evaluating the effects attributable to varying cultural environments beyond developed North American and Western European countries (e.g., United States, Canada, Germany, Netherlands).⁶² Investigating diversity management strategies integrating the Hofstede model of six dimensions of national culture (i.e., power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, long-/short-term orientation, indulgence/restraint) may generate novel findings regarding the moderating role of leadership styles and behavior.⁶³ Results indicating that previous studies' findings are not generalizable would have scholarly and practical relevance to the global leadership discipline.

Additionally, several diversity studies request a more nuanced assessment of the mechanisms that influence intergroup relations across diversity variables instead of combining variables for analysis.⁶⁴ Alternatively, exploration of the combined effects of several dimensions (i.e., greater than two diversity variables) on performance outcomes is also requested since this case more realistically represents the individuals within a diverse workforce who often identify with numerous variables to construct their social identities.⁶⁵

Implications

This review recognized the intersection of global leadership, innovation, and diversity. Specifically, it identified leadership as a variable moderating the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational innovation. This distinction facilitates the development or realization (or both) of relevant practical applications (e.g., diversity management strategies) to affect the variable, organizational innovation, toward a desirable outcome. Additionally, a distillation of the research reveals the need for leaders to remediate how organizations internally codify the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Aggregating these concepts obscures comprehension and inhibits operationalization, diminishing their transformative potential. Furthermore, the practical relevance of this review should motivate leaders to implement suggested practices and strategies to leverage diversity within their own workforces and achieve increased organizational innovation and performance.

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PART 6
DIVERSITY IN PRACTICE

Chapter 20

Hosting Cultural Events to Foster Diversity Awareness and Inclusion in the DAF

Howard-Paul S. Canillas

Introduction

Diversity and inclusion events in the Department of the Air Force add value because they are a window into the different backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs of its members. Public affairs officer Capt Jaclyn Sumayao, president of the Asian-American Pacific Islander Heritage Association at her base, adds, “Highlighting heritage months not only educates our community but also gives members a sense of inclusion and pride while they get to promote who they are. It is important to realize that although we wear the same uniform and focus on the same mission, the reality is we are all different. Coming together and giving different perspectives and ideas are . . . why our military is so successful.”¹ These events help ease patrons into a sense of understanding and acceptance of their differences and also evoke the passion of members willing to share their culture/heritage.

Getting Started

Planning a cultural event may vary depending on base requirements. At March Air Reserve Base, we first requested approval from our unit commander to initiate our Asian-Pacific Heritage Association at the unit level. Next, we emailed squadron members to gauge interest and recruit members. To establish your group, you will need to do the following:

- **Permissions:** To ensure awareness of the event and planning efforts, obtain approval to establish your group from the unit/squadron commander, mission support group commander, or others as applicable.
- **Group/council:** Elect officials and establish roles to help focus the team’s direction.

- Bank account: Obtain a nonprofit tax exemption to ensure tracking of funds from fundraisers, event sales, and other sources.
- Planning meetings: Initiate planning meetings at least six to eight months in advance of the event.

When planning an event on base, you must complete a vetting process. Whether for a unit or private organization fundraiser event, organizers must complete the vetting process in advance, which requires routing a Fundraiser Request Worksheet through the necessary channels. Outside vendors interested in coming on base to serve free meals must also complete this form. Whether or not goods or services are donated, the vetting process still includes approval from various base agencies for safety and legal purposes (e.g., fire department, judge advocate general, public health, etc.).

Logistics

Upon approval of an event, logistics planning is paramount. Planning should include the following considerations:

- Date: Preferably choose a non-flying day (with cooperation from leadership) to maximize participation of patrons and volunteers. If that is not possible, a lunchtime activity is another way to increase attendance.
- Location/venue: Select a centralized area that is large enough to accommodate activities, patrons, vendors, and other applicable factors.
- Vendors/theme/activities: Try to solicit vendors and sponsors from community partners and businesses. Many organizations will be willing to help if you have a good plan in place.

Lessons Learned

- Positive feedback: Embrace good reviews and comments from patrons, commanders, and other attendees; they reflect the efforts of those who coordinated and presented the event. Relay that feedback and use it to guide future events.
- Negative feedback: Use issues and concerns regarding your events as ways to improve future events.

- **Milestones:** Using specific, measurable strategic milestones leading up to the event will help mitigate unnecessary stress and oversights. Milestones that include actionable items, resources needed, and completion dates will help navigate unforeseen issues.
- **Immersion:** Promote diversity and inclusion through educational immersion (e.g., cultural booths, fashion shows, guest speakers, food classes).

Summary

Cultural events are key instruments for introducing diverse cultures and perspectives to those who may not have experienced them often or at all. They are “important for leadership awareness, as their people come from all parts of the world. When the members see their leadership willing to learn about their culture and heritage, it really helps them feel like they are truly part of the team.” Further, “we need to foot stomp that this is not another box to check off and that we truly care about promoting diversity and inclusion through education.”² These events are an immersive experience that can benefit patrons and educators alike. The informal nature of these events precludes or minimizes any resentment from attendees or presenters. Because attendance is largely voluntary, these events overwhelmingly promote an overall feeling of acceptance with rarely any negative feedback.

TSgt Howard-Paul S. Canillas, USAF

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Notes

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Chapter 21

Start at Human

Cultivating a Diversity Mindset in the Workplace

Ayana N. Cole-Fletcher

Fostering a human-centered mental approach toward diversity allows people to innovate individually, at the team level, and at their specific levels of leadership.

The people who make up an organization are its singular, irreplaceable strength. The goal of this chapter is for all individuals—team members, supervisors, leaders, commanders, and directors—to understand how a human-centered mental approach cultivates a diversity mindset. A human-centered organization “focuses on creating better human experiences; builds resilience and de-risks innovation through continuous iteration and learning; cares as much about the experience of its diverse, empowered teams as it does about its customers; and intentionally, actively embeds these principles into the fabric of the organization.”¹ A diversity mindset means building inclusive teams and being open to consider perspectives and ideas from all organizational members. An environment of inclusivity empowers all individuals to have a voice in problem-solving and leadership and engenders creativity and innovation. It gives an organization a greater arsenal of strategies to successfully meet its challenges.

The mindset of empowerment is imperative in military and defense leadership and is supported by researcher and thought leader Brené Brown. In her book *Dare to Lead: Brave Work. Tough Conversations. Whole Hearts*, Brown defines a leader as “anyone who takes responsibility for finding the potential in people and processes, and who has the courage to develop that potential.”² Creating a culture of empowerment requires courage and a commitment to “brave leadership.”³ Getting to brave leadership requires us to cultivate a human connection. Brown identifies communication or, more specifically, a “rumble,” as one key skill of brave leadership. A rumble is “a discussion, conversation, or meeting defined by a commitment to lean into vulnerability, to stay curious and generous,

[and] to stick with the messy middle of problem identification.”⁴ A rumble culture legitimizes each person as a leader who can build their own sphere of influential vulnerability.⁵

A 2021 RAND Corporation study, *Perspectives on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Department of the Air Force*, validates the importance of facilitating authentic human-centered dialogue when normalizing a diverse organizational culture. Leaders who acknowledge the human element make space for validating “a greater number of unique voices from different levels of the organizations.”⁶ Effective teams are first composed of enabled individuals who are empowered by allowing human-centered dialogue to flourish. Human-centric conversation involves “honest, authentic and meaningful communication. . . . These conversations should provide value for all parties so that stronger, positive relationships can be built and maintained . . . [wherein] everyone benefits from continued cooperation, shared knowledge and resources. It enables a true understanding of what people want or value, and why. And a discovery of what makes them tick.”⁷

In his strategic approach presented in *Accelerate Change or Lose*, former Air Force chief of staff Gen Charles Q. Brown stipulates that “empowered Airmen can solve any problem.”⁸ General Brown challenges “Airmen [to] be multi-capable and adaptable team builders, . . . innovative and courageous problem solvers, and demonstrate value in diversity of thought, ingenuity, and initiative.”⁹ Further, within a culture of authenticity, each person practices emboldened leadership “with the appropriate tools to create and sustain an environment in which Airmen can reach their full potential.”¹⁰ Cultivating a diverse mindset is not only crucial but fundamental to building empowered leaders. Fostering a human-centered mental approach toward diversity allows people to innovate individually, at the team level, and at their specific levels of leadership.

The following are some ways to create and maintain a human-centric environment that empowers all individuals to contribute their unique perspectives, skills, and abilities. An organization that successfully creates this climate enhances morale, creativity, and productivity.

Create a Foundation: Start at “I”

Own the tools you have to make the picture.

- **Orient:** Recognize that your baseline is human, which means you have preferences, emotions, experiences, and certain conditioning that can inform your behaviors and the filter you see the world through.
- **Analyze:** What is this situation (short-term or prolonged), place, or person making me feel? Do I find myself experiencing any barrier emotions, such as shame, blame, or embarrassment?
- **Identify:** Are there fences present? Fences are possible barriers of understanding, such as potential bias, differences in opinion or thinking, or a lack of shared experiences. For example, consider the following scenarios:
 - **Scenario A:** You are a non-active duty civilian supervisor of four Airmen. Three of your Airmen prefer to play baseball, golf, and other outdoor activities in their free time, while the fourth Airman enjoys playing video games and indoor activities. In addition to sharing hobbies, the three Airmen are all from the Midwest. As someone who is also from the Midwest and enjoys the outdoors, you find it easier to relate to those three Airmen than the fourth Airman. Would there be potential fences in identifying or interacting with all your Airmen equally?
 - **Scenario B:** You are excited to host the children for your office’s annual “bring your children to work” day. The office is located in an older building on the base without an elevator. You remember that one of your coworkers has a child who is living with a condition that limits their ability to walk. Is there a way you can ensure this occasion is accessible to all the children invited?

Create a Picture: Continue at “We”

The big picture comprises many smaller pictures.

- **Acknowledge:** Make space for the difficult and positive aspects of the human element. Who are the people on your team? Do

you know details and milestones that make them unique, such as names, preferred nicknames, call signs, hobbies, birthdays, significant events, and success stories?

- **Encourage:** What is the quality of conversation in our organization? Within our team culture, is there an environment of openness, vulnerability, and demystifying failure? One organizational leader notes that “no one likes to fail, but failure is an essential part of life. . . . For leaders, it’s important to encourage more discussions about failure in their organizations. By talking about failure, we can learn from our mistakes and become better equipped to handle future challenges.”¹¹ According to another organizational leader, “Failure does not need to be seen in a negative light. As a leader, failure in all sizes is a key identifier of the space to grow, adjust, expand and rethink. Failures within an organization should be evaluated in a way that does not ostracize nor isolate; rather, they should unify and bind a leader and an organization.”¹²
- **Create:** Teams that cultivate authenticity and a diverse mindset create more empowered leaders, team members, and groups. Ways to promote this climate include the following:
 - Lead with visibility and openness.
 - Be active and curious.
 - Make space for individuals to fully be themselves.
 - Show visible support for employee resource groups.
 - Stay focused on diversity and inclusion initiatives.
 - Understand your team’s way of thinking and acting.
 - Have an open mind to learn.
 - Inspire people toward a common purpose.
 - Offer career support to underrepresented groups.
 - Celebrate differences.
 - Connect with your teams by sharing your stories.
 - Listen to learn.
 - Embrace the uniqueness of others without judgment.
 - Focus on creating a culture of belonging.¹³

Create a Cycle: Normalize Continual Growth

Don't frame a wet picture.

- **Cultivate:** Commit to sustaining an organizational culture that is a natural habitat for diverse mindsets. One individual cannot maintain a sustainable culture. While an individual can be the catalyst to change, and change begins at the individual level, ultimately, nurturance occurs at the group level.
- **Iterate:** The cycle of cultivating a human-centric approach to diversity is a constant and evolving process. Leaders are committed to continually assessing what works and what needs to change.

Creating and sustaining an inclusive environment through adopting some of these approaches, among others, will ultimately create a healthier and more productive organization.

Capt Ayana N. Cole-Fletcher, USAF

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Chapter 22

Creating a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Curriculum for US Air Force Medical Professionals

Core Concepts and Experiences Implementing This Curriculum at a Large Military Training Facility

Craig Yugawa
Sanghwa Park
Anita Pechenko

Introduction

US Air Force medical professionals worldwide are tasked with protecting, supporting, and celebrating our most important resource: our Airmen. As of March 2023, nearly 30 percent of the Air and Space Forces identify as a race other than Caucasian, making them more diverse than the United States as a whole.¹ As the force continues to diversify, underlying health disparities, cultural differences about healthcare, and differentials in health literacy are becoming ever more prominent. Adequate education on matters of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) for USAF medical providers is therefore critical for providing the most compassionate and effective care. This care will help to keep the total force—including families, allies, and noncombatants—healthy and mission-ready.

Many professional licensing organizations now require DEIA education as part of the licensing process. For example, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), the licensing organization for medical residencies in the US, requires residents to demonstrate “respect and responsiveness to diverse patient populations, including but not limited to diversity in gender, age, culture, race, religion, disabilities, national origin, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation.”² In addition to the ACGME, organizations such as the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARPCA), American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC),

and Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) all have statements emphasizing the importance of DEIA education in the certification of these various training programs.³ This is to say nothing of the DEIA requirements various specialty licensing organizations require of healthcare professionals to maintain their licenses to practice.

A focus on DEIA improves patient care and highlights the strengths a diverse workforce brings to the mission. The healthcare field is becoming more diverse, and a background in DEIA education maximizes team function. Diverse healthcare providers face significant headwinds in their careers and while performing many of their most important job functions. A meta-analysis, or study of studies, in 2014 found that 59.4 percent of physician trainees, including medical residents and students, had faced some form of harassment or discrimination during their training. Of these, 56 percent experienced some form of gender discrimination, 48 percent faced some form of sexual harassment, and 23.8 percent endured some form of racial discrimination. In most cases, sexual harassment came from other providers in senior positions and was primarily reported by women.⁴ Though this study was limited to physicians, these experiences are likely common across healthcare fields and primarily borne by underrepresented in medicine (URM) colleagues. In the medical field, URM traditionally consists of “Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans (that is, American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians), and mainland Puerto Ricans.”⁵

In a 2019 survey of surgical residents, 23.7 percent reported experiencing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion. Most of these experiences were being mistaken for another person of the same race, with issues primarily coming from other healthcare providers. Among Black residents, 24.9 percent experienced being called a slur or receiving a hateful comment, with most coming from patients and their families.⁶

To further highlight this situation, URM and female medical trainees also receive significantly different narrative evaluations than their White male colleagues. A review of medical student evaluations at Brown University and the University of California, San Francisco, showed significant differences in the language used in narrative evaluations for women and URM medical students during clinical rotations. White students were more frequently referred to as “knowledgeable” and URM students as “pleasant.” Men were more likely to be referred to as “scientific” or other competency-related language and

women as “lovely.”⁷ Much in the same way, Black surgical residents reported different standards of evaluation between themselves and White colleagues.⁸ Trainees at all levels have significant differences in their narrative evaluations based on gender or URM status, which has implications for their careers in the future. These findings are likely to be found across professions where narrative evaluations are critical to career advancement, such as for many Air Force specialty codes.

Another reason these education and practice licensing organizations require DEIA education is its positive effect on building patient trust, understanding how to effectively provide care, and improving outcomes. A 2020 study indicates that patients who share race or ethnicity with their physician were significantly more likely to achieve a maximum patient satisfaction score compared to a patient-physician racial mismatch.⁹ Studies also show differences in important domains, including patient perceptions of lung cancer risk among Black patients when they are seen by a Black physician.¹⁰ This impact is not limited to only the qualitative science of personal interactions but can have important implications for management decisions.¹¹

A 2018 study in Oakland, California, showed the critical implications of this differential. Black men were randomized to Black or non-Black male doctors and tracked to see their decisions on following appropriate screening recommendations. Black men who had a Black doctor were significantly more likely to pursue all appropriate screening recommendations, including those that may be more invasive. Based on the study analysis, simply having a doctor who looked like the patient could reduce the Black-White male gap in cardiovascular mortality by 19 percent.¹² This result highlights the importance of providers being aware of additional factors that affect their patients’ outcomes. Though it may be impossible to bridge this diversity gap in healthcare in the near future, providing DEIA education can help to temporize this difference throughout the USAF.

This chapter sets forth baseline competencies on healthcare diversity topics and relates our experience implementing an in-depth version of that curriculum at the USAF’s premier Internal Medicine Residency Program. Our program provides graduate medical education training to over ninety Army and Air Force trainee doctors yearly and is one of the largest DOD training platforms. By establishing core competencies in these key topics, USAF providers will be able to increase trust and improve mission readiness in the units and bases they support. We lay out topics that comprise core competencies for all healthcare providers

and additional miscellaneous topics and resources for further study. This chapter is designed to serve as a primer on these topics and gives units the foundation necessary to improve confidence in evidence-based, DEIA-friendly practice. After providing foundational knowledge in these topics, we relate best practices for implementation. Our success is made possible by the significant support available at our large medical treatment facility (MTF) through all levels of our joint organization; this chapter facilitates this DEIA education for smaller units and treatment facilities.

An Introduction to the Language of DEIA

Thus far, we have established the necessity of DEIA training. This section highlights the DEIA core competencies healthcare providers should know to provide the best care to patients. These concepts and terms are critical to a basic understanding of DEIA in healthcare. This section can serve as an introduction to these topics for providers in units without significant support, but it is best used as a launching point for further study and examination.

Health Equity

In healthcare, *health equity* aims to provide fair access and the best care possible for all by addressing factors that lead to unexplained differences between various protected classes as defined by medical professionals.¹³ Though healthcare can sometimes be viewed as a checklist item for military members, factors preceding and during their service can affect their health and mission-readiness. For various reasons and across many different domains, factors such as race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and religion affect one's health. The concept of health equity represents the goal of providers to ensure similar outcomes and access for their patients despite any patient-specific factors or differences.

Social Determinants of Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines *social determinants of health* (SDH) as “conditions in the environments . . . [where] people live, learn, work, [and] play . . . that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.”¹⁴ The five domains of SDH are economic stability, education access and

quality, healthcare access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.¹⁵ Thus, simply where a person is born and raised can have a sizable effect on their health down the road. Though service in the armed forces corrects for many of these in the short term, factors present prior to service can continue to affect health and mission readiness during service.

One prominent example of the effect of social determinants was brought to the forefront by protests about the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri. For many years, St. Louis was viewed as a powder keg due to various socioeconomic, political, and racial factors affecting the region. These factors have led to sharp contrasts in health outcomes for residents of the region. Following the protests, Washington University in St. Louis and St. Louis University, in collaboration with many community partners, published the report *For the Sake of All* that drew connections between the political and racial upheaval in the region with notably different health outcomes.¹⁶ The report highlights the stark difference of eighteen years in life expectancy, among other health outcomes, across proximate zip codes in the region. Residents of the 63105 zip code in the upper-middle-class suburb of Clayton had a life expectancy of eighty-five years versus a sixty-seven-year life expectancy for those in the adjacent zip code 63106, an underprivileged, lower-class area of north St. Louis City.¹⁷

These social and economic factors contribute to differences across a variety of health outcomes, including rates of mental health hospitalizations, maternal mortality, and the burden of chronic disease throughout the region.¹⁸ Estimating the economic impact of these differences, the report projects that each year, loss of life of African-Americans in the St. Louis region due to low levels of education and poverty was around \$4 billion. Although St. Louis is highlighted because of prominent national attention, similar disparities exist nationwide.¹⁹

Some of these factors are captured by US Census data and the CDC collection of identification factors into the social vulnerability index (SVI).²⁰ The SVI is used to assess communities that are often the most impacted by public health crises. It is important to reframe these factors as systemic constructs (“structural vulnerability”) that are not fixed traits but are modifiable and intervenable.²¹ Identifying these factors can help drive disaster responses, such as the allocation of resources during and after a hurricane, establishment of vaccine clinic and outreach programs during a pandemic, and formation of preventive screening strategies to reach various populations across different

regions.²² Resources such as PolicyMap can help provide a geographic perspective of social determinants of health.²³

While many of these issues are addressed for service members, those caring for dependents, retirees, or others may find it helpful to consider these SDHs in their interactions. These factors may also contribute to issues with Airmen before their time in service. SDHs are important for contextualizing a patient's experience with the healthcare system and why certain health conditions and issues may seem to be more prevalent for certain people. Consideration of these factors helps improve healthcare for all.

Healthcare Disparities

Building on the concept of social determinants of health, healthcare disparities are the differences in results or treatment that happen when patients interact with the healthcare system.²⁴ An easier way to conceptualize this difference is that SDHs influence the condition of the patient when they show up at your clinic, while healthcare disparities are the different results patients experience when interacting with the healthcare system. Both of these factors synergistically explain why people of color consistently fare worse across many measures of health status. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light these differences across the course of the disease, from the risk of infection to hospitalization to complications.²⁵

One prominent example of healthcare disparity is the pain regimens healthcare trainees prescribed to African-American and Caucasian patients. Owing to underlying false beliefs about differentials in pain tolerance by race, trainees rated Black patient's pain lower and treated their pain less aggressively.²⁶ Underlying false assumptions and training led to different outcomes based on race, a clear example of a disparity in health outcomes due to an unmodifiable factor, in this case, race.

Significant disparities exist even within the Military Health System (MHS), especially along racial lines. Among patients receiving surgical intervention for breast cancer, there is a significant delay in time to surgery for non-Hispanic Black patients. This deferral is associated with a higher risk of death for Black patients, though this higher risk is present even when correcting for the delay in time to surgery.²⁷ However, the universal nature of the MHS has been shown to reduce disparities in colorectal cancer screening seen in the general popula-

tion as well as in readmission rates due to diabetes for Black patients (though this effect did not hold for Native American/Alaskan Islander patients).²⁸ Awareness of these differences allows providers to be proactive about identifying disparities in outcomes in their practice.

Implicit Bias/Microaggressions

A primary driver of these healthcare disparities is implicit bias. Implicit bias consists of the underlying attitudes that providers (or others) may hold toward those who fit into certain identifiable classes. These can include race and gender but can also include other less obvious categories like weight, disability, or age. Although implicit biases are taught, as in the pain management example, they are not always conscious during the decision-making process. Because they are unconscious, these learned behaviors can be difficult to root out. Some of these attitudes can be mistaken for underlying societal issues, but they mostly function at the level of one-on-one, personal interactions. They can even affect our perceptions of groups we feel we belong to and identify with. The Harvard University Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging makes its Implicit Association Test publicly available.²⁹ Taking this test can help providers identify their own implicit biases.

A common example of implicit biases in medicine is the riddle of the Surgeon's Dilemma. The scenario presented is that a man and his son are involved in a car crash, and the man died at the scene. But when the child arrives at the hospital and is rushed to the operating [room], the surgeon pulls away, stating, "I can't operate on this boy; he's my son." In the context of this discussion of DEIA in medicine, it may seem obvious that the explanation is that the surgeon is the boy's mother. Other common DEIA-focused responses sometimes include that this is a same-sex partner of the man who died or is some sort of co-parenting arrangement. Even these other responses highlight our overall bias that tends to associate the medical field, especially surgery, with males.³⁰ Identifying these biases is essential in caring for our patients and interacting with colleagues.

Internal biases can influence interactions. Unintentionally or intentionally, people can commit microaggressions or insults toward individuals based on their identity (such as race). These are most often experienced by people of color and other URM providers. Racial

microaggressions have been shown to cause psychological harm and perpetuate racism.³¹

Females also commonly face these issues when providing care to patients. Many female providers are commonly mistaken for other types of providers (e.g., physician for nurse) and not afforded the respect associated with their position (referred to by first name while male colleagues are referred to as Dr. [last name]). Recognizing and avoiding implicit bias and the microaggressions they lead to is critical, as it erodes trust and is antithetical to providing quality healthcare to all individuals regardless of their background and presentation.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are traumatic events from childhood that can have a pivotal role in an individual's health trajectory and are correlated with numerous chronic comorbidities.³² A study done with Kaiser Permanente and the CDC focused on three main categories: abuse, violence at home, and household dysfunction. Over time, these have been expanded to include violence in the community, bullying, racism, and living in foster care. Of those surveyed, about 64 percent of people reported at least one ACE, with nearly 13 percent reporting more than four ACEs. The researchers found a dose-response relationship between exposure to ACEs and high-risk behaviors, such as alcoholism, smoking, and suicide. This correlation means that the more ACEs people are exposed to, the more likely they are to participate in behaviors with long-term health consequences. In many cases, these consequences lead to early death and substantial healthcare spending differences.³³ A version of the original questionnaire is in the appendix.

ACEs can help to explain differentials in health behaviors across the USAF. By understanding the role they play in future mission readiness, providers can help address the aftereffects of these events for their patients. These events predispose patients to poor health outcomes; effective intervention to address the root of the problem can sometimes prevent behaviors from continuing and stave off the consequences of higher-risk health behaviors. As the mission continues to evolve, understanding ACEs and their impact on health behaviors can help identify resources for our Airmen to be mentally and physically equipped to deal with the rigors of service.

Cultural Competency

One goal would be for all members to achieve cultural competency, with increasing preference for the term “cultural humility.” This concept is defined by Lakshmi Nair and Oluwaseun Adetayo as “the ability to collaborate effectively with individuals from different cultures.”³⁴ As the USAF continues to diversify, providers will need to be proficient in navigating cultural differences, particularly when taking care of dependents and supporting humanitarian missions. For example, many Muslim women have cultural edicts concerning which gender is allowed to provide them certain care. Many cultures have different views of medical care and how it fits into their larger worldview; it is essential to understand how to navigate the known knowns, the known unknowns, and most importantly, the unknown unknowns.

Nair and Adetayo went on to identify five areas to improve cultural competence in practice: “(1) Gear programs to recruit and retain diverse staff members, (2) [Conduct] cultural competency training for health-care providers, (3) Use . . . interpreter services to ensure individuals from different backgrounds can effectively communicate, (4) [Incorporate] culturally appropriate health education materials to inform staff of different cultural backgrounds, and (5) [Provide] . . . culturally specific healthcare settings.”³⁵

Along with understanding the cultural differences that affect how patients view the medical field, providers need to have experience with and ready access to qualified medical interpreters. Many providers rely on family members to interpret during encounters. This practice can lead to suboptimal care, as medical terminology and medical context are essential elements of training for qualified medical interpreters. For clinics that see large volumes of foreign language speakers, consider providing culturally appropriate education materials in addition to having in-person interpreters available for patients.

For understandable reasons, some cultures, even within the US, can be mistrustful of medical care. Black Americans understand that medicine has always been a risky proposition for them, especially in the modern era. In the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study, which ran for nearly forty years, Black men in the South were denied life-saving treatment so that scientists could “advance” understanding of the longitudinal course of syphilis in the body. Started before routine therapy was available, the experiment continued for nearly thirty years after the widespread use of penicillin to treat syphilis; scientists declined

to provide penicillin therapy to these patients, with profound health consequences.³⁶ In addition, continuing debates about the medical ethics of J. Marion Sims, the founder of gynecology, and his experimental surgeries on enslaved Black women highlight the ever-tenuous relationship between Black Americans and the medical field.³⁷

These concepts can be taught and employed in a variety of settings across military and military occupational specialties nationwide. As the medical field and the USAF as a whole prepare for increased diversity, those not in URM groups must understand how to deftly navigate different cultures to maximize outcomes for military personnel and civilians alike. It is not possible to have providers from every cultural group to anticipate these needs; however, preparing to provide culturally competent care is a necessary bridge in the interim.

Health Literacy

Health literacy captures how well people navigate the healthcare system and understand their medical diagnoses and treatment options. In many cases, frustration with nonadherence to care plans can be traced to a lack of understanding related to health and healthcare needs. A scene from the TV show *House* illustrates this concept. A woman complains that an inhaler provided earlier for her asthma is not working. When asked to demonstrate how she is using her inhaler, she states that she is “not an idiot” and sprays the inhaler on either side of her neck, much in the way some people apply perfume.³⁸ This patient had been provided the correct therapy for her condition, but a lack of health literacy on the subject prevented her from effectively implementing it. Health literacy is extremely variable throughout the military population and is mission critical.

Understanding how to utilize the healthcare system to address their medical needs is critical for Airmen to make the most of their health and be ready to support our mission. It helps them know what is wrong with them, how to fix it, and what they need to do to prevent the problem in the future. It helps them consent to what is being done to or for them. Language barriers often impact health literacy, and thus medical interpreters are crucial members of a care team for patients with limited English proficiency.

The terms above are a nonexhaustive list that serve as an introduction to the lexicon commonly used for DEIA education in healthcare. Each term described could be its own discipline, and there are further

concepts that have not been defined above. We invite the reader to continue exploring these concepts on their own. By starting with an open perspective to learn about different cultures, discussions can be held for increasing inclusivity, recognizing suboptimal practices, implementing anti-racist policies, and maximizing mission readiness. Other basic concepts—such as intersectionality, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility—are discussed in other forums throughout this edition.

Points of Further Interest and Evolving Topics

The previous section focuses on topics and terminology all providers need to have some familiarity with. This section recommends areas for further study that will improve practice and enhance mission preparedness. Though considered points of further interest, many of the topics discussed here are required knowledge for various professional and educational licensing organizations.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) Care

The LGBTQ community has endured many pendulum swings in policies regarding their military service. In 1993, Congress passed Department of Defense Directive 1304.26, colloquially referred to as the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT)” bill. It forbade any non-heterosexual person to discuss their sexual orientation or otherwise disclose any same-sex relationships while serving in the US military. This policy forced many service members into the closet, as discovery of their sexual orientation could lead to swift dismissal from the military. Many current LGBTQ service members can remember a time under DADT and the stress and fear it caused in their lives. After significant criticism, DADT was repealed in 2011.³⁹

In 2017, President Trump used a presidential memo to prohibit transgender individuals from serving in the military and stopped military support for transgender service members transitioning during their service. This order was rescinded by executive order in 2021 by President Biden.⁴⁰ This change in policy has enabled the continued growth of various support structures, including the Transgender Health Medical Evaluation Unit (THMEU) that supports Airmen seeking to start or continue gender transition while in service. Based at Wilford Hall Ambulatory Surgical Center at Joint Base San Antonio–Lackland, this unit of the 59th Medical Wing provides an integrated healthcare

experience for those it treats. Those looking to transition have access to four days of medical TDY for initial evaluation. Unheard of a few years ago, such resources represent substantial progress for LGBTQ service members.⁴¹

In the last few years, acceptance and inclusivity of the LGBTQ community in the military greatly expanded with a change in command climate. Jennifer Dane, the executive director of the Modern Military Association of America, a nonprofit group serving LGBTQ troops and their families, remarked, “While we celebrate this momentous victory for a second time, our biggest hope is that this reversal becomes codified into law like the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, to ensure this never happens again.” She added, “Any individual qualified and capable of joining the military should have the right to serve, period.”⁴²

With the increasing visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ members, providers must be familiar with the unique nuances of LGBTQ-focused care. DOD policy shifts result in many LGBTQ patients distrusting the medical system. Establishing trust and ensuring that their health-care needs are met is critical to preventing disparities in clinical care for LGBTQ Airmen. For example, transgender patients commonly span the spectrum of gender presentation and transition. Therefore, providers must ensure careful tracking of which sex organs a patient has at various times in the transition period in order to recommend appropriate preventive medical screening without adding to stigma or creating a climate of distrust. Another example is that due to varied sexual practices, patients may need additional site testing when screening for sexually transmitted infections.⁴³

Refugee and Migrant Population Care

The US military has a long historical involvement with migrant and refugee relief missions at home and abroad. In a recent example, in 2021, more than 124,000 people were evacuated from Afghanistan, with 55,000 Afghans temporarily housed at US military bases around the world during Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). In this case, ensuring adequate cultural accommodations for these programs is also critical for success.⁴⁴ As military providers face these complex logistical situations, understanding the particulars of refugee health is critical.

The most effective research-proven measures for providing effective care in complex emergencies include the protection from violence; provision of adequate food rations, clean water, and sanitation; control

of diarrheal disease; immunization for measles; provision of maternal and child healthcare, including the case management of common endemic communicable diseases; and the availability of selective feeding programs. Providers responding to large-scale emergencies in the military context may refer to the above-cited article on humanitarian guidelines for refugees on military bases.⁴⁵ While large-scale actions like those from the OAW draw the most media and leadership attention, understanding these concepts is essential even when treating locals on a small scale in theater or with international partners.

Mental Healthcare

The field of mental healthcare has especially prominent disparities, even in a system where all military personnel have equal access to healthcare.⁴⁶ According to the Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion (CHERP), ethnic and racial health disparities as well as cultural factors among US military personnel remain. For example, Black veterans are far less likely than Caucasian veterans and those of other racial or ethnic groups to be classified with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This factor has significant consequences for Black veterans, as they are less likely to receive medical treatment for a service-connected disorder and subsequent disability benefits.⁴⁷

In addition to bias, this disparity may also be tied to cultural attitudes about mental healthcare. Research shows that older Black adults particularly view mental illness as a reflection of personal weakness and are less likely to disclose illness and seek help for care.⁴⁸ This stigma against care can have negative consequences, such as leading to delays in care and worsening morbidity from their disease. This view toward mental healthcare can also be seen in other communities of people of color, including among Asian American and Pacific Islander veterans.⁴⁹

Though narrow disparities exist among military members, ongoing research by the Comparative Effectiveness and Provider-Induced Demand Collaboration (EPIC) team at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences indicates a lack of disparities across a variety of health- and surgery-related access and outcomes, including maternal, cancer, and heart surgery procedures. When objective metrics can be integrated into outcomes assessments, disparities in a universal care system like the MHS tend to decrease. As mental health becomes an increasingly prominent discussion in the military community, greater awareness and constant vigilance will help bridge these

gaps. Understanding the role of bias and underlying cultural attitudes can help providers equalize outcomes across various groups.

Veteran and Homeless Care

While active duty service members generally do not have to worry about where they will sleep at night, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that almost 50,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. In many cases, these homeless veterans may qualify for continued benefits and receive care throughout the DOD's various care platforms. Homeless veterans are at greater risk of health disparities than their housed counterparts due to the multifactorial nature of their health and social needs.⁵⁰

Compared to nonveterans, veterans face a greater risk of homelessness and associated medical or mental health conditions as well as fatal and nonfatal overdose. Suicide and opioid overdose are the most serious reported healthcare-related adverse events in the unsheltered homeless veteran population.⁵¹ Delving deeper, in a study comparing homeless veterans in metropolitan versus nonmetropolitan facilities, metropolitan homeless veterans were less likely to receive public financial support or be employed or to have at least one medical, psychiatric, or current alcohol dependency problem and more likely to be homeless longer.⁵²

A greater emphasis on coordination of patient care utilizing an interdisciplinary approach in early identification, evaluation, and wraparound support for suicidal and overdose behaviors can help to mitigate some of these issues. The Veterans' Health Administration National Center for Patient Safety specifically recommends standardizing procedures for discharge, overdose and suicide risk, staff education, and the purchase of equipment.⁵³ All veterans were at one time the service members we help care for; we must address underlying issues while we can to prevent future problems. Although not common, MTF providers may care for the unhoused who qualify for benefits, and understanding their unique health circumstances can help us offer the best care we can.

How Curriculum Was Implemented

Though this chapter can function as a standalone resource for healthcare personnel, teaching these concepts to other personnel can be complicated. This section highlights key curricular elements used

at our larger MTF, development of those materials, and how they were implemented successfully into our Internal Medicine Residency. Examples of these materials can be found in the appendix for further use. At our institution, a group of residents, led by Dr. Crystal Forman, founded the organization Diversity as an Organizational Attribute Project (DOAP), which helped develop our residency's approach to educating residents on these core curriculum items.

Curricular Elements

To facilitate teaching for over ninety residents a year, we identified core elements we wanted to focus on. Terminology and concepts described previously were identified as main discussion points in addition to healthcare policy and insurance coverage, as military and civilian resident physicians do not have a complete understanding of how those elements relate to the practice of medicine as a whole. These concepts were taught in two major forums, PowerPoint presentations during our program's daily academic period and small group breakout sessions, depending on the lecturer and topic covered.

Besides traditional didactic sessions, we identified areas for research to increase the breadth of understanding of military health disparities and to establish the effectiveness of the new curriculum. Research examining healthcare disparities in the Military Health System and ways to increase representation of historically URM groups are part of our goals. For example, several residents created a quality improvement and patient safety (QIPS) project in the outpatient clinical setting where healthcare literacy is screened before each patient encounter. We are working to identify other areas of practice at our institution for which disparities exist in cooperation with the San Antonio Uniformed Services Health Education Consortium's (SAUSHEC) QIPS subcommittee Healthcare Disparities Working Group. We are continuing to collect data on how improving DEIA education for residents improves outcomes for patients and leads to positive changes in practice. Finally, we are assessing QIPS projects to increase access to medical images of skin findings for multiple skin tones and increasing the diversity of applicants to SAUSHEC programs.

We formed a book club to discuss perspectives from various communities, including communities of color, from Black Americans to indigenous populations, to communities impacted by the opioid crisis and more. Though limited by the diversity of our institution, these

book clubs help develop cultural competency as we use stories to explore other cultures and perspectives, from the spiritual to the personal to the psychosocial realms. Book discussions include personal anecdotal experiences and how they initiated a paradigm shift. These informal discussion settings help residents share their experiences and educate colleagues about them.

To turn concepts and teaching into action, volunteering has been vital in our efforts to branch out from the academic environment. Volunteer events in the community have included assisting with organizing and delivering food at a local food bank and mentoring young students interested in careers in STEM. During the pandemic, a fundraiser was held for food during the Thanksgiving season through an annual turkey trot.

Curriculum Development

Utilizing the prior teaching experience of an interested resident, we then began developing a curriculum document for this program based on ACGME, American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM), and SAUSHEC requirements for diversity education. This formal curriculum established key topics to address, as elucidated above; the various elements of practice and implementation; and how to measure successful implementation. Instituting a formalized curriculum allowed resident leaders to establish common ground with institutional and residency leaders. It also increased residents' awareness of this project's short- and long-term goals throughout our residency. Curriculum information is included in the appendix.

How a Curriculum Was Implemented

While curriculum development was formalized, most of these concepts were restricted to intermittent, formal didactic sessions. Lecture topics were derived from these core concepts and typically occurred during formal didactic time at noon (noon conference) that lasted around an hour. Core topics discussed included social determinants of health, food deserts, and discrimination in graduate medical education.

Our book club was also established early in the implementation of comprehensive, program-level DEIA initiatives. Though targeted to residents, we have had excellent participation from residency leadership and other leaders throughout the institution. Books are not all medically focused but have a DEIA theme, such as *The Immortal Life*

of *Henrietta Lacks*, *Cutting for Stone*, and *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. Due to the COVID pandemic, these book clubs were held in various settings, including remote and in-person.

Once the formal curriculum was developed, scheduled routine sessions were integrated into the noon conference setting, with sessions increasing to at least monthly. Efforts still continue to integrate elements of DEIA into other routine lecture series. Breakout discussions during these noon conference sessions included taking the Harvard Implicit Bias test and other participation activities. These lectures form the backbone of our DEIA curriculum and serve the largest audience of residents. Now routine, we continue to assess resident satisfaction with the curriculum and improvements in comfort with DEIA issues in their clinical practice. Assessment includes short, informal surveys administered by residents and analysis of the formal residency end-of-year survey and the national ACGME survey, which each have questions about resident comfort with DEIA topics.

To facilitate communication throughout the program and across the institution, DOAP extracurricular initiatives included establishing a quarterly newsletter, *DOAP Notes* (see appendix). It focuses on diversity issues in the community, including compositional pieces, relevant news, member highlights, and volunteer opportunities.

Finally, we integrated our efforts with larger institutional and DAF efforts. Brooke Army Medical Center and SAUSHEC have DEIA committees through which we coordinated some of our volunteer and mentorship efforts. A core part of our efforts is encouraging resident participation on and with these committees to facilitate efforts that require more significant command attention. In addition, we have had multiple residents participate in DAF Barrier Analysis Working Groups (DAFBWG), such as the Pacific Islander/Asian American Community Team (PACT) that helps to coordinate DEIA efforts throughout the DAF. Participation in these groups helps residents leverage their unique medical training in DEIA efforts. Yearly, our residents conduct a review of DEIA efforts and curriculum that is reported to SAUSHEC, the institution governing graduate medical education in the San Antonio area.

Conclusion

These concepts can help USAF providers optimize health outcomes for those they care for. By integrating DEIA education into practice,

we can have a more mission-ready USAF. Bridging the diversity gap among providers is difficult, but understanding the historical and cultural context for medical issues allows providers to be more sensitive to the circumstances their patients face. At times, doing so requires providers to have a high degree of self-reflection, identify their inherent biases, and make significant changes in their clinical practice. This awareness serves as a reminder to have empathy to understand worlds different from our own and appreciate the value of having diverse perspectives and opinions. We need to take the time to educate ourselves and others on the history of racism and its roots and downstream effects.

Similar residency diversity and inclusion curricula founded nationwide include the Medicine for the Greater Good curriculum at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center and the Leading EDGE curriculum at Dell Medical School. In the Air Force, practices to increase diversity awareness can include the recruitment of diverse members, celebration of multiculturalism, an eagerness to reframe old ways of thought and tradition to ensure broader inclusivity, and direct engagement with the community at large. With an awareness of how to fully appreciate diverse opinions, backgrounds, and experiences that each team member brings to the environment, we can begin to understand each other and our patients better. Our one team, one fight mission is to place patients at the forefront of quality and timely medical care regardless of who they are or what they look like. We want to continue our work by helping empower the patient through self-education and increasing healthcare literacy and access overall.

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Notes

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Appendix

Diversity as an Organizational Attribute Project Charter

This appendix includes examples of the materials the authors developed and used in implementing a diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) curriculum for US Air Force medical professionals at a large military training facility. This project was titled “Diversity as an Organizational Attribute (DOAP).”

Core Purpose

Despite the key role physicians play in the delivery of healthcare, many residency programs fail to provide residents with effective training on various public health topics. Per the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), all residents graduating from an accredited program must demonstrate competence in topics including health disparities, social determinants of health, and cultural competency. This course is intended to give residents an introduction to the social, cultural, and physical barriers to health and challenge them to be better clinicians and advocates for their patients’ health. The course content provides an overview of and will focus primarily on the social determinants of health, health disparities, cultural competency, implicit bias, LGBTQ care, health policy, and racism in medicine. Residents will gain a better appreciation for the historical context of health disparities, identify demographic patterns in health status, and learn current models for reducing and/or eliminating health disparities. Residents will learn about different social determinants of health and how various environmental factors affect health risks and outcomes. Residents will investigate and learn ways in which cultural competency fits within the framework of delivering effective and comprehensive healthcare. Lastly, residents will identify ways physicians can take an active role in healthcare delivery beyond the provision of healthcare services by engaging in local community efforts, advocating for patients, and conducting public health research. Through lectures, discussions, problem-based learning, and informal opportunities, residents will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge they gain during the course.

DOAP Vision

Residents will be equipped to ensure that every one of their patients, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or religion, is able to access the highest attainable standard of health.

DOAP Mission

To develop and utilize structured curricular tools, research, service, and opportunities to provide a safe space for learning, growth, and development of residents around social, cultural, and economic needs of our patients.

DOAP Structure

DOAP as an organizational project will incorporate a three-branched approach to developing residents. The project's focus will be around formal education, research, and social/service-based opportunities. DOAP will be headed by executive committee to include an executive chair, treasurer, and committee chairs. Committee chairs will be responsible for managing each branch of DOAP—education, research, and social/service opportunities.

The Education/Curriculum Committee will be responsible for developing, planning, and implementing the DOAP curriculum as laid out in the curriculum proposal. As of 2020, planned curriculum will occur in the form of small group sessions during research rotations as well as monthly/bimonthly morning reports. Morning reports sessions will predominately be structured as 30-minute lectures, with occasional opportunities for further group discussion and breakout sessions (to be determined by presenter). Small group sessions will take place for 30–60 minutes once weekly during the research rotation. These sessions will allow for discussion around course content as well as a more intimate setting, providing the opportunity for more in-depth discussion and reflection of resident practice/behavior. For the 2021–22 academic year, the DOAP committee will propose a four-week DEIA elective structured primarily around self-directed learning with a final project and presentation due at the end of the elective.

The Research Committee will be responsible for developing, collecting, and implementing research proposals and projects aimed at

furthering the understanding of the inequities within our community and ways to best address those inequities for our patients.

The Social/Service Committee will be responsible for planning, organizing, and executing extracurricular activities around both developing residents' understanding of diversity and inclusion topics as well as providing an opportunity to serve the community. Activities include but are not limited to the DOAP book and movie clubs and volunteer opportunities (e.g., fifth Friday service projects, school visits, etc.).

Competency Objectives to Be Covered by DOAP Curriculum

Morning Report Series

1. Understand the historical context of health disparities, identify demographic patterns in health status, and describe current models for reducing and/or eliminating health disparities.
2. Develop cultural competency skills, awareness of personal biases, and appreciation of differences in health beliefs among socio-cultural groups and be able to apply these skills, awareness, and appreciation in a healthcare setting.
3. Demonstrate how residents can, with an understanding of social determinants of health, be involved as physicians and clinicians to reduce health inequities.
4. Understand the importance of a physician's role in public health, and the benefits of practicing population medicine through advocacy, health promotion, disease prevention and effective leadership.

Research Rotation Curriculum

1. Gain a better appreciation for the historical context of health disparities.
2. Identify demographic patterns in health status.
3. Learn current models for reducing and/or eliminating health disparities.

4. Reflect on current practice with the intent of critically evaluating current behaviors for implicit bias and develop behavioral tools to reduce behaviors guided by those biases.
5. Learn about different social determinants of health and how various environmental factors affect health risks and outcomes. Residents will investigate and learn ways in which cultural competency fits within the framework of delivering effective and comprehensive healthcare. Lastly, residents will identify ways physicians can take an active role in public health beyond the provision of healthcare services by engaging in local community efforts, advocating for patients, and conducting public health research. Through class discussions and a final course project, residents will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge they gain during the course.

Related ACGME Milestones/Competencies

Medical Knowledge (MK), System Based Practice (SBP), Practice Based Learning and Improvement (PBLI), Professionalism (PROF), Interpersonal and Communication Skills (ICS)

ACGME Milestones: MK1, SBP2, SBP3, SBP4, PBLI1, PBLI2, PBLI3, PROF3, PROF 4, ICS1, ICS2

MK1 - Clinical Knowledge: Possesses the scientific, socioeconomic, and behavioral knowledge required to provide care for complex medical conditions and comprehensive preventative care.

- Recognize various social determinants of health and their effect on patient care. Topics to include (but not limited to):
 - Race/White Privilege
 - Implicit Bias
 - Sexism
 - LGBTQ Discrimination
 - Socioeconomic Status
 - Religion
 - Geographic Determinants
 - Population Determinants
- Understand and evaluate various health disparities that are present within different patient populations (civilian and military).
- Evaluate and address patient's/caregiver's medical literacy.

- Understand the historical context of health disparities and the role historical events and cultural shifts contribute to the disparities and inequities seen in healthcare today.
- Identify demographic patterns in health status for communities and the impact on individual patients.
- Describe current models for reducing and/or eliminating health disparities.
- Specifically develop tools around cultural competency, implicit bias, and self-reflection.
- Develop personal cultural competency skills, awareness of personal biases, and appreciation of differences in health beliefs among sociocultural groups and be able to apply these skills, awareness, and appreciation in a healthcare setting.
- Understand the importance of a physician's role in public health, and the benefits of practicing population medicine through advocacy, health promotion, disease prevention, and effective leadership.

SBP2 - Recognizes system error and advocates for system improvement.

- Discuss and develop potential solutions for various health disparities that are present within both military and civilian populations.
- Develop specific projects for addressing health disparities within our patient population (quality improvement and patient safety [QIPS], research around awareness, volunteering, etc.).

SBP3 - Identifies forces that impact the cost of healthcare and advocates for and practices cost-effective care.

- Identify internal hospital departments and infrastructure that help to address social determinants of health.
- Identify different workforce roles involved in social determinants of health.
- Recognize the impact of a patient's community, meaning geographic location and social community, on their health status and cost to the military health system.
- Recognize the potential effects patients' socioeconomic status has on the cost of their healthcare.

SBP4 - Transitions patients effectively within and across health delivery systems.

- Describe the medical neighborhood and the role of community-based organizations within it.
- Identify several local community-based organizations (CBO) that address specific social needs for patients; identify referral mechanisms for those CBOs.
- Utilize resources within our health system to provide community-based care beyond the military systems.
- Identify common social needs within the community served by the primary care practice.
- Recognize the prevalence of chronic diseases within a community based on available data sources.

PBLI1 - Monitors practice with a goal for improvement.

- Devote time and energy to develop skills around self-reflection and self-improvement with regards to the promotion and practice of inclusivity, addressing one's own biases, and actively pursuing diversity within our organization.
- Reflect on current practice with the intent of critically evaluating current behaviors for implicit bias and develop behavioral tools to reduce behaviors guided by those biases.

PBLI2,3 - Learns and Improves via performance audit and feedback.

- Actively seek feedback both formally and informally around recognition of social determinates of health for patients and ability to address the needs of individual patients utilizing tools and resources promoted throughout this curriculum.

PROF3 - Responds to each patient's unique characteristics and needs.

- Learn to utilize screening tools to assess individuals for social needs that impact health.
- Recognize the impact of social relationships on the health of individuals.
- Identify examples of cultural differences within the practice's patient population.

- Demonstrate respect and address cultural differences within the patient population seen in the practice.

PROF4 - Exhibits integrity and ethical behavior in professional conduct.

- Act with intent to provide excellent care for patients.
- Gain a better appreciation for the historical context of health disparities.
- Investigate and learn ways in which cultural competency fits within the framework of delivering effective and comprehensive healthcare.
- Identify ways physicians can take an active role in public health beyond the provision of healthcare services by engaging in local community efforts, advocating for patients, and conducting public health research.

ICS1 - Communicates effectively with patients and caregivers.

- Learn to identify and incorporate patient preference in shared decision making across a wide variety of patient care conversations.
- Learn to quickly establish a therapeutic relationship with patients and caregivers, including persons of different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
- Learn to incorporate patient-specific preferences into plan of care.

ICS2 - Communicates effectively in interprofessional teams.

- Consistently and actively engages in collaborative communication with all members of the team to obtain a variety of input from all stakeholders.

Clinical Learning Environment Review (CLER) Pathways

1. Health Care Quality Pathway 5: Resident/fellow and faculty member education on reducing health care disparities.
2. Health Care Quality Pathway 6: Resident/fellow engagement in clinical site initiatives to address health care disparities.

DOAP Content

Morning Report Series: Monthly to bimonthly morning reports. Topics include but are not limited to the following:

- July - Health Disparities/Intro to DOAP
- August - Implicit Bias
- September - Microaggressions
- October - Social Determinants
- November - Healthcare Provider Disparities
- December - Case Report
- January - Medical Literacy
- February - Racism in Medicine
- March - Health Policy
- April - Cultural Competency
- May - Case Report
- June - LGBTQ Health

Research Rotation Curriculum

Lectures/Discussion Sessions: 30–60 minute sessions; one weekly on research elective.

- Residents will have the opportunity to cover topics around health disparities and diversity/inclusion on a more systematic level in a more intimate setting, providing the opportunity for more in-depth discussion and reflection of resident practice/behavior.

Article Review: One to two articles per research block (every two-week block for internal medicine residents).

- Residents will review articles in the realm of diversity.

Extracurricular DOAP Initiatives

Movie/Book Club: Quarterly; Discussion on literature or film that enables residents to further reflect on personal experiences related to course content.

Research Projects: Resident-driven projects; investigation into disparities of healthcare and healthcare education.

DOAP Elective Block: 4 week block; Resident as Teacher curriculum as basis for this. Goal to roll out for the 21–22 academic year.

Community Engagement: At least one annual project involved in giving back to the local community. Resident-driven volunteer opportunities; Residents to log hours (free clinic at the University of Texas).

CME/Integrated Learning: 1 Grand Rounds per year; Faculty Development

Newsletter: DOAP Notes - Quarterly newsletter to highlight interesting articles, books, and people related to the work we do with DOAP.

Evaluation of Learners

Formal via evaluations via staff

Informal individual feedback via staff

Resident survey

Feedback around any projects pursued throughout the year

Mid-year evaluations

End-of-year evaluations

Evaluation of DOAP

Brief Resident Understanding Survey

Participation in book/movie club

Quality improvement/research proposals successfully implemented

Quality improvement scholarship (number of posters, presentations, publications, awards)

Resident competency as measured through AGCME milestones and objectives as above

Special Considerations

This document is intended to serve as guidance for learning throughout residency as opposed to a specific rotation. Consideration should be given to further developing curriculum for residents to study and implement projects around diversity, equity, and inclusion in a rotational format.



In my view, it is diversity that makes America strong, and, indeed, the greatest country on earth. Likewise, the U.S. Air Force and Space Force are very diverse. . . . Today, virtually anyone who qualifies can join the U.S. military, which is both a strength and a challenge. The strength is more obvious; that is, we enjoy the talents and comradery of the best America has to offer. Not so obvious is the challenge of leading a force with various backgrounds, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses. . . . I have never read a more comprehensive treatise on diversity, equity, and inclusion . . . [and] recommend [it] for all Airmen and Guardians.

LARRY O. SPENCER, General (Ret.)
U.S. Air Force



Be intentional about diversifying your teams and ensuring Airmen and Guardians who don't look like you, think like you, practice the same religion as you, or have the same sexual orientation as you have the same opportunities to succeed as everyone else. . . . Take advantage of this wonderful resource to help you better understand the challenges we face in this area and be intentional about creating a more diverse and inclusive force for the future.

KALETH O. WRIGHT, CMSAF #18 (Ret.)
U.S. Air Force

I truly believe this work is destined to have more impact on the readiness of our Air Force and Space Force than any other Air University Press publication. . . . This compilation of insightful articles full of data and recommendations gives you all the information you need to be a champion at any rank and at any level of the Air Force—flight, squadron, group, wing, or higher.

Are you ready to be a champion?

MARY F. O'BRIEN, Lt Gen (Ret.)
U.S. Air Force



One Team, One Fight will help us identify and acknowledge barriers to opportunity, challenge preconceptions and biases, and talk openly and appreciate the experiences that shape our lives and our service. This compendium . . . reflects diverse voices and thoughtful research from our entire Total Force, demonstrating the value of diversity and inclusion in our ranks and offering actionable recommendations for achieving this objective.

MARC H. SASSEVILLE, Lt Gen (Ret.)
U.S. Air Force



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