

**WORK, SELF, AND MILITARY LIFE:  
THE EXPERIENCES OF U.S. AIR FORCE WIVES**

A dissertation submitted

by

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to

FIELDING GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HUMAN AND ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS

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**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the experiences of U.S. Air Force wives who wish to pursue their own employment while frequently relocating with their military husbands. Previous research has shown that military wives face significant obstacles to maintaining employment, evidenced by lower earnings, and higher rates of unemployment and underemployment compared to the general U.S. female population. While other studies have documented these employment challenges, few researchers have examined the personal experiences of the women who live with them. Through the use of 21 narrative interviews, this research focuses on military wives' thoughts and feelings about their work-related desires, and the impact to self.

The findings from this study are grouped into thoughts and feelings across three domains: working, not working, and being a military spouse. Participants were unanimous in associating positive thoughts and feelings with working and negative thoughts and feelings with not working. Furthermore, participants expressed ambivalence about their military lifestyle of frequent relocation, and identified both positive and negative aspects of this reality.

As a result of the data produced in this study, a model of fit is proposed with respect to work, self, and military life. A high degree of fit facilitates a military wife's ability to preserve her whole self, while lack of fit results in the need to change one's work or self to adapt, and in some cases result in feelings of despair, depression, and loss of self. This process is influenced by multi-layered gendered roles inherent in marriage, motherhood, and the military.

**KEY WORDS:** military wife, military spouse, employment, work, self, gender roles

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am truly grateful to the women who participated in this study by sharing their stories so generously with me. Each time I read their words I am honored by the gift they have given by selflessly speaking about their own joys, pain, and sacrifice. Through their eyes, I hope that others will see they are not alone in their experiences, and will have the courage to give voice to their own stories.

I am indebted to my colleagues who supported me in this research. I thank the members of my dissertation committee who challenged and supported me every step of the way: Julie Benesh, PhD, Valerie Bentz, PhD, Lita Furby, PhD, Jane Jorgenson, PhD, and Katrina Rogers, PhD. And to my Chair, Margo Okazawa-Rey, EdD, who constantly inspires me as a loving and compassionate scholar and activist, thank you for paving the way for me.

I could not have completed this dissertation without much assistance from a few dear friends, who read early drafts and helped with my analysis. Thank you to Julie Brenman, Tracy DeStazio, and Luann Fortune, PhD, for your generous help with the nitty-gritty details of this research. I know this work is better because of you.

I also owe my thanks to Fielding Graduate University, which provided financial support for this research through the award of a Fielding Research Grant, and an Institute of Social Innovation Scholarship.

Finally, I thank my family for their presence and love throughout this process. My children, Sarah and Andrew, are daily reminders of all that is good and important in life. And to my husband, James, who has supported me in every way and lived through each of day of this with me, I could not have done this without you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>My personal experience</i> .....	2
<i>Research question</i> .....	5
<i>Definition of terms</i> .....	5
CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON MILITARY SPOUSES... 7	
<i>Historical context</i> .....	7
<i>Employment studies: An overview</i> .....	9
<i>Employment studies: Contributions and limitations</i> .....	17
<i>Ethnographic studies: An overview</i> .....	18
<i>Ethnographic studies: Contributions and limitations</i> .....	22
<i>Feminist critique: An overview</i> .....	22
<i>Feminist critique: Contributions and limitations</i> .....	26
<i>A closer look at three studies</i> .....	27
<i>Situating my research question in the ongoing conversation</i> .....	36
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....	38
<i>Participant selection</i> .....	38
<i>Data collection</i> .....	47
<i>Data analysis</i> .....	50
<i>Limitations and reflexivity</i> .....	51
CHAPTER FOUR: THE PARTICIPANTS, THEIR STORIES, AND EMERGENT THEMES.....	60
<i>Description of the participants</i> .....	60
<i>Summary of themes</i> .....	71
<i>Thoughts and feelings about working</i> .....	72
<i>Thoughts and feelings about not working</i> .....	81
<i>Thoughts and feelings about being a military spouse</i> .....	97
CHAPTER FIVE: MODEL OF FIT – WORK, SELF, AND MILITARY LIFE.....	105
<i>Model of fit: Work, self and military life</i> .....	105
<i>Initial entry into the military</i> .....	109
<i>Assessment of fit</i> .....	111
<i>Resolution of fit and impact to self</i> .....	116
<i>The context of multi-layered gender roles: Marriage, military, motherhood</i> .....	121
<i>Applying the model of fit: My own example</i> .....	133

CHAPTER SIX : DISCUSSION.....	135
<i>Military spouse employment: Confirming prior research</i> .....	135
<i>Military spouse employment: Contributions of this study</i> .....	139
<i>Areas for further research</i> .....	141
<i>Implications for policy and practice</i> .....	143
<i>Implications for civilian working life</i> .....	146
EPILOGUE: RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS.....	151
REFERENCES.....	157

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

<i>Table 1 – Summary of participant demographics</i> .....	46
<i>Table 2 – Participants by grouping</i> .....	61
<i>Table 3 – Summary of themes by dimension</i> .....	72
<i>Figure 1 – Model of fit: Work, self, and military life</i> .....	107

## LIST OF APPENDICES

<i>Appendix A – Recruiting e-mail message</i> .....	163
<i>Appendix B - Announcement for local newspaper, websites, and blogs</i> .....	164
<i>Appendix C – Volunteer questionnaire</i> .....	165
<i>Appendix D – Decline e-mail due to ineligibility</i> .....	167
<i>Appendix E – Selection grid</i> .....	168
<i>Appendix F - Acceptance script</i> .....	169
<i>Appendix G – Interview tool: Assignment grid</i> .....	171
<i>Appendix H – Interview protocol</i> .....	172
<i>Appendix I – Informed consent form</i> .....	175
<i>Appendix J - Community resources</i> .....	177
<i>Appendix K – Professional assistance confidentiality agreement</i> .....	178
<i>Appendix L – Final coding scheme</i> .....	179
<i>Appendix M – Content analysis themes sorted by frequency</i> .....	182

## CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing movement in the United States to address the needs of military families. Beginning with the Vietnam era, the Department of Defense (DoD) began sponsoring research into the lives of military families, adopting the point of view that combat readiness requires “family readiness” (Enloe, 2000). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have added to these efforts by increasing public awareness of the impacts to military families. When President Obama was elected, First Lady Michelle Obama named support for military families as one of her top issues, and has led a variety of new initiatives to improve the lives of military families (Obama, 2011; Ziezulewicz, 2009).

Employment challenges facing military spouses are among the many issues being addressed in the effort to support military families. Policymakers and researchers have been studying this problem for three decades, and there is no dispute that military spouses encounter unique barriers to obtaining and maintaining satisfactory employment. Although more educated than the average civilian population, military spouses are less likely to work and earn less than their civilian counterparts when they do work (Harrell, Lim, Castaneda, & Golinelli, 2004; Lim, Golinelli, & Cho, 2007). They are also far more likely to be underemployed (Lim & Golinelli, 2006; Lim & Schulker, 2010).

Systemic barriers to employment include both cultural and structural factors, which will be discussed in depth in the literature review in Chapter 2. Cultural factors include a tradition of the military wife as a professional volunteer, providing her unpaid labor to support military needs. Structural factors include the impact of the military’s mobile lifestyle and the effect of military presence on local labor markets. Because military members move routinely, frequent relocation is a significant factor in crafting a viable working life for a military spouse.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the thoughts and feelings of Air Force wives who wish to craft a working life for themselves while following their husbands on military assignments. Although a variety of employment studies have been conducted to define the problems military spouses encounter, there has been little focus on what the experience is like for these women.

*My personal experience*

One of my motivations for studying this topic comes from my personal experience as an Air Force wife. When I met my husband, 15 years ago, I knew very little about military life and never imagined myself as a military wife. I was pursuing a stable and successful career, and lived near my extended family in my hometown. I had no ambitions or desires to live anywhere else, let alone take on a lifestyle of constant moving. As my husband now approaches retirement eligibility, I look back at the last decade and try to make sense of the decisions I have made and the variety of ways I have been changed by my own military experience.

In the early years of our relationship, both courtship and early marriage, I intentionally kept my distance from the military aspects of our life. My husband had his work and I had mine. When the Air Force reassigned my husband, I was able to transfer offices twice within the large consulting firm where I worked. First, I moved from San Francisco to Honolulu, and then to Monterey, California a few years later. I shopped in the military commissary or stayed in military lodging when we traveled, but I never participated in military spouse groups or social activities. We were both pursuing careers that were important to us, and we supported each other in doing so.

My experience changed dramatically during our first overseas move to Turkey in 2002. It was the first time I had to make a significant sacrifice in my own working life in order to

accommodate my husband's career. Although I originally tried to persuade my husband to turn down his assignment because of my own work concerns, I later saw how disappointed he was. Given my dissatisfaction with my employment at the time, my job seemed like a poor excuse for asking him to limit his own aspirations. I agreed to move to Turkey, and felt somewhat relieved to leave my job behind.

When we arrived in Turkey, I felt as if my sole identity instantly became "military wife." I was suddenly one of the women I thought I had nothing in common with. Lacking my own work identity was a new and humbling experience. When I completed the Turkish residency forms, I entered "unemployed" under occupation. I felt humiliated when the title on the residency card I received back read "*Ev Hanımı*" or "housewife." I joined the Officers Spouses Club to meet people, and volunteered for any possible activity on the base to keep busy. For the first time in my adult life, nobody ever asked me what I did for a living, and I longed to prove to everyone around me that I was an important person in my own right. I found part-time work as an adjunct lecturer for a university that catered to military students. I struggled to keep some part of my professional identity alive.

Although I felt that I had made a huge sacrifice in giving up my stable working life, I also found that the experience in Turkey changed me in many positive ways. The blow to my ego was an important awakening to other ways of living beyond career-orientation. Although I had previously defined myself by my consulting career, this approach had not made me particularly happy. I hated the constant travel, long hours, and the need to be available to clients and partners at any time. In contrast, in Turkey, I found that I enjoyed spending my time on a variety of activities other than working, and began to think about life in a fundamentally different way. I

also gained more respect for the military wives I had always avoided in the past, and realized that they each carry their own stories of disappointment, sacrifice, and alienation.

Since the assignment in Turkey, we have lived in Las Vegas, Washington, DC, and Germany. While I suppose I could have returned to full-time corporate employment, I chose to reject this path based on my experiences in Turkey. In Las Vegas, I worked as an independent consultant, and enjoyed the freedom I had from being self-employed. Although the work was not substantively different from my previous consulting life, the lifestyle constraints and demands were considerably diminished. For the first time in my life, work was not just how I defined myself but it was also what I enjoyed doing. In Washington, DC, I began my doctoral studies, which has offered me the opportunity to continue my professional development while giving me the flexibility I need to care for my young children.

Independent consulting and doctoral studies are both paths I had dreamed of pursuing for many years, but I'm not sure I would have embarked on them if not for my military life. If not for the forced break from my original career path, I would never have abandoned a stable, high-status job for alternative work experiences. I have found the resulting experience to be a double-edged sword, one that offers both a great deal of satisfaction and creativity, but also carries the price of significant periods of unemployment, underemployment, and little compensation.

Reflecting on my own past experience has shown me that there have been some unanticipated benefits to the challenges. This insight has led me to wonder how other women have incorporated both the good and bad aspects of this lifestyle into their experience. Although great attention is focused on fixing the employment problem for military spouses, there is little effort to understand the complexity and contradictions of their experiences. My hope is to

increase awareness of military wives' experiences, and enable them to tell their stories in all their richness and complexity.

*Research question*

The research question for this study is: *“How do geographically mobile Air Force wives who desire a working life interpret their experiences related to their desire to craft a working life while frequently relocating with their husbands?”* I will discuss the rationale for this research question in more detail in Chapter 2, but wish to lay out the basic components here.

Although I am interested in the experiences of all military wives, and believe there is a great deal of commonality across services, I am choosing to focus specifically on Air Force wives for the purposes of this study. I am focused on wives rather than spouses because gender-roles play heavily into the military spouse experience, where 93% of all military spouses and 90% of all Air Force spouses are women (Department of Defense, 2007). I want to understand the experiences of those who are employed and those that wish they were. And I am specifically studying only those women who follow their husbands to new assignments, because frequent relocation is such a challenge to a working spouse.

*Definition of terms*

When I refer to the wives of military members, I will consistently use terms that are commonly used in the military community, which may be different from standard civilian vocabulary:

**military spouse** – A male or female spouse of a military member

**military wife** – A female spouse of a military member

**officer's wife** – The wife of a commissioned officer

**enlisted wife** - The wife of an enlisted military member or non-commissioned officer

I choose these terms because they are commonly used in the research literature and widely adopted in the military community. They should not be confused with an interpretation that could result from literal translation. For example, *military wife* could be interpreted literally as a wife who is also a member of the military. For purposes of this study, I will consistently use these terms as defined above.

## CHAPTER TWO – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON MILITARY SPOUSES

The literature on military spouses spans a variety of topics related to the psychological, sociological, cultural, and economic aspects of life as a military spouse. I will not attempt to review the entire body of literature, but will focus on the literature relevant to understanding the working lives of military wives. This includes a brief history of the military wife's role to place this discussion in historical context. I will provide an overview of recent research on military wives, which falls into three general categories: (a) empirical employment studies, (b) qualitative ethnographic research, and (c) feminist critique. While each of these bodies of literature contributes something toward the understanding of military wives' working lives, they each fall short in describing what the experience is like for women who want their own employment, but must craft a working life while moving frequently with their military husbands. Finally, I will conclude with an analysis of three specific studies that I believe come the closest to addressing my research question, and describe the remaining gap I propose to fill with my research.

### *Historical context*

In the United States today, more than half of all service members are married (Department of Defense, 2007), but this has not always been the case (Segal, 2006). Historically, marriage has been discouraged in the military as a distraction from the mission (Harrell, 2003a; Wherry, 2000). Prior to World War II, married men were not allowed to enlist in the military, and enlisted troops required their commander's permission to marry (Lehr, 1999; Wherry, 2000). As a result, many of the female partners of enlisted soldiers were not legally married to them, and were referred to as "camp-followers" (Wherry, 2000). Harrell (2003a) notes that the term "shacking up" comes from this period in U.S. history when these unmarried

women were forced to live in substandard housing conditions in order to remain close to their men. The cultural connotation of camp follower came to be synonymous with “whore” in common circles (Lehr, 1999), a signifier of the intersection of gender and class. According to Lehr, the title for military wives evolved from camp-follower to “dependent” for both enlisted and officers’ wives, representing the wife’s second-class status, and the presumption that she depends on her husband’s employment for survival. She notes that although DoD officially replaced dependent with “family member,” the former term is still commonly used.

In contrast with enlisted men, officers have long been granted the authority to marry, in part for the unpaid labor and social status expected from officers’ wives (Harrell, 2003a). The tradition of officer’s wife volunteerism for military causes dates back to the Revolutionary War days when Martha Washington created the first officers’ wives club (Lehr, 1999). Historically, officers graduating from military academies have used marriage to educated socialites as a way of securing social standing (Harrell, 2003a).

The disparate treatment, role expectations, and stereotypes between officers’ wives and enlisted wives have persisted over time, creating a dual-class system within the population of military wives. I will explore this dynamic further in the discussion of recent ethnographic studies of military wives.

World War II changed the demographic profile of the military by including married men in the draft (Lehr, 1999; Segal, 1986). Since this time, the percentage of married, active-duty military members has grown to 55% (Department of Defense, 2007). By the Vietnam era, DoD recognized the need to address family support as an issue of military “readiness” (Enloe, 2000), a term used in the military to describe the degree of preparedness to perform the mission. The concept has been extended to family members because the military recognizes that when a

family member's needs conflict with the mission, the military member may be unprepared to fulfill his duties. In the current military, every aspect of military life is evaluated for readiness, from the adequacy of a childcare facility or a wife's need for mental health services, to the security of nuclear weapons on a particular installation (Enloe, 2000).

Based on the driver of military readiness, DoD created a complex family support infrastructure in the 1980s (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). During this era, DoD also implemented a formal policy acknowledging the right of military wives to pursue their own careers (Harrell, 2002). This policy officially ended the practice of including wives' volunteerism in officer performance reviews, although Harrell argues that this practice unofficially continues by encouraging officers to use their wives to organize morale-building activities for their units.

Family support initiatives continue to thrive and employ a variety of social scientists dedicated to the socialization of military family members (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997; Lehr, 1999). Although the sponsorship behind each study cannot always be identified by reading a particular article, Segal (2006) contends that much of the research on military spouses has been conducted by researchers employed or funded by the military.

#### *Employment studies: An overview*

Studies of military spouse employment have covered a broad range of issues, but are generally all focused on understanding some employment-related outcome for military spouses, with the ultimate goal of improving military readiness and retention. According to Castaneda and Harrell (2008), "The economic well-being of military members, the degree to which they believe that their families are cared for, and their general quality of life are key to maintaining and motivating the force" (p. 389). In the attempt to improve quality of life for military

members, spouse employment is treated as a key factor. Some of the key questions addressed in this body of research are the following:

1. With respect to education and employment, how do military spouses compare to the civilian population?
2. What are the labor force outcomes for military spouses, and what are the predictors of these outcomes?
3. What are the reasons that military spouses work or have a desire to work?
4. What are the barriers for military spouses obtaining satisfactory employment and earnings?
5. What is the relationship between employment and general well-being for military spouses?

#### #1: Military spouses compared to the civilian population

Two studies by the RAND Corporation (Harrell et al., 2004; Lim, Golinelli, & Cho, 2007) utilize two decades of census data to show that military spouses differ in some significant ways from the general population. Military spouses are more educated than their civilian counterparts, but are less likely to be employed. They also move more frequently, are more likely to have young children, and earn less than civilians with comparable backgrounds. In spite of these differences, military spouses have occupational desires comparable to the general population. Understanding this profile of the military spouse is important because it demonstrates the existence of an ongoing problem. Although military spouses are more educated than the general population and have similar desires for employment, they consistently have higher rates of unemployment and lower earnings.

Two additional studies by the RAND Corporation have turned toward measuring the problem of underemployment among military spouses (Lim & Golinelli, 2006; Lim & Schulker, 2010). After recommending that DoD examine underemployment among military spouses (Lim & Golinelli, 2006), a subsequent study compared military wives to their civilian look-alikes in

identical labor markets (Lim & Schulker, 2010). This study revealed that military wives are more likely to be underemployed, more likely to have involuntary part-time work, more likely to be overeducated for their jobs, and less likely to have adequate full-time employment. For purposes of this research, the authors defined underemployment as involuntary part-time work, a job that is a mismatch for the person's education, and inadequate compensation. They found the biggest gap between military wives and civilian wives in the category of education mismatch: Whereas they estimate 3% of civilian wives to be overeducated for their jobs, about 20% of military wives are.

## #2: Labor force outcomes and their predictors

A recent Defense Manpower Data Center (2011) survey of active-duty spouses shows that 42% of military spouses are employed, 15% are unemployed, that is actively seeking work, and 43% are not in the labor force, that is, they do not wish to work or are discouraged workers no longer seeking employment. Seventy-seven percent of survey respondents claim an interest in being employed regardless of their actual employment status. This gap between the 42% who are employed in some way and the 77% who wish to be employed is evidence that obtaining employment is a challenge for this population.

In addition, there is evidence that the recent economic recession may be impacting military spouses more severely than the general population (Keith, 2011). Although the percentage of employed military spouses mirrored that of the general female population in the United States in 2008 (57% compared to 56% respectively; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009; Defense Manpower Data Center, 2009), only 42% of military spouses remained employed in 2010 compared to 54% of the general adult female population in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010; Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011). Furthermore, these data sets

show that the rate of unemployment among military spouses is three times that of the female population at large, 15% compared to 5%. A history of similar employment trends have led several scholars to study the factors that lead to employment or unemployment among military spouses.

Schwartz, Wood, and Griffith (1991) found that the strongest predictors of employment among Army wives are having more education, living near a population center, and greater time spent in one location. The researchers also found that underemployment is a significant problem for military spouses. As in the recent RAND studies on the subject (Lim & Schulker, 2010), this finding has also been supported by other scholars who contend that many military spouses who are employed have jobs that do not adequately utilize their skills or education (Ickovics, 1989; Scarville, 1990; Trougakos, Bull, Green, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2007).

### #3: Reasons for working

Concerns about military retention and readiness also drive the study of military spouse motivations for work. As Castaneda and Harrell (2008) indicate, understanding the reasons for work may provide alternative policy solutions. For example, if motivations are primarily financial, it may be more effective for the military to increase military compensation rather than provide more opportunities for spouse employment. One of the commonly held assumptions in the scholarly literature on this subject is that enlisted wives work for financial reasons and officers' wives work for fulfillment (Dana, 2006; Russo, Dougherty, & Martin, 2000; Scarville, 1990). However, there is evidence that a desire for career is not unique to officers' wives. In fact, the 2010 survey of active-duty spouses shows that 69% of enlisted spouses say their desire for a career is important or very important; similarly, 63% of officers' spouses agree with this statement (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011). A survey of enlisted Army wives in the late-

1980s revealed that 72% of employed wives say they would work even if they did not need the money (Ickovics & Martin, 1987).

#### #4: Barriers to employment and earnings

Several studies have also identified relocation as a significant barrier to military spouse employment (Booth, 2003; Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Cooney, Segal & De Angelis, 2009; Payne, Warner, & Little, 1992). The average military member moves every 2-3 years, resulting in a lifestyle of continual movement (Burrell, 2006). While most of the literature related to the psychology of moving treats a move as a staged process with a beginning and an end, military families are in a constant cycle of adjusting to the last move or preparing for the next one (Burrell, 2006). Seeking employment throughout this cycle is only one aspect of this experience. Some military spouses find satisfying employment, while many experience underemployment in jobs that do not adequately utilize their skills. Other spouses who desire a working life choose to opt out of the labor force because they believe that available opportunities for work do not warrant the costs associated with frequent switching, or time away from family and military demands.

Cooke and Speirs (2005) used the concept of “tied migration” to examine the employment outcomes of military spouses. The term *tied migration* refers to a scenario where a couple relocates together to allow one of them to pursue a job opportunity. Such a scenario typically results in an economic loss for the female partner, known as the “trailing wife” effect. The researchers based their study on Mincer’s (1978) human capital model of tied migration, which suggests that moving decisions are based on the economic earning potential for the family. Mincer contends that a trailing wife effect occurs because moving decisions are typically determined by male heads of families who generally enjoy greater earning potential than their

female partners do. However, Cooke and Speirs found that the wife is more often the trailing spouse than the husband, regardless of earning potential. They contend that decisions about migration are heavily influenced by gender role socialization. In the trailing wife effect, the economic status of a married woman declines when moving with her husband. For military spouses in particular, Cooke and Speirs found that tied migration led to a 9% increase in unemployment, a 10% decrease in employment, and an average loss of 4 working hours per week.

The study conducted by Cooke and Speirs is one of a dozen attempting to document the phenomenon of tied migration and its economic effects in general, but theirs is the only one I found focused specifically on the military context. I will not discuss the tied migration body of literature in detail, but mention it to acknowledge that extensive research has been done to show that this scenario consistently detracts from women's earnings and employment outcomes, regardless of the industry. Like much of the literature on military spouse employment, the tied migration literature is largely focused on economic consequences rather than the thoughts and feelings of those affected. Two exceptions to this can be found in Bielby and Bielby's (1992) work, which documents the reasons women are reluctant to relocate for a husband's job, and Fang Lee Cooke's (2007) case studies of Chinese academic wives who have relocated to Great Britain. In this latter study, Cooke examines how these women renegotiate their social identity, family, and work roles as a result of their relocation.

Cooney, Segal, and De Angelis (2009) further explore relocation in a military spouse context by analyzing the relationship between moving and satisfaction with employment opportunities. Although their findings must be tempered by the fact that they are using data from a 1992 survey which may not be current, the issues they raise are important. First, they found

that only 2% of military spouses are very satisfied with their employment opportunities, while 17% are very dissatisfied. Second, they found a relationship between the duration of time in one location and the level of dissatisfaction. The longer one stays in one location, the less dissatisfied one is with employment opportunities. Finally, the researchers found that African American spouses are 42% more likely to be dissatisfied than their White counterparts. Although the researchers did not study the reasons for this difference between African American and White spouses, it is an important indicator that race plays a role in the overall experiences of military spouses.

A related area of inquiry relates to the examination of military spouse earnings. Payne, Warner, and Little (1992) specifically explored the impact of tied migration on earnings, and found that frequency of relocating has a significant effect on the earnings penalty faced by military spouses. This effect is caused by periods of non-employment, loss of seniority from one employer to another, and not being able to transfer job skills from one job to the next. Based on their economic modeling, the researchers claim that the average military wife would earn 40% more during a 6-year assignment at one location compared to two 3-year assignments at different locations.

The impact on earnings has also been studied from the standpoint of structural labor market analysis (Booth, Falk, Segal, & Segal, 2000; Booth, 2003). Booth (2003) contends that tied migration only explains part of the employment and earnings picture for military spouses. He claims that military presence in a geographic location lowers earnings and raises unemployment for all women in the local labor market. Although women and men have similar rates of unemployment in general, women experience higher unemployment in labor markets with high military presence (Booth, Falk, Segal, & Segal, 2000). A similar labor market effect

on earnings occurs from a confluence of factors. First, the underrepresentation of women in the military creates an oversupply of civilian female labor when military wives are added to the local labor force. Second, military bases generate low-paying service sector jobs, such as food service and childcare. Third, many military locations represent a monopsony market of few employers, further leading to depressed wage levels. Therefore, military wives incur both the trailing wife effect and the local labor market effect. Booth (2003) estimates a labor market effect of 5% reduction in women's earnings for every 10% increase in military presence. This impact on earnings is felt by all women in the affected labor market, not just military wives. However, Booth's analysis reveals that military wives incur an additional earnings penalty due to tied migration, noting that the average military wife earns 19% less than the average civilian wife, even when the effect of military presence is held constant.

#### #5: The relationship between employment and general well-being

A group of studies have examined the predictors of general well-being (GWB) among military spouses (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Ickovics & Martin, 1987; Klein, Tatone, & Lindsay, 1989; Rosen, Ickovics, & Moghadam, 1990; Rosen & Moghadam, 1991; Sebenick, 1998). Several important findings emerge from these studies regarding the relationship between employment and GWB. First, whether or not one is employed has less to do with GWB than whether or not there is a fit between the roles they play, both work and nonwork, and their expectations of themselves (Rosen, Ickovics, & Moghadam, 1990; Sebenick, 1998). The strongest employment-related predictors of GWB are role satisfaction and overall satisfaction with one's career prospects (Rosen, Ickovics, & Moghadam, 1990). Second, GWB appears to increase when a wife obtains a job, but then declines after a period of ongoing employment (Ickovics & Martin, 1987). The researchers surmise that GWB improves with the

satisfaction of gaining employment, but then declines when work is unsatisfying or poses a conflict with non-work demands. Third, the most recent study on this subject finds that foreign residence is negatively correlated with GWB for military spouses, which is particularly relevant for this dissertation (Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006). In general, this body of research indicates that having just any job does not promote GWB, but that pursuing a job that meets one's expectations does.

*Employment studies: Contributions and limitations*

Employment studies of military spouses have generated a wealth of knowledge over the years, and furthered understanding of the key challenges related to employment. To summarize, there are several key conclusions from this literature. Military spouses are more educated and have similar desires for work compared to the civilian population, but are less likely to be employed, more likely to be underemployed, and earn less than civilians do. The majority of military spouses desire employment in some form, but many are unemployed, underemployed, or have become discouraged workers, opting out of the labor force. Reasons for working vary, with lower ranking spouses citing financial need as a stronger motivator, and higher ranking spouses citing personal fulfillment as a stronger motivator. Two factors impose significant employment barriers for military spouses: tied migration and the structure of local labor markets. Both dynamics lead to higher unemployment and lower earnings for military spouses. Finally, research on general well-being indicates that satisfaction with one's roles in life, both work and nonwork, are an important predictor of a military wife's physical and psychological well-being.

Although the knowledge created by this body of research is valuable, there are also two clear limitations. First, the scholarly dialogue has been significantly influenced by DoD's agenda to improve readiness and retention of military members. Whether or not a study is

directly funded by DoD, research in this field typically references military readiness as the purpose for understanding the employment challenges of military spouses. The assumption that this is a commonly held goal drives what research questions are being asked, as well as those that are not being asked. Second, the DoD policymaking environment supports a positivist approach to these questions. Most studies are based on quantitative survey analysis that limits the researcher's ability to understand the experience of the research participants. Margaret Harrell (2003b) eloquently discusses this dilemma from her own experience as both a cultural anthropologist and a researcher on military issues with the RAND Corporation. She contends that because of the nearly exclusive reliance on positivist research, military leaders are ineffective in their ability to set policy. Although she believes that DoD policymakers have a genuine desire to improve the lives of their people, she contends that they are unable to do so because they lack a deep understanding of their lived experience.

I believe one result of these two dynamics is that the research on military spouse employment has generally focused on identifying barriers to employment and documenting the economic consequences of employment challenges, because they can be tangibly related to military readiness. Although this focus is clearly important, how women think and feel about their experiences has received little attention in the drive to solve the employment problem as a military readiness problem.

*Ethnographic studies: An overview*

Ethnographic studies of military wives address some of the limitations of positivist employment research. Margaret Harrell is arguably the dominant voice in this scholarly conversation, having produced several ethnographic studies of military wives and their experiences. Along with Harrell, other ethnographic researchers have studied the military wife

role, including its cultural and social connotations, through in-depth descriptions of lived experience. Interestingly, the researchers in this category are current or former military wives who conducted their studies as doctoral dissertations (Brancaforte, 2000; Harrell, 2000a; Richard, 2008; Robbins, 2002; Wherry, 2000). This body of literature is helpful in understanding the overall experience of being a military wife because it is not limited to the experiences of working life, thus providing a larger context.

Several themes emerge from the ethnographic research on military wives. First, the military spouse is a socially constructed gendered role, as all gender roles are. Second, the rank system creates and perpetuates a class divide between officers' and enlisted wives. Third, a feeling of invisibility and voicelessness is common among military wives. Finally, race receives little attention in military spouse research but does pervade the stereotypes of officers' and enlisted wives.

Harrell (2003a) argues that the role of military spouse is a socially constructed gendered role. She notes that her argument is supported by evidence that male military spouses are not expected to fill the traditional obligations of volunteerism and unit support that female spouses are expected to fill. They are not expected to join spouse clubs or participate in military activities, and are not expected to give up employment for the sake of the military member's career. In essence, "military spouse" is a euphemism for "military wife," since 93% of military spouses are in fact female (Department of Defense, 2007), and those who are male do not experience the same expectations of the military spouse role.

Traditional expectations of a military wife are distinctly different between enlisted and officers' wives, and stem from centuries of history (Harrell, 2002; Harrell, 2003a; Lehr, 1999). Even today, the officer's wife is still often assumed not to work, and is expected to perform a

variety of volunteer activities in support of the military's mission. This expectation of volunteerism is tightly tied to class, because officers' wives are presumed to have the ability to secure household help required to free up their time for volunteering (Harrell, 2003a). Harrell describes the class-based stereotype that has commonly been applied to the officer's wife:

By presenting an appropriate picture of domestic success, responsible procreation (only through marriage), and social expertise, the officer's wife traditionally has been proof of maturity as well as the social and sexual control that was perceived to define an Army officer. (2003a, p. 71)

In contrast, enlisted wives are traditionally not expected to play any active role in the military. Except for senior enlisted wives, who are expected to play a leadership role, the ideal enlisted wife is one who does not make trouble. The stereotype of the enlisted wife reflects common stereotypes of working-class people, including images of "freely reproductive couples with few social graces and or redeeming features" (Harrell, 2003a, p. 86).

The existence of these culturally constructed roles and stereotypes reinforces the rank-based separation between enlisted and officers' wives. Traditionally, military officers and enlisted troops have been separated both by rank and a fraternization policy that prohibits significant social interaction between the two groups. Although wives sometimes cite the fraternization policy as the reason for the social segregation of military spouses, this policy technically only limits social interactions between military members, not between military spouses (Harrell, 2003a). Although it is true that this segregation is based on tradition, it is not required by the fraternization policy.

Feelings of invisibility and isolation are common among military wives, and may be more pronounced among junior enlisted wives (Harrell, 2000b). Several dissertations written by military wives discuss the loss of identity inherent in the military wife role (Brancaforte, 2000; Richard, 2008; Wherry, 2000). Although a military wife must often rely on the military infrastructure for basic services, such as groceries, childcare, and healthcare, none of these services can be accessed without a dependent ID card and her husband's social security number. Her identity is derived completely through the authority and standing of her husband, and this is perpetuated by the idea that wives wear the rank of their husbands. In other words, military wives are generally treated with the same level of deference and privilege accorded to someone of their husband's rank.

Through an analysis of two centuries of writing and correspondence by officers' wives, Wherry (2000) documents the experience of what she terms "perpetual marginality" (p. 29) imposed by the military. She claims that these women have used writing as a way to combat their feelings of marginalization, invisibility, and voicelessness. Brancaforte (2000) shares her own experience of feeling like a "dumb, brainless follower" (p. 208), and proposes that military wives must re-craft their self-identity to fit into the military community. Richard (2008) proposes that the primary challenge for military wives is the blurred line between their public and private identities.

In addition to class, race is another factor that can contribute to differing experiences of marginality or isolation. Harrell's (2000a) dissertation is one of the few military spouse studies to mention race at any level. In her ethnographic study of Army wives, she finds evidence of race-based stereotypes. Officers' wives are assumed to be upper-class White women; enlisted wives are assumed to be working-class African American women. She contends that African

American officers' wives are more likely to experience isolation, and experience greater scrutiny regarding their behavior. She also found a different attitude toward foreign-born spouses, noting an example in her study where one Asian wife was suspected by other wives to have engaged in prostitution. Foreign-born spouses may also experience unique isolation due to ethnic stereotyping, language barriers, and cultural differences. However, despite these stereotypes, Harrell claims that most military members and wives believe that race is not an issue in the military, and that they see the military as more progressive in this respect than the civilian world.

*Ethnographic studies: Contributions and limitations*

The ethnographic literature greatly enhances the understanding of military wives' experiences. This research adds richness and complexity lacking in quantitative employment studies. These ethnographic studies reveal the lifeworld of the military wife, and illustrate the existing gendered role expectations and how they vary by class and rank. The research demonstrates a common experience of voicelessness and marginality, coupled with a sharp divide between officers' wives and enlisted wives. Harrell's (2000a, 2003a) study of race and class shows that racial stereotypes add another dimension to the complexity of military wife roles and experiences.

This body of literature adds depth to our understanding of the military lifestyle, but is not specific to the exploration of working life. Similar in-depth inquiry needs to be done into the experience of crafting a working life as a military wife.

*Feminist critique: An overview*

A third body of literature on military wives is represented in critical analyses of the military and the military wife's role within this system. This feminist literature examines the military wife's experience not only as an individual, but as a crucial piece of the military system.

As such, this literature adds an important critical voice to the scholarly conversation. Some of the issues explored include the role of feminist research in giving voice to military wives, the military and family as greedy institutions, the military's ambivalence toward the paid employment of military wives, the disenfranchising effect of military family support systems, and the unspoken agenda behind frequent relocation of military families.

Cynthia Enloe (2000) describes the distance that often exists between feminist researchers and military wives:

Military wives often believe that civilian feminists see them as so integral to the military that they must be complicit in militarism and thus in the very patriarchy that many feminists are committed to overturn. For their part, most civilian feminists either do not even "see" military wives as a political category, or they imagine women married to soldiers to be too politically isolated or too lacking in political consciousness to be worthy of organized support. (p. 192)

Enloe (1988, 2000) argues that feminist researchers have been reluctant to give voice to the issues of military wives, but that doing so is an important contribution toward exposing the militarization of women's lives. D'Amico and Weinstein (1999) argue that oral life histories and autobiographies are effective feminist tools for sharing the experiences of military wives.

One of the earliest examples of feminist critique is evident in Mady Segal's (1986) representation of the family and military as greedy institutions. Segal applies Coser's (1974) theory of greedy institutions, which are those that make exceptionally high demands on one's time and require complete loyalty. Segal contends that the challenge for the military wife is negotiating her role in relationship to two greedy institutions that require her complete

commitment: the military and the family. She proposes that progress can be made if women increase their participation in paid employment, requiring men to take on more family responsibilities. She also recognizes that frequent relocation is a symptom of military greediness, and uses the words of Coser and Coser (1974) to illustrate the implications for women: “the nuclear family is functional for mobility only as long as wives are willingly submitting to its greedy demands” (p. 30). Although as a military sociologist, Segal stops well short of calling for resistance by military wives, she does lay the foundations for further feminist critique.

Another line of feminist inquiry deals with the military’s ambivalence toward the paid employment of military wives (D’Amico & Weinstein, 1999; Enloe, 1988, 2000; Harrison & Laliberté, 1997; Lehr, 1999). Enloe (1988, 2000) contends that the employment of military wives represents a double-edged sword for the military. On the one hand, paid work results in the loss of unpaid labor that the military has traditionally expected from military wives, and represents a loss of control over their socialization into military wifedom. On the other hand, paid work generates income and possibly increases satisfaction for military families, which in turn may positively affect readiness and retention of the military member. Although the latter issue is the central theme of military spouse employment studies, the former issue remains in the shadows. D’Amico and Weinstein (1999) propose that the military wants to downplay its reliance on the labor of military wives, because acknowledging the centrality of their role would require some sharing of authority. Enloe (1988) sums up the dialectic in this way: “Military wives...are fundamentally *marginal* at least to the publicly articulated meaning of the military, even while they are *integral* to that same institution’s day-to-day maintenance” (p. 56).

Harrison and Laliberté (1997) continue this dialogue about marginality and greediness in their critical analysis of U.S. and Canadian military systems of family support. Family support organizations are military services intended to promote “family readiness.” Such services include assistance with job searching, orientation to military life, social support of military spouses, workshops on coping during separations, and lending household supplies needed during relocation. In addition to the formal role of providing support for families, family support services also implicitly socialize military family members to behave according to military norms. Ironically, family support organizations often rely on the unpaid labor of military wives to perform some of these services. Although employment assistance is one objective for family support, the overall functioning of family support processes are based on the assumption that paid work is not the primary focus of a military wife. Harrison and Laliberté describe the stereotype of the military wife that still underlies military family support systems:

A self-reliant military wife is neither career woman nor a woman who mobilizes other wives against the military. Rather, she is a helpmate who revolves her life around home and children so that her husband can concentrate on military demands. She is also someone who, in relation to the military, is perpetually accommodating. (p. 39)

Ultimately, Harrison and Laliberté (1997) argue that military wives reinforce their own marginality by participating in unpaid labor contributing to family support efforts. Not only do wives reinforce military socialization through these processes, but also they support a series of activities that offer surface-level solutions to deep and systemic problems. One side effect of this phenomenon is that military wives reinforce the status quo by reassuring each other that they can

thrive under such circumstances. There is no need to organize or resist, because the true sign of a good military wife is someone who can endure anything and chalk it up to another adventure.

One final theme in the feminist literature relates to the unspoken agenda behind the practice of frequently relocating military members. Harrison and Laliberté (1997) claim that the true reason for frequent moving is to reinforce loyalty to the military over all other aspects of life, and limit a military family's ability to establish civilian roots. In essence, it is a practice that reinforces a greedy culture largely because the military must ensure total commitment to its needs. A wife who is employed, and may not want to leave a job to relocate is seen as a distraction and sign of less than complete loyalty.

*Feminist critique: Contributions and limitations*

The feminist literature provides a vital systemic critique of the military wife's experience. Whether the consequences are consciously constructed or unintended, the military system as a whole reinforces a culture of greediness or total commitment, reluctance to fully support the employment of military wives, family support processes that perpetuate marginality of the wife's role, and a policy of relocation that promotes loyalty to the military over anything else. Like the ethnographic literature, feminist critique enriches the picture of the military wife's experience, and adds nuances to a subject that cannot be completely understood through positivist research.

On the other hand, the non-empirical nature of the feminist literature also represents a limitation. Most of this writing is critical in nature, and is not necessarily empirically based. While this literature provides persuasive arguments regarding the systemic issues of military spousehood, research to support these claims needs to be conducted.

### *A closer look at three studies*

As my summary shows, there is a fair amount of breadth to the existing literature on military wives as it relates to their experiences, and about the economic consequences of their military lifestyle. One of the elements that remains elusive is how military wives interpret their experiences related to work, not only in terms of describing what the challenges are, but also revealing how they think and feel about this aspect of their lives as a result. Three studies partially address this hole in the literature, but still leave room for further exploration. The first is a DoD-sponsored study by the RAND Corporation conducted in 2004 (Harrell et al.), and later published in summary form in a journal of military sociology (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008). The second is a doctoral dissertation focused on the career-identity of Air Force officers' wives (Dana, 2006). And the third study is a doctoral dissertation and subsequent book about the emotional impact on British military wives from relocation overseas (Jervis, 2009; 2011). Although none of these studies completely answers my particular research question, they are all highly relevant to my question and warrant a closer look.

### Working Around the Military

*Working Around the Military* (Harrell et al., 2004) is the most comprehensive study of military spouse employment I have found in my search. The purpose of the study was to document challenges for military spouses related to employment and education. Topics analyzed included a comparison between military spouses and their civilian counterparts, reasons for working, and how military spouses feel that the military has affected their opportunities for work or education. The researchers utilized census data to develop a comparison between military spouses and civilians. This profile was discussed earlier in this chapter. In addition, the researchers conducted 1,100 interviews with military spouses from 8 different installations in the

continental United States, covering all 4 branches of the military. Clearly, one value of this study is the generalizability of its findings due to its large and representative sample. One significant omission is that researchers did not include any participants located outside the United States, which represents a population that may face unique and potentially greater employment challenges.

For the purposes of my research, the most relevant aspect of this study are the interview data related to reported impact on work opportunities. The interview protocol included a combination of closed-ended questions, that were analyzed quantitatively, and open-ended questions, that were analyzed through a qualitative grounded theory approach. Out of 41 total interview questions, one open-ended question was asked related to perceived impacts on work opportunities: “How has your spouse’s military career affected your work or education opportunities?” (Harrell et al., 2004, p. 193)

The researchers coded the responses to this question both to identify the positive or negative nature of the response, and to identify factors cited in the responses. Towards the former goal, researchers coded each participant’s answer as positive, negative, or neutral. The researchers report their results in this way:

When asked how their spouse’s military career had affected their work opportunities, almost two-thirds of those interviewed felt that being a military spouse had negatively affected their work opportunities; about one-third felt that it had no effect on their work opportunities; and a small portion of spouses perceived a positive effect. (Harrell et al., 2004, p. 114)

Although participants were not prompted to explain a reason for any impacts described, about one-third of all participants discussed “frequent or disruptive moves” (Harrell et al., 2004, p. 117) as a barrier to work opportunities. Relocation was the most common barrier cited across all services, but was most pronounced among Air Force spouses. Among Air Force spouses who perceived a negative impact on their work, two-thirds discussed relocation as a problem. Explaining the impact of frequent moving, one respondent said, “It takes a lot of your self-esteem; you’re not confident with yourself anymore. It breaks you down” (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008, p. 306). In addition to relocation, other contributing factors included service member travel away from home, child care, and employer reluctance to hire military spouses.

Methodologically, there are several open questions. First, it would be interesting to know how the data would be different if overseas participants had been interviewed, because international relocation can be especially disruptive. Second, the researchers provide little detail to describe their approach to analyzing the data, other than to mention that they coded the qualitative data using a grounded theory approach. Finally, the researchers share that the average interview length consisted of 14 minutes, which seems exceptionally short for an interview comprised of over 40 questions. Understandably, in order to achieve the breadth of interviewing over 1,000 individuals, the interviews needed to be short. But it leaves me believing that they have only just scratched the surface on this topic.

In summary, the greatest value of this RAND study is its comprehensiveness in scope and scale. As a result, *Working Around the Military* provides a broad-brush picture of where the most salient issues lie with respect to military spouse employment. Related to my own line of inquiry, this study illuminates the critical role relocation plays in the working lives of military spouses, and offers numerous tiny glimpses into how these individuals think and feel about their

situation. The interview portion of this study offered participants an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings with one brief question, but the format of this study did not allow for an in-depth inquiry that is missing in this area. This is a need I hope to address in my research.

### Careers of Their Own

The second study I have chosen to highlight is a recent dissertation conducted on Ramstein Air Base: *Careers of Their Own: Role-Identity Negotiation Among Air Force Officers' Wives* (Dana, 2006). In Dana's own words, "The purpose of this study is to seek out the self-sufficient processes through which some career-oriented, officers' wives merge the traditional wife and careerist role into one, transformational whole" (p. 47). Her contention is that the ideal officer's wife is one who is able to blend a career role with a traditional military wife role. Although the stated intent of Dana's study is different from mine, her findings are directly relevant to my research question. In addition, the fact that Dana focused on a segment of Air Force wives in the same location where I conducted my research made this an important piece of inquiry to understand. Thus, I will describe Dana's approach as well as her findings, noting some key limitations to her study.

Dana takes a mixed-method approach, starting with an introductory survey of 93 participants, followed by in-depth oral life history interviews of 15 participants identified through the survey. She obtains her sample through the Ramstein Officers' Spouses Club (ROSC), a social organization for Air Force spouses stationed in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

Dana's survey tool was used primarily as an instrument for selection to find interview participants who fit her ideal-type profile. In her survey of 93 officers' wives, she attempts to identify participants reporting both high career-identity and high participation in the military community. Dana identifies her group of potential participants as those survey respondents in

the top quartile on both of these dimensions, and then selects a participant group that is diverse with respect to several factors (age, military sponsor's rank, parental status, career field, current occupational status, and previous military locations).

Recognizing the significant impact of frequent relocation, Dana organizes her interviews around a PCS event history. She begins the interviews by asking participants to complete a "life event grid" organized by military assignment. The interview questions then focus on exploring the participant's experience at each assignment. The following is a checklist of questions Dana used to discuss each assignment:

What was life like during your time at (location)?

What were your immediate career goals when you arrived at (location)?

What career-related obstacles did you encounter while there?

How about opportunities?

In general, how did you spend your time at (location)?

(p. 292)

Dana then follows up this line of questioning by asking participants to discuss highs and lows in their experiences. Interestingly, Dana's interview protocol does not seem to address her stated research question of understanding the ideal careerist-traditional wife. Instead, what she accomplishes is exploring the thoughts and feelings of her participants as they pertain to their working lives, exactly my point of focus. Therefore, although her intentions differed from mine, her findings provide important information for my research.

Dana uses her interview data as the foundation for discussing her findings. The analysis of her interview data is divided into two parts – analysis of the life course charts and content analysis of the interview transcripts. The life course charts were completed at the beginning of

each interview, and reflect satisfaction trends over time with respect to career, military, and life in general. Dana asked each participant to rate their satisfaction level on each of these dimensions for each of their previous military assignments, and then plotted the trend lines for further discussion in the interview. Dana uses these life course charts to identify critical events that consistently marked highs and lows in reported satisfaction. These critical events include entry into military life, relocation, parenting, change in work-status, and length of time in one location. Her primary conclusion here is that there is a tendency for two of the three dimensions to be in sync for most people, but that all three are rarely in convergence.

Dana uses the narratives from her interviews as the primary support for her findings. She skillfully includes compelling anecdotes to illustrate the experiences of Air Force officers' wives; however, she provides few details regarding her data analysis steps, making it difficult to evaluate her claims. She states that she conducted a content analysis, but does not provide any information regarding the codes she used or the frequency of her results. While the stories from her interviews are insightful and meaningful, Dana limits the trustworthiness of her findings by not sharing any summary statistics from her content analysis.

Dana's primary argument in her discussion section is that maintaining career-identity requires a combination of behavioral adaptation and cognitive adaptation. In her analysis, Dana applies identity control theory to explain how Air Force officers' wives adjust both behaviorally and cognitively to preserve their career identity. She ultimately finds that successfully maintaining career-identity has as much to do with changing one's definition and expectations of career as it does with one's strategies to pursue such a career. In Dana's model, the ideal wife is one who chooses a career suitable for military life, lowers her expectations, and adjusts both her behavior and definition of career in order to support her husband's role.

Although Dana's primary finding is not the subject of my focus, the data from her study reveal rich thoughts and feelings shared by her participants about their efforts to maintain some kind of working life while relocating frequently. The stories and anecdotes from her participants indicate that the process of integrating work and military roles is a painful one, and one that consistently requires self-sacrifice. While the limitations of Dana's study prevent one from drawing any definitive conclusions, this piece of research provides some evidence to me that my research population will have significant thoughts and feelings to share about their experiences related to working life and being a military wife.

#### Relocation, Gender, and Emotion

Sue Jervis is a former psychotherapist and current wife of a British naval officer. In her doctoral dissertation, she examines the psycho-social impact felt by British military wives as the result of overseas relocation (Jervis, 2009). For purposes of this literature review, I will draw upon both Jervis' dissertation (2009) and her recently published book (2011), which is based on her dissertation research. Although Jervis does not emphasize work or employment issues as the main thrust of her research question, she does find that loss of employment or career is a significant psychic loss for many of the military spouses that she interviews. Jervis refers to her participants as "military wives," but she does include one male spouse in her study.

Jervis' research is based on these qualitative interviews, which she analyzes from a psychoanalytic perspective. She queries her participants about their experiences of relocation and what it has been like for them. Drawing upon Melanie Klein's theory of splitting, Jervis demonstrates in her findings that military wives deal with the psychic losses created by relocation by splitting off parts of themselves, and in the process either repressing those aspects of themselves or projecting them onto others. She contends that as a result of this splitting

phenomenon, military wives experience “emotional fragmentation.” Jervis explains, “External losses, such as those sustained when servicemen’s wives relocate, often leave individuals feeling that they have lost important aspects of their inner selves, rendering them, at least temporarily, ‘in bits’” (2011, p. 174).

Continuing with Jervis’ argument, in order for military wives to recover their psychic health, they must grieve the losses they have experienced, and reclaim the parts of themselves that have been repressed or projected. Unfortunately, this process of reparation is impeded both by gender roles and military culture. Jervis claims that wives but not husbands become “incorporated” in the military culture when living overseas, because the role of military spouse holds gender-specific expectations. The result is that wives collude with the military system to keep them in their traditional roles. Connecting back to psychoanalytic theory, Jervis explains that women are conditioned from birth to accept a subservient role, and willingly meet cultural gendered expectations in an effort to seek love and approval. Compounding this dynamic is the “stoic” masculine nature of the military culture, which prevents its members from expressing emotion. Military wives who are incorporated into the military culture accept this norm, and downplay their own painful emotions, further preventing their ability to heal and regain a whole sense of self. Jervis sums up this dynamic in the following way:

Servicemen’s wives’ incorporation means that they often identify with the stoic military attitude of “getting on with it”. Since this attitude accepts without question a duty that may demand the ultimate sacrifice, one’s life, it barely registers, let alone grieves over, less devastating losses, thereby impeding the mourning that would facilitate creative adaptation and personal growth. Grieving

following relocation becomes more problematic when loss is not recognized, felt, expressed and worked through, carrying the risk of an impoverished emotional life. (2011, p. 51)

Jervis uses a “psychoanalytically-informed reflexive research method” (2009, p. 133) to arrive at her conclusions. In addition to analyzing her interview data to look for themes about the participants’ unconscious processes, she also uses her own emotional and physical reactions to gauge what may be happening with her participants. In order to assist in seeing her own blind spots, she regularly consults with other psycho-social researchers about her findings. Here Jervis gives one example of how she uses her personal reaction in an interview to identify what may be going on with the participant:

For example, whilst interviewing Karen, who appeared to be philosophically resigned to repeated relocation, I had noticed some discomfort in my throat and then realised that I was feeling rather sad and swallowing repeatedly. Thereafter I became aware that Karen was swallowing a lot too. Listening to the recorded interview and hearing once more Karen’s rather “flat” speech, my throat again felt constricted, leaving me wondering whether Karen had been obliged to “swallow” painful feelings that had become “stuck in her throat” and therefore remained unspoken (denied). (2009, p. 154)

Jervis’ transparent demonstration of reflexivity greatly enhances the trustworthiness of her research. While she does not specifically focus on employment-related issues, her research

reveals how relocation and the changes associated with it, may be psychologically damaging and lead to a loss of self.

*Situating my research question in the ongoing conversation*

The literature on military spouses has grown tremendously in the last few decades, with particular attention given to employment issues. This literature review has addressed the portion of existing research that either directly relates to the employment of military spouses, or indirectly informs that experience through the socio-cultural depiction of military wives. I have excluded from this literature review a plethora of other research efforts focusing on general psycho-social problems for the military spouse, including the stress of military deployments, parenting challenges, and domestic violence. Because DoD has defined family readiness to include all aspects of family life that could represent a vulnerability to the military, there is no shortage of topics included in recent research.

This literature review demonstrates the breadth of research on military spouses, including their employment experiences and their lived experiences in general, yet nobody has fully addressed my research question. Several studies have included pieces of this, but no previous research that I have found has fully addressed how military wives think and feel about their desire to work within a lifestyle of frequent relocation.

I have focused on several distinct bodies of literature in this review. The research question for my study is *“How do geographically mobile Air Force wives who desire a working life interpret their experiences related to their desire to craft a working life while frequently relocating with their husbands?”* Through this question, my intent was to add new knowledge in a way that prior research has not adequately answered. My desire was to explore how military wives think and feel about their experiences of pursuing or desiring paid employment while

moving frequently. I wanted to know what this experience has meant to them and how it has impacted how they feel about themselves in any way as a result. In doing so, I have added an important complement to the discussion of military readiness. That is, what impact does this lifestyle have on individuals? There is value in understanding the lived experience of these women regardless of the operational implications to the military. My research question represents an attempt to address the major gap that lies at the intersection of these studies – a need to understand the thoughts and feelings of military wives who want their own working lives as they follow their husbands’ highly mobile military careers.

While my research question has obvious relevance for the military community, there are significant implications for the civilian world as well. The experiences of military wives are similar to those of any spouse who may find herself a “trailing wife” in any industry. Geographic relocation is not unique to the military by any means, and impacts many walks of life, especially in today’s global economy. In addition, my findings from this study point to issues faced by married working women in general, not only those who move. The ways in which gender roles are constructed and perpetuated continue to challenge women who wish to work and have a family. This study offers unique insight into this problem through an extreme version of a work-family issue. Whether the application is military wife, trailing spouse, or working mother, the significance of this research lies in the importance of understanding the serious psychic toll women experience when there is a lack of fit between their work-related desires and the rest of their lives.

## CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will describe my research methods, including my approach to participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. I will conclude with a brief discussion of limitations related to my methodology.

### *Participant selection*

The following section describes my criteria for including and excluding participants, my approach to recruiting participants, and my method for selecting participants. My goal was to seek a group of women engaged in frequent relocation who have a desire for employment, whether or not they have been successful in that regard. I wanted to learn from women from a variety of backgrounds, and include the experiences of women who have been military wives for many years and those who are brand new to this lifestyle.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

In order to be included in this study, the participant was required to be a civilian wife of an active-duty Air Force member stationed in the Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC), Germany. Although Ramstein Air Base is the primary duty station for most Air Force members in this part of Germany, there are several smaller bases within a network of local military installations, known as the KMC. Many people within the KMC live and work across multiple installations; for this reason, I am choosing to draw a geographic eligibility boundary around the KMC rather than restricting eligibility to those assigned to Ramstein Air Base.

Each participant was required to have at least one Permanent Change of Station (PCS) during her marriage, with a minimum relocation frequency of one PCS every 3 years. Although the average military member experiences a PCS every 2-3 years (Burrell, 2006), there are some career fields that require minimal moving or no relocation at all. I was contacted by one

volunteer for the study whom I excluded because she and her husband had only experienced one PCS in the past 17 years. I intentionally included participants who have already had the experience of frequent relocation, and those who may be early in a military career but anticipating a future lifestyle of frequent relocation. Other studies have shown that there is a curvilinear relationship between the stress of moving and the number of moves experienced by military wives (Burrell, 2006). That is, moving is most stressful for the most junior wives, those inexperienced with moving, and the most senior wives, those exhausted by moving. In order to capture the range of these experiences, I included wives who share a lifestyle of frequent relocating, regardless of how many moves they have personally experienced to date.

Because I have included both junior and senior wives in my study, and seniority is highly correlated with moving experience, I have included both women who have relocated only once and those who have relocated many times. On average, the women in my study have moved 3.6 times with the military, which is quite similar to the overall profile of the average Air Force spouse, who has moved 3.0 times on average (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011). Everyone in my study has moved at least once, and Ramstein represents the first PCS for 6 participants. Olivia has experienced the most number of relocations by far, with a total of 11 PCS moves.

The final criterion for inclusion in this study was a stated desire for paid employment, regardless of current employment status. In order to understand a wide range of experiences related to working life, it was important to reach not only military wives actively pursuing or seeking employment, but also those who fit the profile of “discouraged workers.” Discouraged workers are those who desire employment, but have opted out of the labor force due to a variety of obstacles, such as the quality of available jobs, the stress and costs associated with frequent switching, and child care challenges.

I also applied several criteria for exclusion from this study. I excluded women who themselves are active duty or reserve members of the military. Although they may face unique challenges to their situations, they do not share the experience with civilians in needing to find their own employment with each PCS.

Another criterion for exclusion relates to marital status. Because the military only supports the PCS of the military member and legal dependents, unmarried partners do not experience military-sponsored moves, thus were excluded from this study. Similarly, same-sex couples are not yet recognized by the military and wives in such relationships are not given dependent status. Therefore, I have excluded them from this study as well.

In order to ensure availability for face-to-face interviews, I excluded anyone who expected to PCS from Ramstein within 6 months of being selected for the study. I also excluded any wives who I know socially, and anyone married to a member of my husband's career field, Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI). My intent was to minimize possible biases from interviewing friends, and avoid any discomfort participants may have felt if they viewed me as part of their own hierarchy. Although I do not formally hold any rank or status within the military hierarchy, I carry informal power afforded by my status as an AFOSI squadron commander's wife. I did not want to abuse this status in any way by recruiting wives of AFOSI members who may have felt obligated to participate, or who may have had concerns about sharing their stories with the commander's wife.

Because my focus is paid employment, I have excluded wives who claim interest only in unpaid work. Since the military has historically relied on the unpaid labor of military wives in various volunteer roles, there does not appear to be a conflict between the pursuit of unpaid work and expectations placed on women by the military lifestyle. By contrast, the pursuit of paid

employment is fraught with tensions and obstacles, as will be shown. Finally, I have excluded any women under the age of 18 in order to avoid any possible risks associated with interviewing minors.

### Recruiting participants

Using the snowball sampling method, I recruited participants through several informal channels, since I did not obtain approval to solicit volunteers through official military channels. I contacted the two private spouse clubs, Ramstein Officers' Spouses Club (ROSC), and Ramstein Enlisted Spouses' Association (RESA). The presidents of ROSC and RESA allowed me to bring my questionnaires to a membership event. At the ROSC event, I was allowed to make a brief announcement explaining my study, then sit at a back table to collect questionnaires from anyone interested in participating. I received 11 completed questionnaires from ROSC members, 8 of which met my eligibility requirements. I was not allowed to attend the RESA membership event because nonmembers were not allowed at this event. Instead, I dropped off my questionnaires with the president and collected them from her after the meeting. I received 9 completed questionnaires from RESA members, 8 of which met my eligibility requirements.

In addition to utilizing spouse clubs, I sent an announcement about my study via e-mail to my personal network of friends and acquaintances, and asked them to forward the announcement to anyone they know. I also posted announcements in the local newspaper, *The Kaiserslautern American*, and on [militarymoms.stripes.com](http://militarymoms.stripes.com), [ramsteinunderground.com](http://ramsteinunderground.com), [ramsteinyardsales.com](http://ramsteinyardsales.com), websites utilized by KMC military spouses to obtain information about resources, and the Ramstein Air Base Facebook page. Throughout the recruiting process, I also relied on word of mouth, mentioning my study to people I interacted with, and asking for referrals to potential participants. See Appendices A and B for the messages I used in recruiting.

In total, I identified 39 interested volunteers, 31 of which met the study's eligibility requirements. Of the 8 individuals who did not meet eligibility requirements, 3 did not PCS frequently enough (one of whom was also eliminated because her husband is a member of AFOSI), 2 were planning to PCS within the next 6 months, one said she was not married to an active-duty member in the KMC, one said she was not interested in paid employment, and I eliminated one person due to a newly formed social relationship between us.

I offered a variety of incentives for participation in this study. The first and most important was the opportunity to share one's story, raise awareness of what it is like to be a military wife, and help others in the process of making this private experience public. I also advertised that I would host a post-study group discussion with any study participants who wished to come together to hear the results of the study and discuss them together. I also committed to sharing a summary of the findings with any participants who may be interested in the information, whether they participated in the group discussion or not. Finally, I offered to reimburse participants for any child care costs incurred during the interviews.

### Selecting participants

My goal was to select a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 25 participants from the pool of eligible volunteers. For purposes of selection and confirmation of eligibility, I asked volunteers to complete a brief questionnaire (Appendix C). This questionnaire includes a combination of criteria for inclusion and exclusion, as well as demographic characteristics I used to maximize diversity among the participants selected. I distributed this questionnaire in a variety of ways, depending on how I came into contact with the volunteer. For groups where I was able to make face-to-face presentations, I brought paper copies of the questionnaire and asked interested volunteers to complete the questionnaire at that time. For volunteers solicited

via e-mail, I attached an electronic version of the questionnaire to the recruiting e-mail. These volunteers then sent me their completed questionnaire via e-mail. For individuals who contacted me in response to my other announcements or word of mouth, I offered them the choice of completing the questionnaire electronically or on paper.

When selecting participants, I set minimum diversity criteria for four demographic variables: rank, pay grade, race, and employment status. The purpose of this approach was to increase the likelihood of learning about a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. With respect to rank, I wanted to ensure that enlisted and officers' wives were both represented in my study. Although enlisted personnel outnumber officers 4 to 1 (Department of Defense, 2007), the voices of officers' wives have dominated the military spouse literature (Wherry, 2000). Therefore, I set a selection minimum of 10 enlisted wives.

Experiences also vary by seniority within the rank system; therefore, I set a selection minimum of at least 3 participants from each of the following pay grade groupings. For comparison sake, I have noted the current demographic breakdown by pay grade according to the 2008 survey of active-duty spouses (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2009):

- Junior enlisted wives (E1 to E4) – 22% of all Air Force spouses
  - Senior enlisted wives (E5 to E9) – 56% of all Air Force spouses
  - Junior officers' wives (O1 to O3) – 11% of all Air Force spouses
  - Senior officers' wives (O4 to O6) – 11% of all Air Force spouses
- (Note: I did not pursue any volunteers from the General officer ranks above O6.)*

The purpose of ensuring some racial diversity within the participant group is also to enhance the possibility of learning about a diverse range of experiences. In 2010, 85% of Air Force spouses were White, 8% were African American, 11% were Hispanic/Spanish/Latino, 7% were Asian, and 1% were Native American (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011). The fact that these numbers exceed 100% in total reflects two aspects of this survey.

Hispanic/Spanish/Latino was not included in the question about race, so these respondents were forced to select another category, and respondents may have selected more than one choice in their answers. Although the majority of Air Force spouses are White, it was important to ensure that this study included more than their experiences. For this reason, I set a selection minimum of two African American participants, two Latina participants, and two Asian participants.

Finally, I established minimum diversity requirements by employment status. I believed that experiences and perspectives about working life may be different for those who are currently employed compared to those who are not. Recognizing that finding employment can be particularly challenging when stationed outside the United States, I expected that many volunteers for my study would not be currently employed. Therefore, I set a selection minimum of five currently employed participants.

After the completion of my advertising process, I waited one week before compiling my list of initial volunteers. I assembled questionnaires I had received so far, and separated out respondents ineligible for the study based on my inclusion and exclusion criteria. I sent an e-mail to these volunteers thanking them for their interest explaining that they did not meet the criteria for participation (Appendix D).

After my initial round of recruiting, I had received 23 questionnaires from eligible volunteers. Using this group as my eligible pool, I selected participants first based on meeting the diversity criteria described above. I assigned a number to each questionnaire, and created a selection grid to track the demographic characteristics of each respondent (Appendix E). To facilitate this process, I created a stack of numbered index cards, with the number on the card representing a completed questionnaire on the above grid. I then started selecting participants for minimum numbers by race, then pay grade, then employment status, and then rank. Using

this approach, I selected a preliminary set of 20 participants, but found that I had not met my diversity goals. This initial group included no African American or Latina women, 8 enlisted wives, and 2 junior enlisted wives. These four areas represented four demographic groups where I had fallen short of my diversity minimums.

Based on this information, I began contacting the initial 20 participants to schedule interviews, while I continued to recruit additional participants. I extended my study announcements in the newspaper and online venues I had been using. I sent another e-mail to my personal network, informing them that I was still looking for volunteers and personally followed up with any individuals who had expressed some interest in participating but had not yet followed through by returning a survey to me. Finally, once I began my interviews, I asked participants for any friends they might recommend for my study. Whenever possible, I targeted potential volunteers from my under-represented demographic groups. As a result of these efforts, I identified 8 additional eligible volunteers for the study. Of these 8 new volunteers, 2 were African American, 2 were Latina, 4 were enlisted, and 2 were junior enlisted.

Based on these additional volunteers, I now had a mix of participants that met my diversity minimums. However, I quickly began to realize that obtaining commitment and follow-through for an interview was becoming a problem among my volunteer group. Several volunteers were unreachable and did not respond to my telephone or e-mail requests for an interview. Others cancelled interviews at the last minute and then failed to follow up when I attempted to reschedule. With this knowledge, I contacted every eligible volunteer for an interview, hoping that I would achieve sufficient numbers. In the end, I successfully completed interviews with 21 of the 31 eligible volunteers who either completed a questionnaire or expressed interest in participating. (Note: two of these volunteers met eligibility requirements

and expressed interest in participating, but never completed a questionnaire.) Table 1 represents the demographic characteristics of my final participant group. My diversity minimums were not met in the area of race, where I interviewed only 4 people of color. I also interviewed only 8 enlisted wives, short of my minimum target of 10. As a result, my participant group is largely White, and contains an over-representation of officers' wives, and senior officers' wives in particular. I did meet my diversity requirements in terms of pay grade and employment status. I interviewed at least 3 women from each pay grade grouping, and 9 participants were employed at the time of the study.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Participant Demographics*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Rank/Pay Grade</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Employed?*</b>
Andrea	Senior Officer	White	No
Brenda	Senior Officer	African-American	Yes
Charlotte	Junior Officer	White	Yes
Dee	Junior Enlisted	White	Yes
Emily	Senior Officer	White	No
Felice	Junior Officer	White	No
Grace	Senior Officer	Latina	No
Heather	Senior Enlisted	White	No
Isabelle	Senior Enlisted	White	Yes
Joanna	Junior Officer	White	Yes
Katie	Senior Officer	White	No
Kendra	Senior Enlisted	White	Yes
Lisa	Senior Officer	White	Yes
Maria	Senior Officer	Latina	No
Nicole	Senior Officer	Asian	No
Olivia	Senior Enlisted	White	Yes
Phoebe	Senior Enlisted	White	No
Roberta	Senior Officer	White	No
Serena	Junior Enlisted	White	No
Tanya	Junior Enlisted	White	No
Vanessa	Junior Officer	White	Yes

*NOTE: For demographic purposes, I have noted employment status as self-reported by the participant in her questionnaire. For some women, this status changed during the course of the study, and some were uncertain whether they should consider themselves employed or not.*

### *Data collection*

After I selected a participant for the study, I contacted the individual by telephone to arrange an interview. (See Appendix F for the telephone script I used.) The purpose of this phone call was to confirm their interest and availability in participating, introduce myself and establish some initial rapport, explain the purpose of the study and the steps involved for them, reassure them about their anonymity, and schedule the interview. If I was unable to reach the participant by phone, I attempted to make contact via e-mail. After I scheduled an interview, I sent confirmation and directions via e-mail, and also sent a reminder e-mail to each participant the day before our scheduled time. In some cases, if I did not receive confirmation, I also followed up by phone to confirm the appointment.

I chose to use qualitative interviews as my method of inquiry for this study, because I believe it is well-suited for my particular research question, and this is typically the best approach for understanding individuals' thoughts and feelings in relationship to an experience in their lives (Weiss, 1994). I partially modeled my interviews on Dana's (2006) study of career-identity among Air Force officers' wives at Ramstein. In Dana's study, she initiated her interviews by asking participants to complete an event grid organized by military PCS. This tool allowed participants to create a snapshot of their work history and map it to their experiences with each military assignment. I also utilized this approach, by working with each participant to complete a list of assignments at the beginning of each interview (Appendix G). For each military assignment, I asked for associated dates, the location of the assignment, and a description of any employment.

After completing the life event grid, the remainder of the interview involved an in-depth discussion of each assignment, followed by general questions reflecting on the individual's

overall experience. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the individual's thoughts and feelings about her work or lack thereof while engaged in a lifestyle that requires frequent relocation. I intentionally asked about "work" rather than "career" because I wanted to include all types of workers, not just those with a professional orientation or a long-term focus. As the discussion in the next chapter demonstrates, some women shared their feelings about a career, or lack thereof, when discussing their feelings about their work. Because some individuals seemed to make no distinction between their work and their careers, some of the participant quotes use the word "career" rather than "work." However, I believe that "career" is in fact a unique construct that I did not explore in this study. Rather, I consistently focused my interview questions and data analysis on the concept of "work," allowing participants to define this to include career if they chose to do so. (See Appendix H for a copy of the final interview protocol.)

I offered each participant a choice between two locations for her interview: an office space at a local off-base preschool or my home. My access to the office space was limited to Tuesdays and Thursdays during school hours, and these times did not work for all participants. In the event that the participant wanted to meet at a different time, including evenings or weekends, we scheduled a time to meet at my home. In both locations, the participant and I were the only people present during the interview, and nobody else was able to see or hear our conversations.

At the beginning of each interview, I started by obtaining the participant's informed consent, and asked her to review and sign two copies of the informed consent form (Appendix I). I retained one copy and provided one copy to the participant for her files. At the end of each interview, I offered to reimburse each participant for any child care expenses incurred during the

interview, but no one accepted this offer. I also offered a list of counseling resources (Appendix J) if the participants should later experienced any anxiety or discomfort from our conversation.

Upon completion of each interview, I immediately documented any field notes from the interview, including comments about the overall tone, body language, or other relevant insights that may not appear in the transcript. I also noted my personal reactions to this interview, and identified any assumptions or stereotypes evoked in me by the participant or the interview. I wrote about these feelings as a way of bracketing any presumptions that I needed to be aware of during this process. I also tracked my own thoughts and feelings during the data collection process by keeping a personal journal throughout the process.

After completing each interview, I assigned an alias to each participant, and labeled the audio file with this assigned alias before having the recording transcribed. I hired a professional transcriptionist to transcribe each interview, and sent her no identifying information about the participants. In addition, the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix K).

In order to protect participant confidentiality, I have kept all paper questionnaires, consent forms, and the audiotapes in a secure file box, where they will be maintained for 3 years and then disposed of. Paper documents will be shredded and audiotapes will be erased. In addition, any electronic files with identifying information, such as digital audio files from the interviews, and electronic questionnaires have been placed in a password-protected folder and will be deleted after 3 years. E-mail communications with participants are maintained in an e-mail account accessible only to the researcher. All digital and paper files with identifying information will be destroyed 3 years after the completion of the study.

### *Data analysis*

My first step in data analysis was to review the interview transcripts for accuracy upon receipt of those transcripts. I listened to each audio recording while reading the transcript, and made any required corrections to the transcript itself. I also noted any new reactions I had after listening the interview, and added those comments to my field notes from that interview.

After listening to each interview and correcting all the transcripts, I began content analysis of the data based on current recommendations for analyzing qualitative data (Berg, 2006; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Miller & Crabtree, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2004). I selected eight transcripts for a second reading, and highlighted any text that seemed relevant to my research question. Based on this reading, I identified three dimensions that pertained to all my interviews: (a) thoughts and feelings about working; (b) thoughts and feelings about not working; (c) thoughts and feelings about being a military spouse. I used these dimensions as the basic structure for my coding scheme, and developed a list of themes under each dimension, each one identified by a unique number. I developed this coding scheme as I reviewed the highlighted sections from the subset of eight transcripts I had just read. As I worked through each highlighted section, I either applied an existing code to the text, or created a new one if there was no appropriate existing code to apply. Once I arrived at a preliminary coding scheme, I asked a friend with content analysis experience to test my coding system by attempting to code three transcripts on her own. After comparing her results to mine, I made some revisions to my coding scheme, and then proceeded to code all 21 interview transcripts manually. As I coded each transcript, I created an electronic filing system, cutting and pasting the relevant text into a file for each code. Upon the completion of this initial coding,

I reviewed all the text within each code and decided to rename some codes, combine or eliminate codes, or recode specific sections of text.

After I completed the coding process, I analyzed these results for frequency and patterns. I tabulated the overall frequency of each theme, in order to understand which issues emerge most frequently in the data. In order to look for patterns, I also utilized a spreadsheet organized by dimensions to identify the frequency of each theme by participant. This allowed me to see how themes varied across individuals in the study. (See Appendices L and M for the final version of my coding scheme, and a summary of the results sorted by frequency.)

Based on my content analysis, I reflected on my findings and felt that I still required more information to make sense of the data. As a result, I put the content analysis aside and attempted to analyze the data from a holistic perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), looking for new themes that might emerge from within a participant's story or as an implicit subtext to the experiences of multiple participants. I began by reviewing each transcript again, and then wrote a one-page overview of each participant's story. I then attempted to assign key words to that participant, trying to typify her story in some way. I also went back to my field notes and journal entries, and continued to write in my journal about thoughts and feelings that occurred to me as I immersed myself in the data. As a result of this holistic approach, I identified themes that were not readily apparent in the frequency counts produced by my content analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 summarize the findings from this study, with Chapter 4 focusing on the results of the content analysis and Chapter 5 focusing on the results of the holistic analysis.

#### *Limitations and reflexivity*

There are two primary limitations to my approach: generalizability and personal bias. Regarding generalizability, I acknowledge that the size of my study is small, and that 21

individuals represents a tiny fraction of the Air Force wife population. In addition, since I am confining my study to a single Air Force base outside the United States, there may be some peculiarities to this population. For example, this population may include people more willing to live outside the United States, and therefore may have somewhat different attitudes about how work factors into their lives. Also, I have restricted my study to Air Force wives, somewhat limiting the generalizability to military wives in general. Finally, I recognize that I achieved only limited success in obtaining a diverse group of participants. There is an over-representation of officer wives in my study, with a particularly high number of senior officer wives. In part this is due to the fact that I utilized my personal network to recruit participants. And with respect to race, this study is predominantly based on the experiences of White military wives, since 80% of the study participants are Caucasian. Finally, the findings of this research are applicable only to those military wives who have an interest in paid employment, since I restricted my participant group by this characteristic.

A second limitation to my method lies in my personal relationship to this topic. I recognize that I am limited by the biases and assumptions that come from my own experiences as an Air Force wife. By definition, I am also situated within the Air Force hierarchy and culture, which impacts how others perceive me and may affect their interest in my study. First, I will discuss these limitations due to my role as an AFOSI squadron commander's wife. Then I will turn to the limitations of my personal biases and assumptions.

As an AFOSI squadron commander, my husband is responsible for managing a group of technical specialists who support Air Force investigations throughout Europe. There are at least two ways in which this could impact my study. First, AFOSI is sometimes viewed with suspicion within the Air Force community due to the investigative nature of its work. Other

wives have commented on my AFOSI affiliation in the past, saying, “Gee, it must be hard for you to make friends” or “People must be afraid to talk to you.” This stereotype is usually mentioned in a joking way, and to my knowledge it has not significantly impacted my social interactions. However, I need to recognize that this stereotype reflects some unease and distrust of AFOSI within the Air Force population. To address this issue, I informed the participants about my role as an AFOSI wife in e-mail messages explaining the study or when I introduce myself during the interview scheduling call.

I also consistently informed participants that I conducted this research independently as a student, with no sponsorship in any way by the Air Force. Other than through anonymous findings in my report, I will not be sharing my data with anyone outside the research team. By clarifying my relationship to AFOSI upfront, I hoped to prevent any distrust that could occur from discovering this information later. I also wanted to be as transparent as possible so that potential volunteers could opt out if they were uncomfortable with my AFOSI affiliation. In general, I wanted to provide as much information as possible without making this a distraction from the study itself. I also stressed to my participants that absolutely nobody but me will have access to their identifying information, and the only other person besides me who will hear the interview recordings will be the professional transcriptionist, who has signed a confidentiality agreement.

Although I have no way of knowing who may have opted out of this research because of my AFOSI affiliation, none of my participants expressed any discomfort about AFOSI to me directly. Most of the participants expressed an openness to share their story, and said they were unconcerned about keeping their identity confidential. A few participants wanted reassurance that they would not be identifiable because they were concerned about their husband’s position,

and one participant requested that I not describe her current job in my report, because she did not want to be identified by her boss. In all cases, I have removed any potentially identifiable information in any participant quotes that appear in this document.

Feelings of discomfort about this study, about the topic, or about me as the researcher may have contributed in some way to the high non-response rate among the study volunteers. Of the 31 eligible volunteers for this study, 10 failed to follow through with an interview. Five of these nonrespondents canceled their interviews at the last minute, all citing family or work conflicts on a particular day, but did not reschedule their interviews when I attempted to contact them. The other 5 nonrespondents did not answer my requests to schedule an initial interview. Interestingly, none of these 10 women expressed a desire to drop out of the study. They simply either did not return my phone calls and e-mails, or would postpone talking to me by saying they needed to check their calendar and get back to me, or asking me to call back at a future time.

I considered that there may be something about this group of women that differed from my participant group. However, looking at the demographic characteristics of the non-respondents, they do not appear to differ from the participants I interviewed. Half were officers' wives and half were enlisted wives, 80% were White, and half of them were employed at the time of the study. Once the study was complete, I sent a follow-up e-mail to 9 of the 10 respondents. (I did not attempt to contact the participant for whom I only had a telephone number.) I informed them in my e-mail that I had completed the study, but was looking for their feedback. Since they were among several people who had expressed interest in the study, but never completed an interview, I asked if they would share their reasons for deciding not to interview with me. I received only two responses to this e-mail, both of which said they had simply been too busy to participate.

Sue Jervis (2009) experienced a similar issue in her research with military wives, and suggests that her volunteers may have unconsciously been avoiding the discomfort associated with the research topic. In her case, she initially received questionnaires from 10 women, only 2 of which were willing to participate in an interview. Jervis surmises that the experience of completing the survey may have “(re)connected them with painful psychic experiences which they preferred not to explore” (p. 149).

In addition to Jervis’ explanation of unconscious avoidance, I found myself drawing on my own stereotypes of military wives to explain the nonresponse. As a person who relocates on a regular basis, and interacts with others who do the same, I have noticed a friendly detachment that exists within the military community. In my experience, military wives are exceedingly polite to one another, and often willing to help a complete stranger, yet are also quick to break an association when it doesn’t serve their needs. This is something I’ve noticed in myself. Because we often do not have the time to form strong relationships, we also afford ourselves the freedom of ignoring people or obligations we would like to go away. Because relationships are fleeting, there is no long-term consequence for breaking a commitment to another military wife. “You will soon be forgotten anyway” seems to be the attitude. This generalization fits the pattern that I witnessed in my nonrespondents. Although nobody would tell me that they wished I would go away and they were all perfectly friendly in their interactions with me, I inferred from their behavior a desire to be free of their commitment to this study.

My acceptance of such generalizations is one example of the way in which my personal biases and assumptions impact this study. Having a personal connection to the research topic made it essential that I incorporate reflexivity into my research and bracket my own experience in the process. Higate and Cameron (2006) point out that military research generally suffers

from a lack of reflexivity because this approach is not encouraged in the positivist tradition of research. However, they contend that such reflexivity is especially important in military research because most researchers of military topics have a personal affiliation with the military in some form.

The process of bracketing is important because it forced me as a researcher to consciously examine my own assumptions and make them explicit. This furthers both my own awareness of these limitations, but makes them as transparent as possible to the reader who wishes to understand my findings in a complete context. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) explain that bracketing is “especially important and useful for noticing what things we take for granted and for trying to step outside of them in order to see things in a new way” (p. 40).

As I described in Chapter 1, I became an Air Force wife with no previous experience of the military. Yet, I held certain negative stereotypes of military wives, and actively resisted identifying myself as one. I thought that military wives were generally uneducated and uninterested in pursuing a career. I believed that military wives were interested primarily in being homemakers, and felt no conflict in supporting their husbands’ careers in order to do so. Most importantly, I saw myself as unique in my educated background and desire to pursue a career equal to my husband’s. Although I have met many other women from all types of backgrounds with a wide range of aspirations and skills, remnants of these stereotypes persist in my thinking. Ironically, as someone who has not been employed for several years, I could now easily be seen as a housewife who accommodates herself to her husband’s career.

Similarly, I bring biases about working life to this research. Paid employment has been a primary source of my adult identity, and my sense of self-worth. I recognize that this is not the case for everyone, and that some military wives may not experience the personal impact that I

have felt from having an unstable working life. I have also generally seen the military lifestyle as a constraint and a source of limitation to my working life, while others may experience the military as a source of enhanced opportunity.

These biases are just a few that stem from my personal experience as a military wife. In my attempt to bracket these and other assumptions, I used a personal journal throughout the research process to reflect on my experiences. In addition, I made comments about my personal reactions in a set of field notes after each interview.

Many of the assumptions that I found myself wrestling with dealt with my own recurring stereotypes related to enlisted wives and stay-at-home mothers. First, with respect to rank, I was struck by my own realization of how little I interact socially with enlisted wives. I do have some connections to senior enlisted wives, but I was at a loss to identify a single junior enlisted wife in my entire social circle when I began recruiting for this study. This is both a matter of social status in the military as well as age, given that I am 20 years older than most junior enlisted wives. Before conducting this study, I did not see myself as particularly rank-conscious, but then quickly realized that I have surrounded myself by other people like me.

My interview with Serena showed me how distant my relationship to junior enlisted spouses is, and how foreign their experiences are to me. When she agreed to an interview, she was enthusiastic about participating, but said she did not have a car or driver's license to go anywhere. I was shocked, and wondered to myself how she could survive without being able to get around on her own. I offered to pick her up and drive her to my home for the interview. When I arrived at her housing complex on one of the local Air Force bases, I realized I had never once been to an enlisted apartment on a military base. It seemed cramped and a little depressing. As we chatted on the drive back to my house, I was struck by the enormous power differential

between us. Not only was I the researcher in this relationship, but I clearly had a higher level of economic prosperity than she did, and I could not help but feel that I could easily be her mother. This power differential was reinforced when we approached my home, and Serena said, “Wow, is this just one house?”

As one of the youngest and most junior participants, Serena forced me to reflect on my own personal biases and assumptions related to rank. I also found that some of the power differentials were reflected back to me by my participants at times. Olivia was the most senior enlisted wife among the participants, with 26 years as a military spouse. At one point, she turned her attention on me in the interview to say, “There is a difference about being a military spouse and a dependent wife. If you haven’t gotten that by now you will. I don’t know how long you’ve been married.” The effect of her comment was to put me in my place as someone junior to her in the system. Whether intended or not, I felt reminded that I should be deferring to her as a Chief Master Sergeant’s wife with much more experience than I.

In addition to rank, I found myself grappling with my own stereotypes of stay-at-home mothers. Grace, Nicole, and Maria challenged my assumptions about this role and the women who play it. They were all women I met informally since they are mothers of other children at my daughter’s preschool. I did not know them well, but mentioned the study to them at various points on the school playground. They were all interested in participating. I was a little surprised to learn of their employment interests, because I had labeled them as stereotypical stay-at-home mothers. I had often observed them chatting about shopping or getting together for coffee, and I had dismissed them as women with too much time on their hands. Of course, as I interviewed each of these women, I quickly realized that they all have strong professional backgrounds, and are smart and talented women with various aspirations. Although they have

varying levels of satisfaction with their current status as full-time mothers, they are hardly brainless followers of their husbands. I realized through this process that my initial opinions of them say more about me and the parts of myself that I fear and dislike, than it does about them.

Stereotypes about rank, employment status, and other aspects of identity certainly play a role in this study and have impacted me as the researcher. Although I cannot fully understand the subtleties of these impacts, I hope that my attempts to acknowledge and bracket some of these reactions enhance my ability to be a trustworthy conduit for the stories of my participants. I discussed my bracketing process here because it was a central component of my method. In addition, I have used the Epilogue to further explore and reflect on my own experience as it relates to this research topic and my findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR – THE PARTICIPANTS, THEIR STORIES, AND EMERGENT THEMES

As I described in the preceding chapter, I took a two-step approach to data analysis, comprised of content analysis and holistic analysis. Through content analysis, I coded and tabulated themes from the interview data that were relevant to my research question.

Conversely, in my holistic analysis, I looked at the participant stories as a whole to look for types and patterns. In this chapter, I will present the results of my content analysis, and in the following chapter I will discuss the findings from my holistic analysis. First, I will describe the participants and their stories, then summarize the primary themes that emerged from the participant interviews, focusing on thoughts and feelings related to working, not working, and being a military spouse.

### *Description of the participants*

There are many different ways in which I could have described the 21 participants in my study. I considered describing them by parental status, since I heard distinctly different stories from women with young children compared to women with no children or women with older children. I thought about describing the participants by years of experience with the military or number of moves, since there seems to be a newlywed followed by periods of shock and adjustment.

In the end, however, I chose to typify my participants by their working status, since that is the heart of my research question. Three types of working status emerged in my study: continuous worker, temporarily unemployed, and out of the workforce. The continuous worker group includes anyone who was employed at the time of the interview and demonstrated a consistent history of regular employment during previous military assignments. The temporarily

unemployed group comprises women who worked regularly before moving to Ramstein, but have been unable to work in this location. Finally, women with children who have taken some period of time away from the workforce constitute the out of the workforce group. Regardless of the group into which they were placed, every woman in this study expressed a desire for employment in some way, even if they were not actively working or trying to work at the time of our interview. Table 2 shows a complete list of all participants by grouping.

**Table 2**

*Participants by Grouping*

<b>Continuous Worker</b>	<b>Temporarily Unemployed</b>	<b>Out of the Workforce</b>
Dee	Charlotte	Andrea
Isabelle	Felice	Brenda
Joanna	Heather	Emily
Lisa	Kendra	Grace
Olivia	Nicole	Katie
	Roberta	Maria
	Serena	Phoebe
	Vanessa	Tanya

*Continuous worker*

The “continuous worker” grouping includes five study participants: Dee, Isabelle, Joanna, Lisa, and Olivia. The experiences of this group are quite diverse, with a wide range of ages and seniority within the military. At one end of the spectrum is Dee, one of the youngest participants in the study, recently out of high school and newly married. At the other end of the spectrum is Olivia, a military spouse for 26 years, married to a Chief Master Sergeant on the verge of retirement. What all five of these women share in common is that they were employed at the time of the interview, and had a consistent history of prior employment. The following is a brief description of these participants.

**Dee** moved to Germany a year ago, right after marrying her husband, whom she met in high school. She is currently working at a retail job on base while taking college classes. After completing her college degree, she hopes to become a teacher with the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) system. Dee has very positive feelings about being a military spouse, and feels lucky to be able to live overseas and get away from a negative family environment. She admits that the first few months of her marriage were difficult because she was temporarily unemployed and lacked a purpose, but is now happy to be working and in school.

**Isabelle** is also a newlywed, having been married only 2 years. Ramstein is her first assignment as a military spouse. As an experienced DoD civilian employee, Isabelle was easily able to find work in her career field as a contracting specialist upon her arrival in Germany. Isabelle expresses ambivalent feelings about working, saying she had thought it might be nice to stay home for awhile, since she had spent several years as a single mother and sole breadwinner prior to her current marriage. However, she also says that she feels lazy when she does stay at home, and needs work to keep her feeling motivated.

**Joanna** is a nurse, who consistently has been able to find employment throughout the course of four military assignments. Joanna's current marriage is her second Air Force marriage. Joanna left her first husband because he was abusive, and feels proud that she was able to later finish nursing school and provide for her children on her own for several years. She is also very proud of her accomplishments and loves helping people through her work. Her sense of pride extends to the military and she says she is proud that her husband is "helping America stay free."

**Lisa** is married to a senior officer with a high-profile position on Ramstein. In her 12 years of marriage, Lisa has moved seven times. Although after the first several years, she

abandoned her dream of being a commercial pilot, Lisa has adapted by finding employment with an organization that monitors air traffic control patterns. While Lisa has had to compromise her initial aspirations, and has faced some periods of unemployment, she has maintained both a pragmatic attitude and relatively consistent employment history. Lisa was a new mother at the time of our interview, having given birth to her first child just 3 weeks before.

**Olivia** is the most experienced participant, with 26 years as a military spouse and 11 assignments. Her husband is a Chief Master Sergeant with a high-level position, planning to retire soon. Olivia has consistently worked throughout her husband's military assignments, early on in service jobs and medical support roles, and later in office-management and healthcare administration roles. Although she has generally been able to work, she laments her belief that she has never had a career. Olivia says that working is very important to her, and that doing so allows her to maintain her sense of self-worth and identity, preventing her from feeling like a "dependent wife."

#### *Temporarily unemployed*

This group of participants includes those women who characterized themselves as unemployed at the time of the interview, were recently employed, and were attempting to find employment in the near future. The eight women included Charlotte, Felice, Heather, Kendra, Nicole, Roberta, Serena, and Vanessa. The following is a brief description of these participants:

**Charlotte** is an engineer by training, and has been unable to find employment in her field since moving to Ramstein. This is her second military assignment in 3 years of marriage. Although she considers herself unemployed, she is working occasionally as a substitute teacher. Charlotte says that her confidence is shaken from not being able to find work here, and wonders if her 3 years of engineering experience will be the sum total of her career. Even though many

people told her that it would be difficult to find employment overseas, she is still surprised that she hasn't been able to work. She feels like a "bump on a log" because she does not have children yet to keep her busy, and feels guilty to have the luxury of not working when so many other people have to work for a living.

**Felice** is the most recently married of all the study participants, having been married only 6 months at the time of our interview. With several years of experience as a human resources professional, this is Felice's first significant experience with unemployment. When she could find no other option, she considered taking a position well below her qualifications, but decided not to. She is frustrated by her situation, and sums up her situation as feeling "defeated." Felice shares that her feelings of self-worth come from her accomplishments, and she wishes she had a job to make her feel better about herself. Her dream is to become a nurse, but she is having difficulty finding the right nursing school that will fit with her military lifestyle. She is concerned that consistently putting her own needs behind those of her husband will not be healthy for their relationship.

**Heather** recently finished nursing school and started her first nursing job just a few months before her move to Germany. She has been unable to find a nursing job here, and has opted to volunteer full-time as a nurse with the Red Cross to maintain her credentials. Heather says that being unemployed makes her "feel like crap" and that she does not want to lose the training she invested so much time in. Heather is a former member of the Air Force herself, and has been a military spouse for 11 years. She spent several of those years as a stay-at-home mom before returning to school. Being unemployed reminds her how she felt as a teenage mom in high school. She felt that she was labeled as someone who would never amount to anything, and it is important to her that she be able to overcome that label.

**Kendra** is a former member of the Air Force, having separated from active duty 5 years ago. Kendra met and married her husband while in the Air Force, and therefore has experience as a military spouse, both as a civilian and as active duty. Kendra speaks negatively about her work experience within the military, saying it was too much for her to handle as a 19-year-old airman loading bombs and unloading bodies from aircraft. She was confused by her feelings about the impact of war, and also disliked the sexual harassment she experienced in a male-dominated career field. When she left military service, Kendra was shocked by her change in status when she became a “dependent” spouse and “lost her identity” to her husband. She has been able to find jobs in each of the two locations they have since moved to, and says she likes moving around because it allows her to be a “job person” rather than restrict herself to a single career focus. She is currently between jobs and recently accepted a position in the same air terminal where she used to work as an airman.

**Nicole** has spent her career working for a DoD agency, which has allowed her to work at every military assignment so far, until coming to Ramstein, where the agency has no presence. Nicole was excited to come to Germany, both to be overseas and to have a much-needed break from work. After a few months, however, she began to focus on looking for work again, and has become frustrated by the lack of options here. She is particularly concerned that, if she wants to maintain her federal employment, she may have to take a position well below her qualifications. This is an emotional issue for her, and likens it to having to repeat freshman year when you are already a senior in high school. She describes her feelings as a “roller coaster,” at times happy that she is free to have lunch or work-out during the day, and other times frustrated that she wants to work but cannot.

**Roberta**, another newlywed, left her job as a midwife to accompany her new husband to Germany. She says she was naïve to think she could easily work here, and was frustrated trying to find work in her field during her first 6 months at Ramstein. Roberta says she has struggled with feelings of being “irrelevant” and a sense of laziness without the structure that work provides. After the first few months of frustration, Roberta says she experienced a mindshift. Therefore, she is now able to appreciate the opportunities she has to do other things during this period of unemployment, such as attend graduate school, travel, or start a family.

**Serena** has been married 2 years, and Ramstein is her husband’s first military assignment. She and her husband met in college, after which they both attempted to start careers but ended up working multiple part-time, low-wage jobs. They married after Serena’s husband decided to join the military. By enlisting in the military, her husband has provided them increased financial stability and access to healthcare they didn’t have before. Although Serena is frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities in her career field (writing and editing), she feels that her husband’s decision to join the Air Force was a wise one. She often feels lazy and stuck in the house because she is not working and does not have a driver’s license to go places on her own. Serena copes with these feelings by working on her writing projects. She initially felt bad that she was not working, but has since realized that she is contributing to her marriage in other ways. Serena notes this realization as a sign that she is growing up. She hopes to start a family soon.

**Vanessa** is one of the few participants who was already married when her husband decided to join the military. They decided together that the military would provide the greatest financial security for them as a family and allow them to live on one income. From the beginning of their marriage, Vanessa knew that she wanted to stay home when they had children.

Vanessa spent several years working in preschool and childcare settings, and determined that she did not want to leave her own children in such environments. When she eventually had two children, she was happy to follow through with her plan of being a stay-at-home mother. After a few years, however, she began to feel that she wanted something more for herself and launched her own photography business. Vanessa describes the joy and pride she feels from doing something she loved, while still being able to be there when her kids needed her. Recently, Vanessa was forced to close her business when she learned that her home-based business does not meet the requirements of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) governing U.S. military activities in Germany. Although she plans to resume her photography business when she returns to the United States, Vanessa still feels “cheated” that her business has been temporarily taken away from her.

#### *Out of the workforce*

Eight of the study participants are currently stay-at-home mothers, who have opted out of the workforce for a period of time for a variety of reasons. The participants in this grouping include Andrea, Brenda, Emily, Grace, Katie, Maria, Phoebe, and Tanya. Although they all share the experience of staying home with young children currently, they represent a range of situations. Some are actively seeking employment or preparing to re-enter the workforce, while others have given up altogether on the possibility of working. In the middle, there are a few who are content to stay home for a period of time, but look forward to the day when they will feel it is right for them to go back to work. The following is a brief description of these participants.

**Andrea** is happy to stay home with her two young children, but also says she can't wait until her children start preschool, allowing her to go back to work. Andrea has worked in a variety of administrative jobs over four military assignments, and is contemplating a career in

accounting. She says she is satisfied in her current role because she feels like she isn't failing at what she has set out to do. As long as she knows she is a good mother, she feels good about what she is doing. She looks forward to working again because she likes the social interaction gained from a work environment, and she misses having something for herself, and being able to contribute to her family.

**Brenda** has been married to a pilot for 14 years, and now has three school-age children. She is an accountant by trade, but has not worked in her field since becoming a mother. While her children were younger, she made several attempts to work part-time, but found that it was too difficult to maintain any employment and be the sole caretaker while her husband was frequently away. She says this established a pattern where she was responsible for everything in the household and her husband was responsible for nothing. When they arrived in Germany, Brenda started working full-time for the first time since her children were born. She enjoyed the job, but found it stressful to juggle her new job with all her commitments at home. At the time of our interview, she had just resigned from her position at her husband's request. He was not comfortable with the impact Brenda's work was having on their family and household. Brenda expressed her anger and resentment that he is unwilling to give "even just a little" and says that the military has bred a kind of "selfishness" in his attitude. She is discouraged, and feels that she is too tired to contemplate a career for herself again, even after military life is over.

**Emily** has been a stay-at-home mother for the past several years, and was preparing to re-enter the workforce at the time of our interview. She had recently accepted a human resources position on base, and was excited about resuming a career path she put on hold when she became a mother. Emily explains that she has been satisfied to stay home with her children, because she has seen it as a job, but that she has also always wanted a career for herself. Now that she is

about to take a federal position, she is hopeful that she will be able to stay in the federal system and maintain employment at any future military assignment. She describes this feeling as being able to “check the last box” in her life, and although she was happy before, now she feels complete.

**Grace**, a mother of two school-age children, feels fortunate to be able to stay home with them. She has never been comfortable with the prospect of childcare, and says that living overseas for several years has given her the justification not to work and to stay home with her children. At the same time, Grace worries about setting an example for her two girls because she wants them to have good career options to choose from. As a former project manager in the high tech industry, Grace does miss the feeling of accomplishment and social interaction of a work environment. She would like to return to work, but says she would only consider a job that would allow the right balance between work and family.

**Katie** has two young children, and has moved six times in 9 years of marriage. Before having children, Katie worked as an athletic trainer, her “passion.” Even now, after several years of not working, she still claims her identity as an athletic trainer, “That’s what I do.” Now that her children are school-aged, Katie would like to work again, but is finding it difficult to do so. She wants to ensure that any work she does will still allow her to be there when her kids need her, and athletic training often requires evening commitments. Since her pilot husband is away so often, she cannot rely on him for childcare responsibilities, describing herself as a “married single mom.” Katie misses her work as an athletic trainer, and feels that part of her identity was lost when her career was “put on the backside.” She says that giving up a part of herself is a painful sacrifice that she has made for her family, but feels like it is worth it. She tries to accept the situation, but also wishes for a little opportunity for her own career again.

**Maria**, an attorney from Puerto Rico, has struggled to maintain her career since becoming a military spouse. She admits that her family was concerned when she left a high-profile prosecutor's job to marry her husband, but she was in love and hopeful that she would be able to practice law wherever she was. Looking back 12 years later, she now says she would tell any woman dating a military man, "End it now before you fall in love." Maria found it overwhelming to study and take the bar in each new state she moved to, and was devastated when she found good jobs only to move again. Finally, 6 years ago, she learned she was pregnant while studying for a third bar exam, and was too ill to complete the exam. She has not practiced law since that time. Maria was initially very depressed and ashamed by her feelings of failure, but then forgave herself and decided to focus on being a mother. Now that her daughter is entering school, Maria is ready to work again and is frustrated by the lack of opportunities. She sums up her experience by saying the military lifestyle forces women to be stay-at-home mothers whether they want to or not.

**Phoebe** did not intend to be a stay-at-home mother, but has found herself in that situation since separating from the military and marrying her current husband of 2 years. When Phoebe met her husband, she was an active duty member of the Air Force, and a single mother with one son. Phoebe speaks with pride of her military service, and states that being in the military meant everything to her. As a photojournalist in the Air Force, she loved going to work, and says that her work gave her the energy to be a better mother when she got home. After moving from Germany to Texas, she learned she was pregnant and wanted to be with the baby's father, who was still stationed in Germany. After several attempts to obtain permission to move back to Germany, Phoebe decided she had no choice but to leave the military and marry the baby's father. Now she feels lost without her military identity and says that being a stay-at-home

mother of two children is exhausting. She is seeking therapy for depression and has had thoughts about ending her life.

**Tanya**, who stays home with two children under the age of 3, reports that these have been “the worst 3 years of my life” because she has either been pregnant or nursing since getting married and moving to Germany. Her biggest complaint is that there are no breaks from the job of motherhood, and that being home all the time makes her feel “stir crazy.” She would like to work, but has not been able to find suitable employment. She is also reluctant to place her children in childcare, both because she doesn’t want to miss important moments with them, and because it is expensive. Tanya likes to organize things for people, and dreams of having a “real career” in an administrative or secretarial role.

#### *Summary of themes*

The preceding descriptions typify the study participants into three groupings to offer three general profiles of the stories that emerged in their interviews. Although their work histories are diverse, they share a great deal in common in how they feel about the role of work in their lives.

The primary themes from participant interviews fall into thoughts and feelings about three dimensions of their experiences: working, not working, and being a military spouse. The first two dimensions are directly related to my intent to explore how military wives interpret their experiences related to their employment or desire for employment. Although the third dimension is not directly related to my research question, I found that themes about one’s military spouse identity were closely related to how they felt about their lifestyle of frequent relocation and the need to determine how their work fits, or does not, in such a context. Within these three dimensions, I identified 10 primary themes that I will highlight in this discussion (see Table 3).

These themes are not specific to any participant's current work status, as all the women in this study have experienced periods of working and not working, even if the circumstances or lengths of these periods may vary.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Themes by Dimension*

<b>Working</b>	<b>Not Working</b>	<b>Being a Military Spouse</b>
#1 Working makes me feel good	#1 Not working makes me feel bad	#1 Frequent relocation is a double-edged sword
#2 I feel underemployed	#2 Motherhood and housework aren't enough	#2 I didn't know what I was getting into
#3 Working has to be worth the costs	#3 I have accepted my situation	#3 I have mixed feelings about my military spouse identity
	#4 I am lucky that I don't have to work	

*Thoughts and feelings about working*

**THEME #1: WORKING MAKES ME FEEL GOOD**

Every participant in this study expressed some sentiment that working makes her feel good in some way. Because I only selected participants who expressed a desire for employment, it may not be surprising that they are unanimous in their positive feelings toward work. Yet the depth and variety of these feelings was telling in the way the women spoke about their experiences. Although the women I talked to used different words to describe their feelings, or emphasized different positive aspects of employment, they all found something about working that mattered to them. The following discussion about this theme portrays the variety of ways in which participants described positive feelings about working.

The majority of participants described work as fun, and expressed pride in their accomplishments at work. Often these feelings of enjoyment and pride are inter-related. Phoebe

expresses an example of both feelings when she talks about her former role as a military member:

I loved taking pictures, and I loved being around Colonels and only being an Airman, and not feeling nervous because it's my job. I loved being in the background and behind the scenes. I got (to) meet bands. I got to go to other countries... Even when it was the worst day ever, I still loved my job.

Similarly, Joanna talks with great animation about the fun of caring for patients, and then shares her feeling of accomplishment from becoming a nurse. She exudes both a sense of pride and joy in her work that feed off each other:

I felt a strong sense of accomplishment and I felt very proud of myself, because that's a hard thing. If you ever went through nursing school, that's a bear...And I was able to prove to my kids (that) I don't have to sit back and collect welfare and collect food stamps, and just be. I did something with myself. I got up and I fought.

When Lisa describes her previous work as a commercial pilot, she explains that her desire to fly is both a "gut reaction" because she loves it, and that she is also attracted to the idea of doing something that not many people or women in particular get to do. Here she describes her feelings:

I suppose at a very basic level I don't think I've ever gotten out of an aircraft without a smile on my face at the end of the day. So it is very much about...the sort of gut reaction again. I suppose

some of it's independence, some of it's the achievement of a challenge. And it's just simply fun.

Tanya also uses an airplane metaphor when describing the excitement she feels about office work. Like many of the other participants, her sense of joy when talking about her work is striking:

I think for me it's the same as when people jump out of airplanes and go bungee jumping and ride roller coasters. That's their kind of thrill. For me it's taking on those jobs that nobody wants to do, that's my kind of...it's not exactly a thrill, but it's the same kind of a feeling.

About half of the participants felt good about helping people in their work, earning money, having something to do, interacting with people at work, advancing her career, having a purpose, or just having a time and place all their own. Like the feelings expressed about fun and accomplishment, these sentiments are also closely related to other positive feelings associated with working. Vanessa describes how good she feels about helping people as a photographer, and how these feelings are intimately related to her sense of pride in her work:

(My work) makes me elated, like I'm doing something that I know I'm good at. Let me help you. Let me give you something that I know you're going to love and that I'm going to love. Let me create memories for you. So it's just precious to me to be able to do that. And also when I'm in a group of people and people are sharing that about me, I'm like yeah, I'm excited. Let me talk to you about it...I'm doing what I love.

Olivia provides an example of the positive feelings associated with earning money, and working to have something to do. Again, her comments reveal a clear undertone related to the theme of accomplishment:

I got a job so I wasn't sitting at home all the time, so I had something to occupy my time. And it wasn't for the money. It was for something to do. And within three months I was promoted to one of the managers and got a huge raise. That was the hardest thing I ever walked away from when we moved here, because I never thought as an uneducated woman I would ever make \$50,000 a year. It was so good!

Other less frequently mentioned positive feelings include a sense of independence, self-worth, recognition, fulfillment, confidence, power, and doing work that matters. Maria's feelings about her former role as a prosecutor in Puerto Rico touches on several of these themes, as well as the recurring dominant theme of accomplishment:

That was like a once in a lifetime opportunity. And I was so lucky they picked me....That gave me so much prestige....There were still law students that knew me from law school and they told me, "Maria, I want what you have. When I graduate I want to be just like you." See, that gives you an example of how lucky and what a good position I was. Like I was only 25 years old and police officers were calling me...Honorable Prosecutor...So it was scary because I have a lot of power. I can send people to jail. But wow,

so I was so proud of myself. I was very proud of myself. I thought like, wow, I did it. I did it.

#### THEME #2: I FEEL UNDEREMPLOYED

The majority of participants related some feelings of underemployment at some point in their history as a military spouse. In this context, I am defining underemployment to include employment that does not fully utilize one's skills, does not adequately compensate for the work, or both.

Roberta and Heather are both volunteering their professional skills at the base hospital, and are both dismayed that they have to provide their services for free, but resigned to the situation so they can maintain their credentials. Heather explains her situation:

Somebody said to me the other day, "Why do you even volunteer because that's just making less of a chance for you to get a job, because they're getting all this free work?" Well, I need the experience. I need the continuing education. So I guess it's double-sided, sort of.

Later in the interview, Heather expresses concern that she may have to seek a job as a childcare provider or medical receptionist if she cannot obtain employment in her nursing field. The thought of going backward in her career is unappealing to her.

Isabelle is employed full-time, but still felt underemployed when she first began her job. Although she had a decade of experience directly related to her position, she explains that she was treated as a spouse that knew nothing, as if she were selected only because of the military spouse hiring advantage in the federal government:

I come into work and you're given the lowest duties no matter what your capabilities are because the expectation is "she's just a spouse" and "she's a stopper." She stopped me from getting the person I really wanted.

Although she was eventually able to prove herself and began receiving work at a skill-level appropriate for her experience, she is concerned that she will have to repeat this process with each new assignment, impeding her ability to advance her career. She now understands why her own mother never advanced beyond the level of GS-7 as a military spouse.

Another federal employee, Nicole, is facing the choice of taking a position several grades below her previous pay grade or losing her employment status. She describes the step down as a "devastating" possibility, and likens it to having to repeat freshman year when you are about to graduate from high school. She describes her prospects as depressing:

But it's still tough for me to swallow to say, okay, if I want to work and stay in the federal government I'm going to have to take a step, many steps down and be thankful to get that job. So that's tough. That's really tough. And that's the part that's actually pretty depressing to me.

Several of the women who discussed their experiences of underemployment said it was not about the money, and yet it does seem to be about what the money represents. Nicole and Heather hate the idea of taking a step backward in their careers, and Isabelle is concerned about remaining at her current level without advancement. Felice sums up this dilemma from her own perspective when she talks about considering a job that she is overqualified for. She asks herself, "What's my self-worth if I'm making \$8.00 an hour when I was making \$55 thousand (a year)?"

For her, and for others, the experience of underemployment carries a psychological price as well as a financial one.

### THEME #3: WORKING HAS TO BE WORTH THE COSTS

Although every participant expressed positive feelings about working, the majority also told me that working is not always worth it. This sentiment was particularly prevalent among women with children. In some cases, women felt that the jobs available to them would not be financially viable to cover the costs of childcare or make the loss of flexibility worthwhile. Several people talked about the unique opportunity of being overseas, and the desire to travel frequently. I also heard many examples of jobs that became too stressful to be worthwhile. Overall, most women I talked to felt that they had to consistently evaluate whether each job opportunity was a good fit in their lives, and if it made sense for their finances, family, and overall well-being.

Heather is an example of someone who decided working was not a financially viable option for her when her children were small. In her case, her decision to stay home for a period of time resulted from a combination of factors, both a financial one and a personal decision to be home with her children:

I decided, money-wise, it wasn't going to be worth it for daycare and private school, and I always wanted to be a stay-at-home mom anyways so it was like, you know what? I can put my career on hold and do what I gotta do.

Grace also encounters multiple factors that contribute to her decision to stay home with her children. When she arrives at her first overseas assignment, she finds it difficult to maintain her previous employment through a telecommuting arrangement, and discovers she is pregnant at

the same time. The confluence of these events, along with few employment options in the area, led her to leave the workforce and stay home:

So I was in Europe, wanted to travel, I was pregnant. And the work wasn't working out the way I wanted. And so I said, you know what, forget it. I'm just going to enjoy having kids. And I haven't worked since then.

...Well, you know, my rationale was I won't find a worthwhile job in the Air Force at a high paid level... So I was earning about \$80,000 plus bonuses a year. So I figured I'm not going to go to McDonalds. I'm not going to work at McDonalds....Even if I worked in finance I'd probably find a lower level finance position. And I'm not going to do that. It's not worth my time. I'd rather stay home with my kids and travel.

Brenda's experience demonstrates a variation on the stay-at-home mother scenario. Although she had decided to stay home while her children were pre-school age, she attempted to work part-time shelving greeting cards in grocery stores in order to have some stimulation outside the home. Unfortunately she discovered that this approach to work was not financially sustainable:

I would end up hiring a babysitter for \$15 an hour when I got paid \$10 an hour (to) put cards in (slots),...so that didn't work out. So it was frustrating. And it was only to do something, to have a little time, talk to some people, see what was going on....totally not

worth the stress. But the alternative was washing more dishes or scrubbing the floor again.

Nicole's story includes a demanding career that she has been able to advance over the years, until she faces a typical work-family balance dilemma. She is offered the opportunity for promotion that entails long hours, a long commute, and little time with her children. Ultimately, she decides that her progression is not worth the toll on her personal life:

I didn't want to have to do that commute every single day. I just didn't want to do it. I was worn out. I was pretty exhausted physically and emotionally and not feeling good about myself because I had gained weight, sitting in the car, eating whatever. I wasn't eating healthy. And then I had a lot of time away from my kids... I really did because sometimes I didn't get home until 7:30 at night. My kids were already going to bed if not already in bed. And I hadn't seen them in the morning because I was leaving the house at 5:00 to miss traffic. So I said no, I can't do it.

The examples of the costs associated with working are varied, and not all are about work-family issues. Kendra relates her experience as a young airman who feels overwhelmed by her military role, and feels a real emotional cost associated with her work:

I really enjoyed it (being in the military) until the war started, and then I wanted out. Because, I guess, when you're 19 you don't think about joining the military as there might be a war. I didn't anyways. I just thought of it as a job. And then when the war started we were loading bombs and loading food and then

downloading bodies. So for me it was just too much, at the age of 19 to handle, I think, emotionally.

*Thoughts and feelings about not working*

**THEME #1: NOT WORKING MAKES ME FEEL BAD**

Just as the women in this study were unanimous in having positive feelings about working, they all also unanimously reported some kind of negative feelings about the experience of not working. In my coding scheme, I categorized 21 different positive feelings associated with working and 35 negative feelings associated with not working, demonstrating a greater range of emotion associated with not working. In fact, many women were quite emotional and cried when they discussed how they felt about not working, and what it meant to them. In several cases, the participants were surprised or embarrassed by the intensity of their own reactions.

Although about half the participants shed tears at some point in their interview, I was commonly asked, “Am I the only one who cried?” As Jervis (2011) points out in her work on the emotional impacts of military life, military wives are expected to maintain a norm of emotional stoicism unless faced with a life-or-death issue, something truly worth crying about. Grace’s interview is an example of this dynamic. Although she is matter-of-fact throughout most of the interview, describing her transition from finance professional to stay-at-home mother, she breaks down into sobs when telling a story at the end of her interview:

(You) just hear a lot of stories...when you go back to the States or when you talk to people in the States there seems like there is no war. And, for example, my mom works in a high school. She's a high school teacher right now. And she brings military recruiters

into her classroom because a lot of the kids don't have an alternative. They don't have someplace to go. They have very bad families. And they don't have money. And they're just trying to escape from a really bad situation that they have. So my mom, for example, encourages them to go into the military. And that's a big fight that I've had with my mom. I'm like, "You don't know what you're sending your kids to." I said, "Yes, the military's good for a lot of kids, you know, because they get this self-esteem. They get money. They get to get out of the ghetto. But just, you know, wait until your kids come back with, you know, one arm or one leg..."

Sorry, I don't know why I'm crying.

After we conclude the interview, Grace says she doesn't know what made her cry, since she's generally not emotional about these issues. She also tells me that she has never really realized what a big transition she has undergone until she recounted her story to me. I cannot help but wonder if she has unconsciously held in her tears about her own experience only to release them when talking about wounded warriors because it is a socially acceptable thing to cry about. I share this because I believe it is representative of the grief that military wives experience but hide from the outside world. The participants' stories about their lack of employment only begin to scratch the surface of these complicated emotions.

The negative thoughts and feelings related to not working can be understood in multiple layers of depth and substance. At the most accessible layer, the majority of participants expressed feelings of frustration about job searching and about one-third shared concerns about the impact of unemployment on their future career. Many women used the word "frustrated"

when talking about having to look for work, and often finding nothing suitable, especially at their current overseas location.

Another layer of emotion involves how women feel when they don't have work to fill their time. About half the participants reported feeling bored or stuck in the house when they don't work, while about one-fourth say they feel lazy or don't know what to do with their time. Felice explains what it's like for her now that she is not working:

I'll get up, at like 6:30 in the morning, because when we first got here I was sleeping in till noon. Then he would come home and be like, "Oh my God, why is your hair wet?" "Because I basically just took a shower 15 minutes before you came home. I didn't do anything today." Now I try to get up and I try and stay up...So it, it's just weird, I've never been this way. I've never been like oh my God, how am I going to fill the day? If I don't have anything he knows I'm on the couch all day. That's not healthy for me...that's not mentally healthy.

As Felice alludes in her comment, how women feel about their situation often spills over into feelings about their husbands and their role in relationship to the family. About half of the participants expressed feeling badly that they are not contributing financially to their marriage when they are not working, and about half dislike feeling dependent on their husbands when they are not working. About one-third of the women say their job is to be the primary homemaker, which for some contributes to their lack of employment. About one-fourth of the participants have shared feelings of anger or resentment toward their husbands, or say that not working creates stress in their marriages.

Kendra and Serena express two different perspectives on feeling dependent on their husbands and making a contribution. Kendra becomes emotional as she explains her own feelings of vulnerability when she is unemployed:

I've taken care of myself for so long that it's scary to let someone else do it. And it's my job to do it. It's not his job to do it. I guess ...if you don't have a job and he decides you're not important and leaves, then what? (*crying*) It's easier to take care of yourself. Always take care of yourself.

Alternatively, Serena says that she disliked feeling dependent on her husband at first, but has gradually gotten used to the idea as her concept of marriage and partnership has evolved over time:

I looked for at least six months trying to find jobs. I mean, it is really important for me because I'm used to being independent. I'm not used to relying on anybody and it was actually hard to sit at home as a housewife and not work. I feel like I should contribute somehow. Because my mom, she took care of her four kids all by herself. She worked to support us, and it's just weird to rely on him. I'm getting used to it now...I still want to be independent, but marriage isn't really about the separate people. It's like you are working together; so it's not like I'm not contributing in my own way. I mean I still contribute at the house and in our relationship so I don't have to work to make a contribution. So I'm just growing up.

The case of Brenda illustrates both the impact of being a primary homemaker and feelings of anger and resentment that some military wives feel toward their husband when they are not working. As described earlier, Brenda abandoned earlier attempts to pursue part-time work when the cost of childcare was prohibitive. Because her husband was frequently deployed, she felt she could not rely on him to help with childcare or household duties:

I was angry that my husband and his pursuing everything for our country...that it didn't leave me 10 hours a week to place cards in slots. So, I mean I think that's what it comes down to, is always feeling like that you have to be the one in charge...or the one that does everything for your family to the point that you can't have a little 10-hour-a-week job. I mean that's the issue that I have with my husband, not that he can do anything about it.

Another layer of emotion emerges around feelings of self-worth and identity that are evoked by lack of work. About half of the participants admitted to feeling like they had lost self-worth or a piece of themselves as a result of not working. A few expressed feeling like they had no purpose, felt like they didn't matter, or felt feelings of shame or guilt for not working. I group these feelings together because they all portray an impact on one's sense of self. Katie offers her own experience, saying that her decision to leave her career as an athletic trainer and stay home with her children has cost her a piece of herself:

I lost a part of myself as a person. Because that's how I identified myself a lot,...and that's what I worked hard to do. And I do mean blood, sweat and tears...I worked so hard for that. So it is a little hard. It's a sacrifice, painful, very painful.

Although Olivia has worked throughout most of her husband's military career, she has had periods of unemployment, particularly when she was home with her young children. She credits her husband for recognizing her need to work and encouraging her to find employment again. In her mind, his support has been critical to her ability to preserve her sense of self:

Thank God I have a husband who doesn't want me to be submissive. He wants me to be my own person,...have my own individuality, ...because I'm not happy when I don't feel that. I feel like there's something missing in my life. Because...it's my own little piece of life. My own that's just me. And if that's missing, I don't feel whole. I don't feel complete. I feel like I'm not doing what I was meant to do on this earth.

The final layer of emotion evoked by not working is a feeling of despair. About half of the participants reported feelings of depression, sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, helplessness, or fear as a result of not working. Maria describes the sadness she experienced when she had to leave her job in Florida in order to move to Texas:

And that first week when I arrived to San Antonio I was so depressed. I stayed a whole week in bed. I didn't want to get out. I didn't want to go. I said no. I don't want to go anywhere. I don't want to see San Antonio. I don't want to be here. And I felt bad for my husband, but it really hurt me so much leaving my job because I said... "Not everybody can find a job that you look forward to go to every morning." (*crying*) ... And I had to say goodbye and start all over again. You know, the thing is, every

time you PCS, you have to start all over again, your life. Your life is in pieces and you have to start all over again.

Phoebe shares having similar periods of depression, and admits that she has struggled with suicidal thoughts at times. She explains that therapy has helped, but that she continues to deal with feelings of depression as a result of leaving the military, getting married, and staying home with her children:

Little things started to affect me tenfold, like more than they normally would have...I realized that I had feelings of not wanting to live anymore and... every morning I'd wake up and I didn't want to be here. I just didn't want to do anything. I didn't want to run a marathon anymore. I didn't want to do it...I feel more exhausted now being a stay-at-home mom than I ever did being a single mom, working and pregnant. And I feel more exhausted now. I mean, how is that possible? I wonder if it has something to do with...probably the way I'm thinking. More of a mind over matter type of thing. I think my brain is just messing me up with my new life.

#### THEME #2: MOTHERHOOD AND HOUSEWORK AREN'T ENOUGH

Of the 21 participants in this study, 15 are mothers with children ranging in age from newborn to fully grown adults, but most are preschool or elementary school age. Regardless of their decisions about working vs. staying home with young children, 11 of the 15 mothers expressed feeling that being a full-time mother is not completely satisfying. In addition, about one-third of all participants discussed their dislike of housework, and feeling confined by it when

they are not working. I discuss these two subthemes together because motherhood and housework were often discussed as the default roles to play when work is unavailable. Some of the participants without children expressed feeling out of place or having less to do because they don't have a mothering role to fulfill.

Brenda eloquently describes the pitfalls she has experienced as a stay-at-home mother. Although the long-term rewards may be great, she says that the day-to-day benefits are hard to see:

No matter how many people tell you that motherhood is noble and good and all that, you still have it in your mind like, yeah right. I mean I should be doing something more. I think we always want to see the fruits of it. When you go to work you get the paycheck. You get the accolade. When you stay home you don't get any of that, not in the short term. You get it when you have great kids at the end. But when your kids are screaming in Wal-Mart and you've tried your best and you're doing everything possible and you just don't see. When you clean the house perfectly spic and span and in a half an hour it's just as crazy as when you started, you just don't have those cues that you're doing a good job, or that you're doing anything really.

Brenda goes on to explain the invisibility she feels as a mother and housewife, and how different that feels from being an employee. In the latter context, people notice what you do, while in the former it is easy to remain unseen:

It's much different, because at work people are looking at you to do your job. And when you're at home, you're trying to get people to look at you. You know people are constantly critiquing your work or looking at your work or praising your work or criticizing your work. They're always looking. But when you're at home you're trying to get someone to acknowledge that you're doing something of worth as opposed to no one's looking. Maybe your husband looks every once in a while. Maybe your mother-in-law looks every once in a while. But really, no one's looking.

Many of the participants talk about caretaking and housework as tedious and tiring. Phoebe wonders how it is possible that she had more energy when she was a working single mom, than she does now as a stay-at-home mom. She finds her new life "exhausting." Tanya shares similar feelings, and believes that having a job would give her a much-needed break from her home role:

I've been stuck in the house for the last 3 years. It's like "Great, laundry, but I just did laundry yesterday. I don't want to do laundry today. Now I have to do dishes." It wears on me now, but if I had the job, I'd have that break from the house and the dishes and the laundry and the tedium, so I could switch back and forth between the two.

In contrast, Vanessa never directly expresses dissatisfaction with her homemaker role, but does explain that she reached a point where she felt like she wanted something more for herself:

I thought that just being the caregiver for my children would be enough for me. And it was enough, but it still felt like I needed to be doing something outside of them. I realized I still needed a piece of me that was separate from my children. Because I didn't want to continually see myself as a mom. I mean you never break free from that role, but like I didn't want that to be my only label. I wanted something for myself and I needed something where I was pursuing something individually that wouldn't necessarily affect my children, but still I could go off on this career path and still feel like I was accomplishing my own goals.

Although most participants in this study have children, negative feelings about the homemaker role were also expressed by participants without children. Felice describes her frustrations that she does not get any satisfaction out of housework, and does not consider it an achievement she can be proud of. Kendra explains her feelings about becoming the primary homemaker after leaving the military:

I felt lost for a while, just trying to find which direction I wanted to go, and it made things between me and my husband weird because he expected a wife now. Because before, I worked more hours than he did, so he did the laundry and the dishes and the cooking. Now the roles were reversing and I'm not a stay-at-home wife. I don't like doing that kind of stuff. And now he expected that because he did it when I was busy and now it's my turn. But that's not what I want to do. I'd rather be out of the house and working

and bringing home the money and let someone else do (the housework).

As a woman with grown children, Olivia is now an “empty nester” but has the benefit of looking back on the years when her children were young. She considers work her salvation from the lack of fulfillment she felt from caretaking and housework:

The more I worked, the less stress I felt, because at home, I was able to take care of the house and the baby and everything, but I think I found out then that I’ve never been a stay-at-home mom. I mean you can only clean the house so much. You can only play with the baby so much. You can only walk the dog so much. You can only watch so much TV, or work out so much, that there’s got to be something else. And I think it was then that I realized there has got to be something else.

### THEME #3: I HAVE ACCEPTED MY SITUATION

Perhaps paradoxically, just as the majority of the participants report experiencing negative feelings related to lack of work, a majority also report feelings of acceptance. In part, this may be due to a progression in feeling over time or differing responses to different situations. In other words, some periods of unemployment are harder than others, depending on the circumstances. For most of the women in this study, this seems to be the case; a job change or unemployment that may be devastating in the early years is experienced differently after one has accepted the constraints of military life. Also, some women have taken a fairly fatalistic or pragmatic view of their situation in general, contending that the employment-related challenges

they have faced really have not bothered them very much. Emily and Lisa fit this profile especially well.

In Emily's case, she contends that she has been happy at every military assignment, even in cases where she wanted to work but was unable to do so. In these locations, she says the timing was right to have children, and so she simply took on the "job" of motherhood instead. Although she is satisfied that she will finally be able to "check the last box" in her life by resuming her career, she maintains that she has always taken the view that "whatever happens, happens."

When Lisa tells her story, she speaks passionately about her love of flying, yet equally matter-of-factly about the reality that she will never be a career pilot. Although she originally expected to pursue a flying career, this became increasingly difficult to do as her husband received multiple overseas assignments. She describes how the sacrifice of her dream did not impact her as a harsh blow, but was a reality she accepted quietly over time:

It wasn't a dramatic thing; it was sort of a slow realization. So I don't think it was a huge impact emotionally or anything like that on what I was feeling about it. It was just sort of an acceptance that things don't always go the way you planned when you were 19, 20 years old and life puts other challenges in the way, and you sort of deal with everything as it comes along and adapt with it.

#### THEME #4: I AM LUCKY THAT I DON'T HAVE TO WORK

Although most women expressed some type of loss or negative emotion surrounding their inability to work, about three-fourths of the participants also admitted to seeing some benefit or opportunity to not working. Most commonly, these women spoke about feeling lucky that they

do not have to work, can be there for their children, focus on other things they are interested in, or find other ways besides employment to show their worth.

Typically, participants who commented about feeling good about not working, spoke about it in the context of their mothering role. One-third of the participants expressed a negative view of paid childcare, often saying they don't want other people "raising their children." Taken in combination with the costs of childcare, this negative perception factored heavily into mothers' decisions to leave work for a period of time to stay home with their young children. Grace describes her perspective on this decision, and feels fortunate that living overseas helped her justify her decision to stay home:

Because if I had lived in the States and having a corporate career, most women are pushed into...continuing to work. And so I mean you've got school for so long. You're making a lot of money. You're making your bonuses and things like that. And the society wants you to keep on going. And so most likely is if we had stayed in San Diego...or in the States and had kids, I would probably be working, putting the kids in daycare. It's...at least that's the most pressure. That's the way that most people would want us to go. And being in Aviano was actually wonderful because there was no pressure to work. And there was that freedom. So it was actually kind of liberating because I said, you know, I don't have any pressure to keep on working and put my kids in daycare. I don't have to justify that to anybody. And in the States, a lot of working moms look down on stay-at-home moms.

And so I didn't feel I had to justify that to anybody, and that was really nice.

Similarly, Brenda speaks about staying home with her babies and young children as a “gift” that felt “luxurious” at first:

It does make you feel like I have the opportunity to stay home with my kids. I don't think there are very many mothers of newborn babies that want to go back to work right away....It did feel like kind of a gift. I mean it was nice not to have to go back to work and financially, yes, of course, more money would have been nice. But it wasn't the most important thing at that time. So it did kind of feel luxurious.

When Tanya explains her decision to stay home, she represents a point of view expressed by about one-third of the participants in not wanting other people to “raise my kid”:

Well, it was a choice between staying home and taking care of my kid versus working. It was an easy call, because I didn't want to let somebody else raise my kid...throw them in the CDC (Child Development Center) or neighbor, or whatever. Then you get to see all those moments. I get to see the first steps or the first tooth, all that. I didn't want to give up all that and give the moments to somebody else.

Even participants who have been continuous workers expressed some value in maintaining their freedom to stay home if they chose to. Nicole has consistently worked in a demanding job through most military assignments, and considers herself a better mother because

she has a professional outlet for herself. Yet, when her husband offered to leave the Air Force so they could focus on her career, she explained that she was not comfortable being the primary breadwinner. She likes the idea of her husband in that role, and wants to have the option to be home with her children if she chooses to:

I think that would have just added more stress to me that I wasn't ready for, you know, having a family. I'm very independent and driven,...and like to know that I can support myself. But then again on the other hand I'm also very old fashioned and feel like, let the man make the money, you know what I mean. And whatever I make, that's great.

Similarly, Isabelle has always worked, but feels a great sense of relief now that she is no longer a single mother and sole provider for her children. She is surprised how easy it is to allow her husband's career to take priority over hers.

Just based on my personality I would have thought that I would have had a harder time letting go of that control of my career, my life, my plans. And it's just been really easy to just give that up... Yeah, it feels like a burden has been lifted off of me that I don't have to make all the decisions.

Although she isn't ready to leave her job now, Isabelle expresses a long-term desire to focus full-time on her volunteer counseling work. Now that she is married, she has the option to explore the possibility of not working and spending her time in other rewarding ways.

Finally, some participants without children also reflected on the positive aspects of not having to work. Roberta and Charlotte offer two perspectives. Roberta says she began to think of her unemployment as a “blessing” and stopped feeling so stressed about her situation:

And then it just, it's sort of weird I think, once you realize how it's sort of a blessing to me to also be able to not have to work. And so to be presented with this opportunity to do other things, whether it's school, or travel, or have a baby, or those sorts of things. Once I realized that it was an amazing opportunity, after a few months, I stopped being so stressed about it. I just sort of accepted that it's going to be hard to find a job, that I would keep looking but I wouldn't be so stressed about it.

In a way, Charlotte agrees with Roberta's feelings about being blessed to do whatever she wants with her time, but she also feels guilty about finding herself in a position of such privilege:

Well I think you have to have something to show for your life...I don't know. I just feel like God put us here to work...I feel bad. There's people out there who don't have what I have, ...and so I just kind of feel bad that I have all of these things and all this wonderful life and I don't even have to work for it now. And other people would love to have this, and they work hard...I don't feel like I should be able to just do whatever I want just because my husband makes a good enough salary that I don't have to work.

*Thoughts and feelings about being a military spouse*

The preceding themes about working and not working represent the primary focus of this research. These themes summarize the dominant thoughts and feelings expressed by the women in this study. In addition, a clear meta-theme that emerges from these stories is that of ambivalence. The women I spoke to are passionate about the meaning of work for them, yet also want to preserve their flexibility to pursue other roles, including motherhood. They are sometimes devastated when unable to work, but also sometimes see their situation as a blessing. In the midst of their attempts to navigate work and family roles, these women must make meaning of their situations within the constraints of their military context. Because the military context directly affects how the participants feel about their work or lack of work, I will touch on three emergent themes about being a military spouse. In this discussion, the meta-theme of ambivalence is also apparent.

**THEME #1: FREQUENT RELOCATION IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**

About three-quarters of the participants spoke about relocation as an experience with both significant benefits and significant costs to them. Although I expected to hear predominantly negative sentiments about moving, in fact my data showed a fairly even split between positive comments and negative comments from most participants.

As other research has shown (Booth, 2003; Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Cooney, Segal, & De Angelis, 2009; Payne, Warner, & Little, 1992), some of the negative impacts associated with frequent relocation include lack of continuity with a single employer and having to start over with each new assignment. Andrea describes the lack of permanence and progression she feels as a result of moving around:

It sucks because... you can't look long term with a company that's past 3 years. Long term for you is getting a job immediately and working 3 years. So... you never really do climb that ladder, you never really do get that permanence that you kind of need when you're trying to plan retirement and things like that...You never really try to go too high up in a company because you know you're not going to be there.

Lisa describes the frustration and lack of support she feels trying to maintain a career as a highly mobile military spouse:

I think frustrating is the hardest thing....You either accept that you don't work or you accept that every time you move...you're going to have to find something else and that you're not necessarily going to find something that is your career field or is your first choice. And I suppose it's very different moving within the states than moving overseas. But in general the lack of realistic support, I mean I've been to the Civilian Personnel offices and handed over my CV and said what have you got and I've been offered waitressing or cleaning or something. I'm like this is not, this isn't for real...You are very much on your own if you want a career...It's been a challenge. I would like to have been further on in a career. I probably would have been if we hadn't moved, but that's reality. And if you marry into the military to a point you just

have to accept it. You can fight the system but the system is not going to change for just a few people.

On the flip side, most participants also see moving as an adventure, a unique opportunity for new experiences, and a great way to travel and see the world. Dee shares her own feelings of good fortune and excitement about being able to live overseas because of her military connection: “I wouldn’t be in Germany, Europe. I mean a lot of people don’t have those kinds of opportunities in life. It’s just what I think about all the time. So, I mean it’s exciting.”

Vanessa shares a similar sense of excitement: “Coming from a really small town myself, I was ready to get out. I wanted to see the world. I’ve always sort of been different than the rest of my family who are very comfortable where they are. I wanted to have that experience and see the world.”

While moving is seen as a challenge to one’s employment or career aspirations, many women are also equally drawn to the prospect of traveling the world. These two sentiments represent a tension in how these women feel about the lifestyle they are pursuing. Charlotte shares her own example of this conflict by saying that she was initially so excited about coming to Germany, that she didn’t let herself think about what it would take to find a job here:

I just wanted to go to Europe so bad. I was so excited. And I didn’t really think too hard about work because they (other people) were like, “Oh it’s hard to find a job there.” Yeah, yeah, I’ll find something, don’t worry.

#### THEME #2: I DIDN’T KNOW WHAT I WAS GETTING INTO

Like Charlotte, who avoided thinking about what was in store for her career, about half the participants in this study reported a difference between their initial expectations of military

life, and what it was actually like for them. Many of them described feeling like they didn't really know what they were getting into until they actually experienced being a military spouse. Felice says she doesn't know how she's going to feel about a situation until she's "living it on a daily basis" and that's part of the reason she feels she's going through a period of "shock" as a newly married military spouse.

Roberta's story offers a compelling example of this phenomenon. Like Charlotte, she was initially so focused on her feelings of excitement that it took her some time to understand that her career would be impacted by a military lifestyle. She is surprised when she learns that her friends and family were aware of this reality long before she was:

I don't think I fully understood it. I think I was very excited about getting married and the process of us being together and moving. So that excitement I think overshadowed my ability to think through it. So I don't think I had a concept of what it was really going to be like.

I definitely felt like... other people at home or whoever I was talking to didn't really understand what I was talking about because they're like "Well, yeah, you moved to Germany and now you're following (your husband) around the world. Isn't this what you thought it was going to be?" Their idea of what they thought I should be thinking was totally different than what I was thinking. And then it occurred to me, wow, they totally got it. They knew that...you will leave your job and now I'm with (my husband) and

basically I'm on his career path. And I didn't get that until people were reflecting this back to me. I was like, "Oh, okay."

### THEME #3: I HAVE MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT MY MILITARY SPOUSE IDENTITY

Continuing on the meta-theme of ambivalent feelings, about half the participants expressed conflicting feelings about their military spouse identity. Brenda, Grace, and Charlotte all speak about the process of becoming a "real" military spouse when they no longer worked and became integrated into the military community. Working had allowed them to maintain an identity separate from the military. Charlotte describes how humbling it has been to become one of the women she used to look down upon:

But I'm like I had my own thing before....So, yeah, I think sometimes I'm a little snooty like I'm not like y'all. I'm not just a spouse. I have my own thing...I don't need to be defined by my husband because a lot of people are.... That's rude but I think ... that you need to work. You need to have a goal. You need to be in school. You need to be doing something. And if you're not and you're just what I am, I'm like kind of something I didn't want to be... I'm just a spouse now because I don't really have a daily purpose, something to make me wake up.

Olivia has similar feelings, but makes a distinction between being a "military spouse" and being a "dependent wife." The former is a role that she is proud to play as long as she is able to maintain her own sense of self, while she sees the latter role as a negative one:

There is a difference about being a military spouse and a dependent wife. If you haven't gotten that by now you will...You

picture these women...they'll go to the commissary and they'll throw a fit about something stupid. Something that was there that's not there now or they go to the clinic and demand to be seen because of who their husband is or what their status is in the community....And it always seems their entire life was negative and it all revolved around their husband, their status, their position, and their job. And it was never about them. They didn't seem to have their own identity and I never wanted to be a dependent wife. I wanted my own identity. I wanted my own sense of self-worth.

For Olivia, working is one important factor in distinguishing herself from the status of “dependent wife.”

Vanessa also shares complicated feelings regarding her status as a military spouse. She talks about feeling cheated because she is unable to maintain her business in Germany, and is resentful that she now feels forced by the military to play out the stereotypical military spouse profile:

And now to have that taken away from me I just feel like, there's this stereotype that military spouses don't do anything. (*crying*) They kind of sit on their butts, do whatever. They're just there as caretakers or whatever. But I feel like they almost push us to be that way instead of allowing us to do these things and be a part of these things...By making it so difficult, they're taking stuff away from us.

Despite her angry feelings, Vanessa continues by saying how much she loves being a military spouse and how proud she is of her husband's role. According to her, once you become a part of the military, it becomes a part of yourself that never goes away:

And I think that for myself, I like being a part of something bigger than myself. I like seeing my husband in this role and him being a part of something bigger than us. I think it's great and the reasons why he keeps doing it. I stand by him 100%. So I'm really proud of him. (*crying*) ... And I've been able to have such great amazing friendships and meet some of the most amazing people and become... part of such an amazing family really. There's a whole difference between being...in a group of people that are in the military and those that are not. And it's like, it's night and day. I don't even know how to describe it, but I like being a part of that. This, I don't know, just the sense of family that I have being a part of this. I really love it....I mean I'm proud to be a military spouse. ...I don't want to not be a part of this, as crazy as that is, because as sad and emotional as it has made me, I can't see myself not (being a military spouse). Even once he retires, a part of us will always be military. Once you get in it you can't separate yourself from it.

It is interesting that Vanessa speaks about the attachment she feels to her military identity, considering that she was the only participant who spoke about wanting her husband to leave the Air Force at an earlier point in his career. When she became frustrated by the

frequency of his deployments, and felt that his absences were taking a toll on their family, she persuaded him to leave the military. However, when he began job searching and found the prospects daunting, she did not like seeing him “devastated” by the process. Ultimately, she agreed to support his desire to stay in the military. Vanessa describes this as a difficult sacrifice for her family, but believes that her husband’s military career is the right thing for him to be doing.

What strikes me is that nobody else in my study shared a similar experience of urging her husband to get out of the military, or even shared thoughts about considering this possibility. Despite their stories of sacrifice, loss, and ambivalence about their military lives, they all seemed to deal with this struggle by making personal choices to adapt to their challenging circumstances. Just as the feminist literature describes, these individuals seem to have adopted the military spouse norm of being “perpetually accommodating” (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997, p. 39) to the demands of military life. The following chapter discusses this in more detail, as I describe a model of fit that represents how women assess the fit between work, self, and military life and how they respond to any perceived lack of congruence.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – MODEL OF FIT: WORK, SELF, AND MILITARY LIFE**

The discussion in the previous chapter reviews the themes that emerged from my content analysis of the participant interviews. In this chapter, I will turn to the results of my holistic analysis, and will propose a model of fit between work, self, and military life.

### *Model of fit: Work, self, and military life*

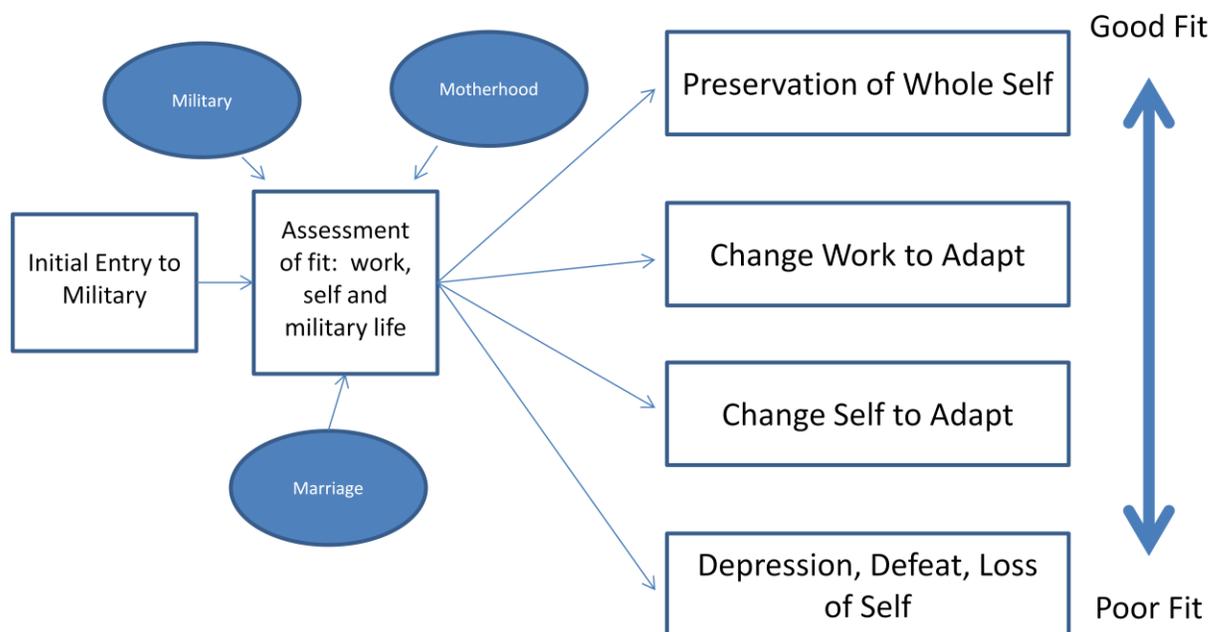
Through the use of holistic analysis, I attempted to make sense of the varied emotions and reactions the study participants expressed in response to their experiences. I noticed some patterns that emerged over time, and heard the women talk about how their initial expectations changed over time, both with their years of experience as well as the constraints imposed by relocation and other life events. I also noted that the participants reacted to challenging situations differently, with varying impacts to them as individuals. I saw that some women seemed to feel that being a military spouse was a good fit for them and their work, while others felt a significant conflict with their military lifestyle and work-related desires. In addition, the perception of fit between these different aspects of their lives sometimes changed over time, resulting in a feeling of good fit at times and poor fit at other times.

As I looked at the patterns emerging from my participants' stories, I also saw trends that exemplified claims from previous research on military wives. I noticed that the women in my study discussed the cyclical nature of their experience and the emotional toll of repeated moves, just as Burrell (2006) and Jervis (2011) note in their research. I saw that my participants demonstrated adaptive strategies to cope with obstacles to their work-related desires, just as Dana (2006) describes in her study of Air Force wives. I was also struck by some of the more painful stories that revealed a real loss of self, just as Jervis (2011) claims can happen when military wives do not have the support needed to grieve their psychic losses. Finally, I

contemplated why my participants seemed to experience such a wide range of outcomes, and looked at Rosen, Ickovics, and Moghadam's (1990) research on role fit and general well-being as a possible explanation.

The concept of role fit used by Rosen et al. (1990) became an important starting point for the model of fit I am proposing from this study. Using a definition created by Townsend and Gurin (1981, p. 467), role fit was used in the Rosen et al. study to mean "the congruence or discrepancy between a woman's objective situation and her preferred or ideal situation." In their examination of the general well-being of military wives, Rosen et al. found that there was a significant positive correlation between role fit and general well-being. In other words, the stronger the fit between one's ideal situation and one's actual situation, the greater one's general well-being. This concept seems to directly apply to the experiences of my study participants, where women with significant conflicts between their work-related desires and their military lives suffer serious losses, while those with little conflict are able to maintain a whole and healthy sense of self.

In my adaptation of the concept of role fit, I am focusing on fit more broadly than simply a fit between roles. Based on the definition above which contrasts one's ideal situation with one's actual situation, I believe this is a construct that has the potential to encompass more than one's role or set of roles. In the context of this study, I am applying the concept of fit to examine the domains of work, self, and military life. In my proposed model of fit, a military wife compares her ideal work situation and her ideal self with the actual reality of her military life. Where the fit is good, a whole and healthy sense of self is preserved. Where the fit is poor, she risks loss of self. And where fit is neither clearly good or clearly bad, she has the choice to adapt her work or herself in an attempt to create a better sense of congruence in her life.



**Figure 1. Model of fit: Work, self, and military life.**

The model of fit I arrived at is an attempt to capture the dynamics evident in the study participants' experiences, built within the context of existing theoretical knowledge about military wives (Figure 1). Before I discuss this model in more detail, let me offer three important caveats. First, I do not wish to imply that any individual participant is defined by a particular step in this model. Each woman I interviewed holds a complex set of emotions and meanings about her experiences, and may find herself at different places in this model at different moments in time as her circumstances and/or perceptions change. Second, the assessment of fit between work, self, and military life is not a one-time event, but a continuous process that evolves over time, punctuated by regular moves and major life events. Very often, the military wives in this study reassessed their feeling of fit with each PCS, birth of a child, or change in employment status. As Burrell (2006) points out, the process of relocation for military families is constant in the psyche of the military spouse, who is either recovering from the last move or preparing for the next one. As part of this process, the military spouse faces a recurring

cycle of work and self-renegotiation to meet the demands of constant change. Third, I have drawn several boxes and sequences in order to simplify the patterns that emerged in this research, however I am not proposing the existence of a rigid, sequential, or stage-based process. Rather, these are dynamics that are fluid and changing over time in a way that is different for each individual.

Fundamentally, this model reflects the reality that military wives undergo an evolving process of self-assessment and redefinition that begins with initial entry into the military community. After this initial entry experience, which is often full of hope, excitement, and romance, she assesses her own fit within the military lifestyle, determining how she feels about herself and her work-related desires in her new context. Depending on how good she feels about the level of fit between herself, her work, and her military life, and how she chooses to respond to her circumstances, there are four potential outcomes: preservation of her whole self, a change in work to adapt, a change in self to adapt, or loss of self. In reality, military wives also hold the option of changing the military aspect of their lives by either persuading their husbands to separate from the military or by choosing to leave their husbands. However, since none of the study participants had taken this approach, I did not include these options in my model.

This assessment of fit is a dynamic that is repetitive but also changes over time. With each new PCS, a military wife with employment desires must reevaluate her options and goals. Similarly, life events such as a child's birth or entry into school, the prospect or loss of a job, a husband's deployment, may all cause the individual to reassess her current feeling of fit about her situation. A significant influencing factor on this dynamic is the impact of multi-layered gendered roles, and how they are experienced by a particular individual. Typically, military wives hold three roles outside of work that are heavily laden with gendered expectations:

marriage, motherhood, and being a military wife. Any one or all three of these roles may intervene at any point to change a military wife's perception of her fit between work, self, and military life. Having briefly described this dynamic overall, I will now explain each piece of the model in more detail.

*Initial entry into the military*

For purposes of this discussion, I will refer to the military wife's initial entry to the military as the point in time when she either first married her husband (if he was already in the military), or when her husband joined the military (if he was not yet military at the time of their marriage). About half the participants in my study had some prior experience within the military community, with several having grown up in military families, and a few having been prior members of the military themselves. However, even those women with military backgrounds found themselves in a brand new role when they became civilian military wives.

When the study participants spoke about this stage in their lives, many talked about feelings of excitement, hope, and romance. For most of the women I interviewed, this phase of entry into the military was also their honeymoon period with their husbands. They were newly married, in love, and eager to start a new life with their partners. Maria looks back on this period in her life and recalls how she was hopeful about her future and willing to give up a prestigious job as a prosecutor in Puerto Rico in order to be with the man she loved:

All my family were like, "Are you sure? Are you sure about this? You're going to get married and leave everything behind?" But I was in love. And I said, you know what, I'll find another job. I'll pass the bar in the United States. I'll do whatever it takes. This doesn't mean the end of my career...I thought.

Several years later, Maria now finds herself as a stay-at-home mother who was unable to maintain her legal career after multiple moves and a baby. She reflects on her own naiveté during the early days with her husband, and says she would discourage other women from making the same sacrifice she made.

Roberta, still a newlywed herself, is beginning to make sense of her own entry phase into military life. Discussing how she felt about becoming a military spouse when she first got married, she says, “I think I was very excited about getting married and the process of us being together and moving. So that excitement I think overshadowed my ability to think through it.” Her focus was on the romance and excitement of getting married, not the potential impacts to her work or sense of self. Later she shares that she is surprised to find herself unemployed, while her friends and family expected that she would not work. This was a reality that was obvious to outsiders, but one she did not allow herself to think about when she made the decision to marry her husband. Like Maria, people outside the situation saw the implications for the future that Roberta was unable to face herself.

These two examples illustrate a common theme about initial entry, an experience of suspended judgment or denial. Several women in this study shared a feeling of not really understanding what they were getting into when they first decided to become a military spouse. Others described it as knowing, but not knowing; in other words, they rationally understood the facts of military life but did not yet fully comprehend the impact that could have on them. Felice, a newlywed of 6 months, acknowledges that she really didn’t understand how difficult being an unemployed military spouse would be:

...Until I’m in the situation you can try to warn me and talk to me about it a hundred times. My husband does that very well. Here’s

every single situation that could ever happen. And of course I was listening to him at the time but...until I'm living it on a daily basis, I couldn't always make those connections.

Of course, some women become military spouses with various degrees of knowledge and experiences of military life. Among the study participants, those with some prior experience with military life were less likely to express a difference between what they thought it would be like to be a military spouse and their actual experience. What appears to be universal in this group, however, is the entry experience. Whatever her fears or concerns may have been or may continue to be, there is some brief period of time where the military wife suspends all judgment and takes the plunge into marriage and military life. It is only when she emerges from this initial entry that she begins to ponder what this means for herself as an individual.

#### *Assessment of fit*

After initial entry into the military, the military wife who desires employment begins to assess the fit among her work-related desires, her sense of self, and her new military life. This includes an examination of one's work-related desires in the military context of frequent relocation, unpredictable schedules, and possible deployments, often while living far away from one's family and support network.

For some women this is not an unsettling event because a good fit exists between their work, self, and military life. Joanna was raised in a military family, and had a previous military marriage before marrying her current husband. Not only was she already familiar with the military culture and lifestyle, but she was pursuing a highly transferable nursing career. In her assessment, Joanna's work fits perfectly with her military life.

Other women, like Maria, found significant conflict between their work-related goals and their new military life. Maria faced the reality of having to go back to school in the mainland United States because she feared discrimination as an attorney from Puerto Rico. In addition, she determined that she would have to take a new bar exam for each new state she and her husband moved to, creating significant challenges for her legal career, and her sense of who she is.

Maria and Joanna provide two of the more extreme examples in this study with respect to fit, one perceiving a bad fit between her work, self, and military life, and the other perceiving a good fit between her work, self, and military life. Most of the women in this study are somewhere in between these extremes, but are also constantly negotiating this reality with each relocation or major life event. Just as a military wife assesses her sense of fit after initial entry to military life, she must repeatedly do so whenever her life circumstances or employment are changed.

Some women react strongly to their own assessment of fit with feelings of shock, sadness, or anger. While they may have temporarily suspended judgment about their situation during the entry phase, this is when reality begins to sink in. Felice talks about her own struggles to reconcile her feelings as a newly married unemployed spouse. She is bothered by her current unemployment, and is grappling with the long-term implications of the choice she has made to become a military wife:

I think what's difficult too is that I am newly married. So this is a formative time for my relationship and here I am in shock mode, like oh my gosh this is my life and how will I ever have a job? How will I ever do this when everything right now is based on

him? So it's coming together as a couple but it's also like I said the two marriages. Realizing this thing is the military, that's the marriage.

...Why am I complaining? My husband has taken an oath to do this. This is a very honoring position what he's decided to do with his life. And here I am spending my 8 hours a day...complaining about it. I chose this.

After 6 months of marriage, Felice is realizing that she doesn't see a good fit between the work she desires for herself and the constraints of military life. At the same time, she is reluctant to "complain" about her situation because she chose to become a military spouse. She is not happy about her current situation, but hasn't yet figured out what to do with those feelings.

Felice experienced a particularly intense transition into military life, finding herself newly married, overseas, and unemployed for the first time all at once. As a result, her first military assignment triggered a number of conflicting feelings and an overall sense of poor fit between her work, self, and military life. This leaves her feeling "shocked" and "defeated." Unlike Felice, other women describe a good sense of fit early in their marriage, only to find this fit disrupted by a significant life event, such as moving overseas or having a baby. The examples of Charlotte and Grace illustrate that a feeling of fit is not constant, but is subject to change over time.

Germany is Charlotte's second assignment as a military spouse. During her husband's first assignment in Georgia, Charlotte held her first job out of college as a civil engineer. She describes that time as one where work was important, and she largely avoided any involvement in the military community. Back then, she felt no conflict between her military life and the work

she was pursuing. She was also unconcerned when her husband received orders for an overseas assignment, despite his warnings that employment may be challenging for her. She was very excited about coming to Germany, and had never had trouble finding a job before, so she was confident in her ability to maintain a career anywhere. She describes a suspension of judgment consistent with the experience of initial entry; for her, Germany has truly been her initial entry to the military lifestyle. Whereas in Georgia she describes distancing herself from other military spouses because she had her own career to focus on, now that she is in Germany without a job, she finds herself one of them. She says, “I’m like kind of something I didn’t want to be...I feel like I’m just a spouse now.” This experience has caused Charlotte to assess the fit between her work-related desires and military life, and is complicated by the possibility that she and her husband may soon start a family:

So, I’m wondering if this is it. Was my 3 years in Georgia going to be my whole career? Am I never going to find a job again? Was I on a roll and then did it end and am I just going to be a mom now? ...It’s not bad, but in my mind I always thought I’d be a working mom, because my mom was.

In Grace’s case, her first experience of conflict between military life and her work occurred with her first overseas move. Prior to moving to Italy, Grace had pursued her own career in finance and project management, and was proud that she did not fit the stereotype of the non-working military spouse. When her husband received orders to go overseas, her employer allowed her to keep her job through a telecommuting arrangement. Although she felt lucky to take her job with her, Grace quickly became frustrated with the arrangement because her new home in Italy did not have the technical infrastructure she needed to get her work done in the

way that she was expected to. Grace describes what it was like trying to perform an American job at “Italian speed”:

It was really difficult, you know. ...The electricity for example, you couldn't have three main things going at the same time, you know. You couldn't have the dryer going with the computer going, with the oven going. All your breakers would pop. So you can't multi-task. And, you know, working in the States is multi-tasking, severely multi-tasking. So I just couldn't multi-task, you know.

And that was very frustrating.

In addition, her employer wanted her to work during the middle of the night, during California business hours. When she learned she was pregnant, Grace says she was relieved to quit her job and allow herself the opportunity to spend her time traveling and being a full-time mother. In her assessment, there was no longer a good fit between her work and her military life that required her to be overseas. The prospect of becoming a mother only added to the conflict she felt over her work.

Felice, Charlotte, and Grace offer three different stories of conflict between one's work and military life. In these cases, the women all experienced a point in time where they have felt there to be a poor fit between their work-related desires and their military lives. One thing they share in common is the experience of an overseas move contributing to this sense of conflict. Felice also alludes to her marriage as a contributing factor, since she feels that everything now revolves around her husband. And Charlotte and Grace both find themselves factoring in a motherhood role when they consider if or how they will work. These examples all show that an assessment of fit between work and the military is not done in isolation, but is impacted by other

salient roles held by the woman at the time. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how roles played in relation to marriage, the military, and motherhood often come into play when evaluating one's overall sense of fit.

*Resolution of fit and impact to self*

Once a woman determines the fit between her work-related desires and her military life, she then responds to her situation in some way either consciously or unconsciously. Among the participants in this study, I saw four types of responses exhibited: preservation of whole self, changing work to adapt, changing self to adapt, or depression, defeat, loss of self. As I have described in this model, no single response is an indication of a woman's permanent state. Rather it is a temporary response to her current situation, and may change significantly in the future.

*Preservation of whole self* occurs when a woman perceives a very good fit between her work-related desires, self, and military life. As in Joanna's case, she never expresses a conflict between what she wants to pursue, how she sees herself, and the military life she is now leading with her husband. Not only has she been able to work consistently as a nurse at every military assignment, but she feels good about the lifestyle overall, and her place in it:

Life is an adventure and I ... think that it's really cool that I can be married to someone who is helping America stay free. And growing up with my father was a huge influence on me. My dad was a Vietnam vet and retired from the Air Force reserves a few years ago. And having that patriotic way of thought for something bigger than you, it's kind of neat. And it's nice to have that. So it's really a neat thing that my husband gets to defend my freedom

as well as a lot of people's freedoms and be part of something bigger than I am.

Similarly, Vanessa has also experienced a good fit. In the early years of her marriage, she anticipated becoming a stay-at-home mother, and felt that the military life would enable her to pursue this lifestyle. When she began to seek other outlets for herself beyond motherhood, she found that photography would allow her to achieve her professional goals while maintaining her commitment to her children. In addition, she has found that the military community has provided her with the ideal client base for her business. Only recently, has she been forced to put her business on hold, resulting in strong feelings of loss. Vanessa's example shows that this process is not static but changing over time. In her case, she has enjoyed a positive feeling of fit throughout most of her experience, resulting in her ability to maintain a whole sense of self:

And I didn't think I'd be going back to work but I thought I could do this. I could start a business and I could travel with that business because I could take it wherever we go. I could do it out of my home or what have you. And with the military it wouldn't really be an issue because it was there with me. And it was just a part of me. I didn't need someone, their facility. And so it seemed really reasonable...I could be contributing to society or being a part of something that was bigger than myself, and giving something to people, and still creating my own schedule. Being on my own timeline and still being able to be there for the boys when they needed me.

Even as she describes her decision to establish her business, she paints a picture of her life as an integrated whole, where the various pieces of her life fit well together.

*Changing work to adapt* is a practical response taken by some women who perceive a poor fit between their work-related desires and their military life. Lisa and Emily offer two examples of this response, both in terms of the behavior exhibited but also in terms of an overall dispassionate and practical approach to navigating the realities of their lives. Lisa even describes herself by saying, “I would say above everything I’m fairly pragmatic.” In Lisa’s case, she began her career as an aspiring pilot, working for small commercial outfits. After moving to Europe and staying there for several assignments, she resolved that her flying career was not to be. While in Europe, she first went back to school, then negotiated an internship for herself in crisis management, and most recently found a long-term position that she enjoys, working on air traffic control analysis. Although she wishes she was further in her career, she feels she has managed the reality of her situation:

You either accept that you don’t work or you accept that every time you move you’re going to have to...find something else, and that you’re not necessarily going to find something that is your career field or is your first choice.

Emily takes a similar pragmatic view of her life, and notes that she has always taken the point of view that “whatever happens happens.” When she first moved overseas and could not find an adequate job, she and her husband decided to start a family. When she became a stay-at-home mother, she says it was not a difficult change for her because she thought of it as “just another job.” She missed her work as a human resource professional, and decided she would be patient until she could find a position within the federal system that would allow her to transfer

jobs with each military assignment. At the time of our interview, she had just landed such a position. She feels satisfied that her patience has paid off, and she now feels complete:

Don't take me wrong. I'm always happy. But to get to that complete satisfaction. You know like, okay, now my kids are taken care of. My husband is doing great on his job. My house is set. And now I get this last check in the box. I got a job. I got a job in my field so now everything is perfect.

*Changing self to adapt* is an option some women pursue when they do not see a possible fit between their work-related desires and their military lives. Elements of this are included in the stories of Katie and Grace. Both have chosen to be stay-at-home mothers, in part to emulate an ideal of motherhood they aspire to, but also in response to the constraints of their military lifestyle. As discussed earlier, Katie was an athletic trainer who now stays home with her children. Although the sacrifice of her career has been painful, she says it is worth the cost. She acknowledges, however, that she has lost a piece of herself along the way:

I lost a part of myself as a person. Because that's how I identified myself a lot, was you know that part of me that's where I thought I was supposed to be and supposed to be doing and that's what I worked hard to do.

Similarly, Grace feels that she made a good choice in staying home with her children while they have been young. At the same time, she acknowledges that giving up her career to stay home, while living in an overseas military environment, has changed her. When she lived in the United States and had her own employment, she interacted little with the military community and maintained a separate identity. She was surprised when a co-worker told her he'd never met

an officer's wife like her, because she worked and wasn't "stuck up." Living overseas, she has found herself becoming incorporated into the military community, in part because she has not had a job to keep her identity separate. Although she used to pride herself on not fitting the military wife stereotype, she says she definitely feels like a military wife now.

*Depression, defeat, loss of self* is a state many women find themselves in, at least temporarily. Although the other responses may involve genuine loss, even to one's identity, feeling depressed and defeated is a state of being stuck. In this state, one feels the loss but has not yet found a coping strategy for the resulting impact to one's sense of self. Some of the stories already discussed contain elements of this: Brenda's feelings of discouragement from ever pursuing a career again, Felice's worries about the lifestyle she has agreed to, and Maria's feeling that she has been forced from her legal career into a career of motherhood. Phoebe's situation represents a particularly painful example of the potential toll to sense of self that can take place when a woman feels a poor fit between her work desires and her life as a military spouse.

Phoebe's loss of self began when she decided to leave active duty, and abandon the work role that was so important to her in order to marry and have her baby. When speaking about being in the Air Force, she says, "It was everything about me. That's who I was." When the Air Force denied her request to be in the same location as her baby's father, she felt she had no choice but to separate from the military, get married, and become a stay-at-home mother. As a result, she left a situation where she felt a complete fit between her work and self, for a life where she sees no fit between the work she would like to do and her commitment to being a wife and mother. Phoebe feels this loss so acutely that she has struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts. She longs for the security and identity that the military used to provide her.

Interestingly she speaks frequently about how much she loved wearing her uniform, and alludes to a sense of comfort she felt from being able to put on that identity. Speaking of her recent struggles with depression and her efforts to control her weight, she says, “Lately I’ve been feeling more depressed because I haven’t been able to exercise, and little things get to me. If I was in the military I’d have my uniform to cover it up.” In the context of our discussion she was telling me that she wished she had the uniform to cover up her weight gain, but as I read the transcript from the interview I could not help but infer a deeper meaning, and see the uniform as a symbol of emotional security, one that covers up her pain. Ultimately, being a member of the military was critical to Phoebe’s sense of self and how she fit in the world. Without it, she is struggling to define a new self.

*The context of multi-layered gender roles: Marriage, military, motherhood*

Although the focus of my research was to understand how military wives think and feel about their desires for employment, the participants’ stories demonstrate that women’s experiences and circumstances related to their employment are highly affected by the gendered non-work roles they play. In particular, the roles of wife, mother, and military spouse repeatedly appeared as threads throughout the interviews, often significantly influencing a woman’s choices about her work, and her belief about what is possible or desirable. For this reason, I have included these three roles in my model of fit, to represent them as a factor that impacts a woman’s sense of fit between her work, self, and military life. At times, all three roles may combine to create an insurmountable barrier to a woman’s work-related desires.

Based on my interview data and the patterns evident in the participants’ stories, I believe the power and salience of these gender roles are a critical piece toward understanding the experiences of military wives with respect to work and self. Unless these factors are included,

this model of fit is overly simplistic and risks repeating the mistakes often made in addressing the military spouse employment problem. The solution is not simply one of job placement, but of resolving a myriad of competing expectations and barriers that face a military wife who wants to work. The presence of these gender roles in effect creates an invisible blanket of oppression over the lives of military wives, which permits the illusion of unlimited choices, but in fact severely limits their potential. In some cases the effect is subtle, while in other cases it is dramatic. I will now describe each of these three roles, and the ways in which they manifested in the lives of these participants.

*Marriage* and the role of wife is one layer of gender roles impacting military wives. A traditional marriage in the United States between a man and a woman still carries a set of gender-specific norms that dictate what a wife should be like. Marriages certainly vary a great deal in how a couple chooses to enact these norms, but the fact remains that a culturally constructed view of wife exists (Bernard, 1981). That is a woman who is there to serve her husband, perform the emotional labor for the family (Hochschild, 2003a), and make her home life a priority over other spheres.

Many of the participants in this study offered insight into their own marriages, and how their role of wife has influenced or been influenced by their employment situation. Nicole and Brenda represent two very different experiences that show how important the marriage role can be in determining one's fit between work and the military life. In Nicole's case, she has been able to pursue a continuous career throughout multiple military assignments, with the current assignment in Germany being her first experience with unemployment. During her working years, she found herself advancing rapidly up the ranks in her organization. When talking about

her career, she repeatedly emphasizes how crucial her husband's support has been for her, not only symbolically but practically in sharing household and caretaking roles:

(He) made an effort to try to get away from work when he could to make dinner or (help) with the housework. He's always been very, very good at that, very good at that. So that's been great. And then the times when I went TDY<sup>1</sup>, I mean, he was there taking care of the kids and trying to arrange his schedule so that he could do that, the drop off and the pick-up and just doing everything for the couple of days that I was gone. So I don't take that for granted.

Nicole shares that her husband has never thought of her career as secondary to his, even though the military lifestyle sometimes demands that his career comes first. At one point he offered to leave the military so her career could become primary. However, the idea of being the primary breadwinner didn't match Nicole's own view of gender roles, so she declined this opportunity:

And we even talked about...did I want him to get out (of the military) and then I would kind of be the breadwinner and he would find a job elsewhere. And but I said, no. No, I'm comfortable with the way things are...I think that would have just added more stress to me that I wasn't ready for, you know, having a family. And that's where it gets back to I'm very independent and driven...and like to know that I can support myself. But then again, on the other hand I'm also very old fashioned and feel like

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<sup>1</sup> TDY = temporary duty, and is the term used for business travel within the military.

let the man make the money, you know what I mean. And...  
whatever I make, that's great.

In Brenda's case, her marriage has been built on traditional gender roles that have made it challenging for her to pursue the work she now wishes to return to after several years of being a stay-at-home mother. In the early years of her marriage, Brenda took on the majority of the household responsibilities because her husband was often away on flying missions, and she took on the role of full-time mother. Over the years, this division of labor has become such a strong norm in their household that her husband has never cooked a meal in their home. Brenda reflects on how these roles became established and wishes she had understood the potential long-term impacts from the beginning:

I remember someone said when I got married, "Establish the way you want it to be before. Don't mow the lawn if you don't plan to mow the lawn for the next 40 years." And I was like, oh, yeah.  
And yes, now I wish I would have listened to this tidbit of advice.

Brenda recently attempted to return to full-time employment, now that her children are all in school. However, she quit her job after 6 months because it was very stressful trying to maintain all her household and caretaking responsibilities in addition to a full-time job. Finally, her husband requested that she resign because he didn't like the impact her work was having on the household; Brenda says, "It's not running the way he thinks it should run." It does not seem to be an option that he assume some of the household tasks. At the time of our interview, Brenda is resentful that she has given up a job she enjoyed, and is discouraged from considering any prospect of future employment:

But now I really truly feel as if my role is to be the support, to make sure that my husband gets someplace in his career, a certain place, wherever he wants to go and that my kids get wherever they want to go in their lives, which is what I would want to do for my kids anyway. But somehow the husband thing... I'm getting a little bit more and more resentful as I see that it's so one-sided... that the expectation through the years of this military career is that we promote his career and to my nonpromotion of anything I want to do.

Brenda's experience of being a wife has been heavily influenced by her military and motherhood roles as well. The three gendered-roles are intertwined. The gender roles assumed in her marriage are reinforced by military norms that tell its members that duty comes first, above all else, and spouses are expected to tend to home and family in order to free the member of any distraction (Harrell, 2003a; Segal, 1986). Brenda describes the military as her husband's "excuse job" that conveniently prevents him from taking on any commitments at home. Similarly, the gender norms that encouraged Brenda to stay home with her children helped solidify her role as primary caretaker and manager of the household. As a result, she says that it always falls to her to "pick up all the stuff" in her family's lives, leaving her with little time for anything else.

The contrast between the stories of Brenda and Nicole indicate the potential importance of gender roles within a marriage, and the ways in which such definitions can either sustain or inhibit a woman's expectations for her work and for herself.

The *military* represents a second layer of gender roles impacting military wives. As discussed in Chapter 2, the military spouse role has always been a role fraught with gender-specific expectations and has been designed to be a female supporting role. Other research has focused on the expectations of volunteerism and supportive behavior that have been prescribed for military wives, and officers' wives in particular (Enloe, 1988; Harrell, 2002). The participants in this study did not discuss this aspect of their role as being burdensome to their lives or barriers to their pursuit of employment. Rather, they discussed the indirect effect on them of the stereotypical assumption that military spouses do not work, and that they are always assumed to be the trailing spouse. This is especially true in overseas military communities, where work is less available to spouses. As a result, several participants expressed feeling left out or denigrated because they pursue employment. Others were resentful of the assumptions made about them.

In effect the stereotype of the non-working military spouse who spends her time on "frivolous pursuits" (Jervis, 2011, p.97) influences a woman's assessment between her work and the military lifestyle. If she takes in the gender-based messages that encourage her to be the supportive trailing spouse and not work, she may feel that working in any form does not fit with military life. Several spouses acknowledged that they felt special or different from other military spouses as long as they had their own work. Both Charlotte and Grace talk about the feeling of becoming "one of them" when they began living overseas and stopped working. Jervis (2011) notes that military wives often become more incorporated into the military community and culture when they embark on overseas assignments that isolate them from their civilian lives at home.

Roberta talks about her own experience as a newcomer to military life, and how strange it is that other spouses don't discuss their own work interests or ask about hers:

It was actually shocking to me when I first got here... I did immediately notice meeting with other spouses or just being in this new community, people always asking, "What does your husband do, what does your husband fly?" ...Never, "What do you do?" Which is also an American thing too. Maybe it's just that we're in a different country and sometimes Americans are caught up in what you do...And so I would never get asked, "What's your job?" And that's okay, but is it because the assumption is I don't have one? Or is the assumption because I don't want to or I'm not supposed to, or I don't know.

Roberta is trying to make sense of her experiences so far as a military spouse, and is still assessing the fit between her work and her new military life. One aspect of this is interpreting the signals she is picking up about what it means to be a military spouse. Is it inappropriate to work? Is it not supposed to be important? She is still unsure what the message is, but is left feeling "sad...like I just didn't matter."

Other spouses mention more directly that there is still a prevailing assumption that military spouses do not work, especially overseas. Although Joanna is very proud to be a military spouse and is an active volunteer in the military community, she has been unable to participate in the local spouse club because the activities take place during her work hours. She is resentful to be excluded, and feels this sends a message that working spouses are not welcome to participate.

Similarly, Olivia has been directly criticized over the years for pursuing her own employment. She talks about how others have made the assumption that her employment will be detrimental to her husband's career. This is ironic, considering her husband has reached the highest possible rank for an enlisted member of the Air Force:

Just because I work outside the home doesn't mean I'm not involved in his career. And then when we moved to New Jersey, one of the ladies asked him, "Well, is Olivia going to work when she gets to New Jersey?" And he said probably, because I'd always worked. And she said, "Well that's too bad." She says, "Maybe it would help your career a little bit more if she didn't work." And I'm thinking, how much more could I help his career by staying at home waiting for him to come home?

Whether encountered subtly, as in Roberta's or Joanna's experiences, or quite directly, as in Olivia's experience, the traditional expectation of a military spouse remains a gendered one of supportive trailing wife. The existence of this traditional gendered norm still serves to influence a woman's experience and what kind of a fit she sees for herself and for her work in military life.

***Motherhood*** represents the third layer of gender role expectations facing some military wives. In this study, 15 out of the 21 participants had children, mirroring an Air Force where 72% of married couples have children (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011). Like marriage, parenting is traditionally performed by a man and a woman who have divided responsibilities shaped by socially constructed gender roles. During the era of post-industrial prosperity, the image of the ideal mother emerged as a woman who stayed home with her young children to provide for their every need at all times, while the father provided for the family by working

outside the home (Bernard, 1981; Lopata, 1971). For the first time in history, the focus of child-rearing became the sole responsibility of the mother, rather than the extended family or community (Lopata, 1971). This norm is particularly salient for military families who often live far from their extended families and civilian support networks. The demographics of the labor force have changed substantially since this post-World War II era, yet the ideal of the stay-at-home mother has survived in many circles, most notably in the military community, where jobs are still structured as if there were a single breadwinner with one career and a supporting wife and mother at home.

Although most of the mothers in this study expressed frustration or dissatisfaction when staying home with their children full-time, about half also said they felt lucky that they have the option to stay home with their children, and one-third disliked the idea of utilizing outside childcare. All of this is consistent with a gender-specific expectation that women who are mothers should be the primary, if not sole caretaker of their children, and should play that role by being in the home with them. Whether enacted or not, these norms factor into a woman's experience, how she feels about her desire to work, and whether or not she sees a fit between work and her military life.

Katie's story offers a rich example of these considerations. Although Katie says she lost a piece of herself when she stopped working, she says it was a sacrifice worth making. When she describes her situation, she calls herself a "married single mom." As in Brenda's case discussed earlier, Katie is married to a pilot who is away from home frequently and works an unpredictable schedule. So Katie is faced with the double burden of maintaining the household on her own, while holding herself to the ideal image of the mother who stays home with her children. Katie would like to resume her career as an athletic trainer, but says this typically

requires regular evening commitments to attend sporting events. Explaining her decision not to use childcare that might allow her to work, she says, “Somebody else is raising your kids. I don’t want to do that.” Coupled with her reluctance to use childcare and the fact that her husband is often away, she feels that pursuing the kind of work she would like is just not possible. She sees a poor fit between her work-related desires and her military life, compounded by her motherhood role.

Tanya feels a similar conflict between wanting to be home with her children and wanting to pursue work she enjoys. Like Katie, she dislikes the idea of childcare because she doesn’t want to “let someone else raise my kid.” Yet she contemplates the idea of working, and has applied for various positions that have not come through. She longs to pursue an office job that will get her out of the house and give her a break, but she feels constrained by her own desire not to “miss the moments” with her children.

Motherhood also certainly impacts women who resist the ideal of the stay-at-home mother. Participants like Nicole, Isabelle, and Phoebe all claim that having their own work has made them better mothers. At the same time, they acknowledge being influenced by the dominant ideal that mothers stay home. After being a single mom for many years, Isabelle was excited to have the opportunity to stay home with her daughter. In her case, becoming a military spouse allowed her to stay home, which she had never before been able to do. She had always thought this would be an ideal situation, but in reality she found it to be lonely and unrewarding:

I think I really realized who I am and who I’m not. And I had spent 8 years wishing that my life was different, that I could stay home. And I think that really helped me realize that the grass isn’t always greener. That’s not who I am. And it’s not like you see on

TV where you're in the kitchen with your daughter and you guys are baking and having fun. And it's not that way. So it really, it helped me to go back to work and not be wishing that I was at home.

Several of the study participants expressed their view that the military lifestyle is a good fit for stay-at-home mothers. Grace and Vanessa see this as a positive aspect of the military, and have felt that the military life has enabled them to choose their stay-at-home role. Vanessa says she supported her husband's decision to join the Air Force because of the stability and security it would provide, allowing her to stay home while her children were small. Grace is grateful that she did not have to make the choice between her career and staying home, because she feels that being overseas as a military spouse gave her an easy justification to stay home and not work. Both Vanessa and Grace dislike the idea of using childcare for their own children, and subscribe to the traditional ideal of the mother who is home with her children. Although they both have a desire to work, they only wish to do so in ways that do not impact their primary role with their children.

Alternatively, Maria has found herself a stay-at-home mother when this was not her original goal. After living in three different states and preparing for a third bar exam, Maria realized the physical and emotional toll she was feeling from her efforts to maintain her legal career. She decided to stay home when she became pregnant, and says it took her a long time to accept the image of herself as a stay-at-home mother. She had always looked up to her own mother, who is a successful business woman, and assumed that she would follow in her footsteps. She laments that she has been essentially forced into a traditional mothering role by her military lifestyle:

And it's tough. It gets so tough. It has impacted me a lot. Now that I cannot find a job, not even as a volunteer, it's like this military lifestyle forces you to be a stay-at-home mom even if you want to break that cycle.

Although there is a strong influence to pursue the ideal of the stay-at-home mother, many of the participants share Maria's feelings about wanting to emulate their mother's careers in the working world. About half of the participants said that work was important to them because of the role models offered by their own mothers, and several of the participants who are out of the workforce said they worry about setting an example for their own daughters. Ironically, Katie shares her feelings about how important it is for her to be there for her kids, while acknowledging that she did not value her own mother's role when she was a child:

I'm like wow, what do you do, Mom? You stay home and take care of us; that's not a big job. ...But now that I'm a mom, now I look back and go wow that was a huge job she did for us and a sacrifice as well. Now I'm looking at my daughter, because I'm like oh, you think your mom is a slacker.

Clearly, there is a tension felt between wanting to be ever-present and committed to one's children, and wanting to show that a woman can be successful and worthy in the world outside the home. How a woman resolves this dialectic and responds to the gendered message associated with motherhood will directly impact her perception of fit between her work, self, and military life.

The impacts of marriage, military, and motherhood are not experienced or felt uniformly. However, the presence of these multi-layered gender roles does influence the degree of fit a

woman feels between her work-related desires and her military life. In some cases the cumulative effect of these roles can be burdensome to the point that she will choose to abandon any work-related desires completely. In other cases, there is a perception of good fit, and she is able to pursue her employment goals without much conflict. And still others find ways to reshape their work or their definition of who they are in order to create a better fit between their roles and the requirements of their military life.

*Applying the model of fit: My own example*

During this research, I have reflected on my own experience as an Air Force wife, and have written about my own story as an Epilogue to this study. In doing so, I re-examined my experience through the lens of the model of fit, and found that I have repeated this cycle many times with varying results at different points in time. Like many of my participants, my entry phase was marked by romance and excitement, with a naïve belief that my husband and I would be able to resolve any conflicts between my work and our military life. When I first encountered a serious conflict, and gave up my work to move overseas, I experienced feelings of depression and low self-worth. Later, I experimented with creating work that would be flexible enough to meet the demands of military life. I found this to be a reasonable but somewhat frustrating compromise. Most recently, my doctoral studies have proven to be an ideal solution to my quest for fit, providing me with work that is fulfilling, flexible, and fully consistent with who I am and wish to be. My own experience demonstrates the ever-changing and potentially volatile nature of this cycle that military wives live every day.

Regardless of her particular response to perceived fit, any of these states are temporary states of being. A woman may change how she chooses to respond to her particular circumstance, or a new life event may occur to introduce the next round of self-assessment.

Each move to a new location, birth of a child, or change in employment triggers a new cycle of assessment and response.

Clearly, this model of fit is a preliminary proposal based on a small number of interviews. I believe it holds promise for new understanding, but must be explored further in more detail. It is based on a foundation of knowledge gained from previous research, and begins to explain the full range of diverse experiences and feelings shared in this study. Furthermore, I believe this model passes the test of being a trustworthy representation of my interview data, as several of my interview participants expressed strong agreement with this model when I shared it with them. Some expressed satisfaction and relief to have a model that helped them make sense of their experience for the first time.

One limitation of this model is the broad definition I have chosen for “fit” to include any aspect of work, self, or military life. Although I believe this definition accurately reflects the scope of the problem, it does not provide enough information to fully understand what aspects of these domains are most salient. Perhaps this provides an opportunity for further research.

The following chapter will explore such possibilities for further research, in addition to discussing the significance of my findings within the scholarly context. I will elaborate on the connection between my findings and existing research, and how this study contributes a new dimension toward understanding the experiences of military spouses. In addition, I will discuss the connection to the broader scholarly discussion on the human experience of working life, and implications for further research and practice.

## CHAPTER SIX – DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will discuss the implications of the findings from my research, focusing first on the significance with respect to military spouse employment. I will explain how my findings reinforce claims that have been made in prior research, and identify how my research adds new knowledge to the scholarly discussion on this topic. I will also explore the significance of my findings with respect to the broader field of working life, and demonstrate a connection between this research and the current debates on work-life balance, and work and self. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting areas for further research and implications for policy and practice.

### *Military spouse employment: Confirming prior research*

The findings from my study confirm several claims that have been made by other scholars. I will highlight here four specific ways in which my research reinforces the findings from previous research: (a) military wives are impacted by the cyclical nature of frequent relocation (Burrell, 2006; Jervis, 2011); (b) the concept of role fit is an important determinant of a military wife's general well-being (Rosen, Ickovics, & Moghadam, 1990); (c) when there is a poor fit between a wife's expectations and reality, she may accommodate to this reality by changing her behavior or by changing her expectations about herself (Dana, 2006); (d) military wives who are unable to find a solution to a poor fit risk losing parts of themselves (Jervis, 2011).

The military wives in my study revealed the importance of finding a good fit between their work-related desires and their military lives, but also showed that this was not a one-time process. Frequent relocation creates a continuous process of assessing fit, determining one's options, and developing a response. As Burrell (2006) and Jervis (2011) each point out in their research, moving too frequently may also inhibit a woman's ability to recover from the losses

associated with her last move. The existence of this recurring cycle means that military wives are subject to an emotionally disturbing process of self-evaluation on a constant basis. They are often either engaged in preparing for the next move or recovering from the last one, but it is difficult to identify the discrete impact of a particular move when moving is a process that occurs every 2-3 years. Rather, moving becomes a continuous process for a military wife, who is always in some stage of adjustment (Burrell, 2006).

The example of Maria highlights the importance of the recurring nature of relocation. In her case, she attempted to maintain her legal career after she married her husband. In the first assignment, she went back to school to supplement her credentials, but then lacked sufficient time to obtain a job before moving again. In the second assignment, she spent the first few months unpacking, and then spent several months studying for the Florida bar exam. Once she passed the bar, she had a difficult job search and finally found a job that was not a good fit for her. She quit, and found a job that she loved, only to learn it was time to move again. During this third assignment, Maria again took time to set up the house, and then began preparing for the Texas bar exam. While studying for this exam, she became overwhelmed by stress and was concerned about putting her pregnancy at risk. She canceled her plans to take the bar, and has been a stay-at-home mother ever since.

If we looked at each of Maria's moves in isolation they might appear to be surmountable challenges. If she had been able to stay in Florida (the second assignment), it seems likely that she could have stayed in the job she loved, and the investment she made in the bar exam and initial job searching would have felt worthwhile. However, when faced with the prospect of repeating this cycle every few years, the challenges became overwhelming. In addition, she was trying to motivate herself to study for the Texas bar and begin a new job search when she was

still grieving the loss of her job in Florida. As a result of her frequent relocation, and the mismatch between her career goals and military lifestyle, Maria began to suffer from depression and a profound sense of loss. Her example reinforces the claims of Burrell (2006) and Jervis (2011) who contend that military wives are impacted by the continuous change introduced by frequent relocations.

Another finding from my research is that this process of continuous change includes an assessment of fit between a wife's work-related desires and her military life. This is a finding I discussed at length in the previous chapter, and is consistent with Rosen, Ickovics, and Moghadam's (1990) research on the general well-being of military wives. In their research, Rosen et al. found that one of the strongest predictors of general well-being is a woman's perceived "role fit," defined as "the congruence or discrepancy between a woman's objective situation and her preferred or ideal situation" (p. 379). In other words, women who perceive a significant gap between their actual role and their ideal role are likely to suffer in their general well-being. An example the researchers offer is that housewives who want to be housewives enjoy a higher level of general well-being than those housewives who would prefer to pursue a different role.

Although Rosen et al. focus on general well-being, while I have explored the impact to self, I see these themes as consistent. The participants in my study who are able to maintain a whole self and overall satisfaction with their situation are those who feel the best fit between their work-related desires and their military lives. Joanna represents an obvious example of strong fit. Her vocation as a nurse is important to her, and it is a goal she achieved prior to marrying her current husband. She has been able to maintain her career goals while being a military wife, and she sees no conflict between work-related desires, her expectations for herself,

and her military life. Her description of her life is positive, and she attributes much of her feelings of self-esteem to her work-related accomplishments. She exemplifies the claims made by Rosen et al., by showing that a perception of fit is consistent with an overall sense of general well-being.

An equally important finding relates to the strategies women take when they find themselves in a state of poor fit. I found that military wives who perceive a poor sense of fit will either adapt their work or change themselves in some way to create a better fit. This finding is consistent with Krista Dana's (2006) research on career-identity among military wives. She finds that women with a desire for career either modify their behavior or take an adaptive cognitive strategy to create a fit between their career aspirations and their actual experience. Taking a behavioral approach, a woman will make a career change that is a better fit with a military lifestyle. Lisa offers a prime example of this in my study. Although she aspired to be a commercial pilot, she adjusted her career goals to fit her military life by finding analytic work with a European company that allowed her to work from home. Alternatively, women who choose a cognitive adaptive strategy may change their definition of career in order to find satisfaction with their situation. Both Dana and I found this to be true among some of the stay-at-home mothers in our studies. In my study, Andrea says she became satisfied with her role as a stay-at-home mother, once she began to see it as a job. Once she identified herself as a teacher to her children, her role took on new importance to her, and she no longer felt like she was "failing."

Sue Jervis (2011) describes an alternative option military wives can take when faced with the emotional disruption of a move. She contends that women who fail to grieve the losses incurred by relocation suffer from "emotional fragmentation" and lose parts of themselves in the

process. This finding is consistent with the women in my study who have experienced feelings of depression, defeat, and loss of identity as a result of a poor fit between their work-related desires and their military lives. As Jervis found in her study, my research shows that some women find themselves stuck, at least temporarily, and cannot see a good solution for their problem. As a result, they experience a loss of self. Phoebe's story represents one example of this dynamic. After leaving the Air Force, getting married, and becoming a stay-at-home mother, Phoebe finds herself depressed and struggling with thoughts of suicide. Because being in the Air Force was "everything about her" she is now lost without that part of herself.

*Military spouse employment: Contributions of this study*

While my research confirms aspects of several other previous studies, I believe it also adds new information in two important ways. First, as discussed in Chapter 2, my intent was to fill a gap that exists in the literature on military spouses. Where many other researchers have studied the employment challenges of military spouses, and others have analyzed the overall lived experience of the military spouse, few have specifically addressed how military spouses think and feel about their work-related desires. Second, my findings reveal the significance of multi-layered gendered roles in a way that has not been discussed in other studies.

To the first point, this study takes a targeted look at the thoughts and feelings experienced by military wives who have an interest in employment. By asking each participant to recount her history as a military spouse, assignment by assignment, I was able to explore how she felt about her employment status at each point in time. I also took this inquiry a step further by asking each participant how she felt about herself during each of these periods. By taking this approach, the participants were able to share their feelings about work, lack of work, and self. As stated in my findings, the specifics of each story were unique, but all participants were unanimous in their

belief that work helps them feel good about themselves, while not working sometimes makes them feel bad about themselves. This is a fundamental point that has been overlooked in other studies of military spouses. These findings are important because it supports the notion that military spouse employment is a problem not only because of its economic consequences but because of its psychic impact as well. Given the millions of American women who are current or former military wives, the potential impact from depression and loss of self has serious implications for individuals and families.

To the second point, multi-layered gender roles inherent in military, marriage, and motherhood, play a subtle but powerful role in influencing how military wives think and feel about their work-related desires. For some, these socially constructed roles act in combination to partially or even completely impede a woman's attempts to work. This finding is consistent with other research touching on gender roles (D'Amico & Weinstein, 1999; Enloe, 2000; Harrell 2000a; 2003a; Harrison & Laliberté, 1997; Jervis, 2011; Segal, 1986), but differs by suggesting that it is not one set of gender roles that a military wife must contend with, but several simultaneously. For example, Segal (1986) claims that women will only cease to be stuck carrying the demands of the family when they enter the workforce in greater numbers and require men to take on a greater share of responsibility at home. However, cases like Brenda's show that entering the workforce is not an easy solution for women who are contending with three layers of gendered expectations: (1) *military* – to be the trailing and supportive spouse who will follow her husband to each location and allow him to work whenever he needs or chooses to; (2) *marriage* – to be the wife who will take sole responsibility for all household responsibilities; (3) *mother* – to be the ever-present figure for her children and the parent that will be relied on for all needs. Although Brenda attempted to change her situation by working,

she found that her husband was unwilling to accommodate the change in roles that would be required.

Understanding the impact of gender roles is an important contribution of this study because it highlights the stickiness of the military spouse employment problem in a way that other studies have not demonstrated. Resolving the low employment of military spouses will take more than simply placing women in jobs. Addressing this issue in a genuine way will require a strategy that focuses on creating a good fit between work, self-expectations, and military life. Creating such a fit demands a conscious look at gender roles and the additional conflicts such norms create for a military wife who wants to work. I believe this study has the potential to inform future efforts to support military spouses by challenging the assumptions made about the nature of the problem.

#### *Areas for further research*

There are several areas that emerge for me as topics requiring further research on military spouse employment. First, is the notion of being able to integrate one's work and military life in such a way that a military spouse is able to maintain a whole and healthy self. I see evidence of this in the stories of Olivia, Joanna, and Nicole, but don't believe this study is adequate to fully understand why their approach to their work and their lives allows them to preserve an integrated approach to work, self, and military life. I believe further research is needed to explore the experiences of military spouses who have successfully blended work-related desires and military life. Although this was the stated intention of Dana's (2006) research, I find her answers wanting. She essentially suggests that women achieve this integration by lowering their expectations and accommodating their desires to the realities of military life, and I saw evidence in my own research that many women take this approach, resulting in feelings of compromise

and sacrifice. However, women like Olivia, Joanna, and Nicole demonstrate that it is possible to be a military wife, have a satisfying working life, a healthy home life, and a whole sense of self at the same time. It would be helpful to further explore and understand these models so that other women might begin to see what is possible for them, and not assume that constant accommodation is the only option for a military wife.

Another area of research is that of male military spousehood and employment. There is ample evidence that male military spouses have a different experience than female military spouses because of the impact of gender roles (Harrell, 2003a). However, there is little information about how male spouses navigate the employment challenges created for them, and how they feel about them. There are few stories about what it is like for them to pursue a working life while being a military spouse. Jervis (2011) offers an interesting anecdote by sharing that her one male participant is the person in her study who showed no loss of self from relocation. From his story, it appears that he was able to keep his job, and ultimately expected his wife to maintain primary parenting responsibilities regardless of the demands of her military career. This one example speaks volumes about the potential power of gender roles and the assumptions underlying them about what is possible or normal. It also shows that the “greediness” of the military culture (Segal, 1986) can be overcome when trumped by gender role expectations at home. It would be helpful to research the experience of male military spouses, both to understand their experiences in their own right, but also to help military wives see another possible way of being. In essence, understanding the non-gendered version of the military spouse, and seeing the behavior and expectations that are not there, may help others see the military wife’s oppression more clearly.

Finally, I believe my proposed model of fit could be further tested and refined in future research. For example, as I discussed in the previous chapter, I constructed a model that broadly encompasses a variety of factors that influence a woman's perception of fit. However, I do not have adequate information from my qualitative interviews to determine how these influences work or which factors are more salient than others. As a future study, it may be helpful to operationalize these variables and attempt to determine the relative significance of each one, in order to develop appropriate solutions.

*Implications for policy and practice*

In addition to possible new research, there are clearly significant implications for policy and practice. One of the lessons from this research is that military wives feel that their challenges are personal ones, yet in reality it is a systemic problem, tangled in a web of gender roles and a lifestyle of frequent relocation. Yet, DoD's policy response to the employment challenges for military spouses has been focused on assistance for job searching and job placement. While this may help to some degree, this solution falls far short of addressing the root causes of the employment problem.

There has been some awareness raised about the impact of frequent relocation (Booth, 2003; Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Cooney, Segal, & De Angelis, 2009; Payne, Warner, & Little, 1992), and DoD has taken steps to increase the average length of assignments. However, there is little debate about the military's need to regularly relocate its personnel. Evaluating the efficiency of the military's personnel policies and operational tactics is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, however I do believe it is worth asking what the true operational need is for the current PCS system. In the body of literature I explored, the only explanation I encountered was one that was based on tradition and culture. Military members and their families are more likely

to develop a strong tie to the organization if they are forced to abandon ties to the civilian world and move at the military's command (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). Moving around and living in different places also supports the culture of "adventure" that is attractive to many military members and their families (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). I do not presume to know the right answer behind the military's need to PCS, but if DoD has a genuine concern for "family readiness" and spousal employment, I believe it is time to examine this issue in a transparent way.

Another implication from this research is the importance of dialogue among military spouses. Several of my participants mentioned feelings of being unique or different because they felt bad about wanting to work and not being able to. Others expressed relief when I told them they weren't the only ones to express frustration or even tears about their experiences. A few women wished they had access to a support group to talk with other women about their employment challenges. And Roberta insightfully noted how we unintentionally hold back our work-identities when we interact with other military spouses, causing us each to feel that much more isolated or abnormal from our experience.

There are several consequences to this culture of silence among military spouses (Lehr, 1999; Wherry, 2000). By not discussing our true feelings, we deny ourselves the opportunity to work through them in a healthy and reparative way (Jervis, 2011). We reinforce the feeling that we are really not like everyone else, and continue to try to cope as individuals, without any support. Such tactics can lead to feelings of alienation, with significant impact to our overall health and the satisfaction with marriage and home life (McKain, 1973). Finally, this act of withholding a part of our true selves is an act of collusion with the military status quo, that only

serves to support the myth that military wives can and should perpetually accommodate themselves to any situation (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997).

I believe an important way of addressing military spouse employment is through dialogue. This has implications for both policy and practice. Michelle Obama has made dialogue a part of her approach to supporting military families, and I believe her conversations are a step in the right direction. In practical terms, dialogue can begin informally in any venue with military spouses. Simply having a conversation about what military life is like and how we feel about that is a significant way of removing a barrier. Talking about this allows women to feel that they are not alone, and that they are not strange for having feelings they don't normally hear others talking about. In the tradition of Freire (1974), dialogue among oppressed groups and enabling them to name their issues is one of the first steps towards claiming freedom. On a systemic level, this may not directly bring about policy change, but it can become a way of talking differently about the subject, which is the beginning of real lasting change (Barrett, Thomas and Hocesvar, 1995, Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005).

Finally, I believe there is an opportunity to use the findings from this research to educate both members of the military community and those who serve them on these issues. One of my participants suggested that my research become part of the standard "in-processing" that military members receive at new assignments so that they might better understand the experiences of their spouses. I learned from my participants, and recognize in my own experience, that one of the biggest challenges for military wives is often the frustration of trying to convey their feelings about this topic to their own spouses. Rather than fighting this challenge one marriage at a time, it would be helpful to raise awareness about this problem at a community level. One channel for this could be the various social service professionals who support the military community, such

as mental health providers, human resource professionals, and family support personnel. If they begin to understand the complexity involved in the military spouse experience, they may also help build broader awareness and begin to change the conversation about what needs to change.

*Implications for civilian working life*

This research clearly has direct significance to the military spouse population, and the majority of them who want to pursue their own working lives. However, the findings from this research also have implications for civilian working life as well. When a civilian colleague reviewed an early draft of my findings, she remarked how much the stories reminded her of women she knew in her own life. In other words, the restrictions military wives feel from their gender roles are hardly unique to the military community, but exist in civilian life as well. Military wives simply represent a more extreme version of this dynamic, both because they relocate frequently and because they operate within a culture based on traditional, conservative norms.

The current focus on “work-life balance” in white-collar American workplaces represents a parallel story to the spouse employment focus in the military community. In both cases, a systemic problem rooted in traditional gender role expectations is portrayed as an individual challenge to be overcome by individual women. DoD urges military wives to take advantage of the resources aimed at helping them land a job, but in doing so they deflect attention from the underlying causes of the problem: frequent relocation and the perpetuation of rigid gender roles. Similarly, American employers and human resource professionals have developed a personal strategy for women who juggle work and family demands, largely without addressing the underlying assumptions about gender roles and the ways in which work is constructed.

Feminist scholars on the subject contend that work-life balance programs discriminate against women because they provide exceptions for them rather than changing the design of work itself (Lewis, Rapaport, & Gambles, 2003). These programs provide flexible work options, largely for women with young children, but fail to question the basic design of work, which is still based on the industrial era assumption that families have a single breadwinner and a wife at home (Bailyn, 2006). Inherent in the post-modern assumptions about the white-collar workplace is the idea that work is an “all or nothing proposition” that requires a worker’s whole self in order to be successful (Bailyn, 2006; Casey, 1995; Hochschild, 2003a). Because working mothers are often unable to commit to such a standard, while men are encouraged to do so, women as a population find themselves underemployed, while men are overemployed (Bailyn, 2006).

Employers in the US have avoided the debate about job design, and have saved men from changing their gender role assumptions by providing women with the option of underemployment. In doing so, the message is that women hold the keys to wholeness and satisfaction in their own hands, if they only find the right “balance” between work hours and home hours, and practice the most efficient time management techniques (Caproni, 2004). By framing this issue as personal rather than systemic, the gender role issues remain hidden from view, and women are largely left to choose an accommodation strategy, bearing a striking resemblance to the case of military wives.

Furthermore, the current discourse on working mothers perpetuates a myth of choice rather than highlighting the complex factors that create a conflict between work and motherhood (Crittenden, 2001; Hirshman, 2005), just as the current initiatives to support military spouse employment tout the need to make jobs available without examining the full range of reasons

behind the employment problem. When working mothers “choose” to opt out of the workforce, or military spouses “choose” to give up their plans to work, this does not absolve us as researchers and practitioners from looking more closely at the reasons behind this supposed choice. When the choice lies between two undesirable options, we should dig deeper into understanding the source of this conflict rather than allowing it to be held up as an example of individual liberation.

As this study demonstrates, accommodating oneself to fit a less than ideal working life can have significant impact to one’s sense of self, and result in despair, depression, and fragmentation. This finding certainly has implications for the civilian population as well as the military spouse population. Thompson and Bunderson (2001) contend that the real issue behind the quest for work-life balance is a desire to find a fit between one’s ideal self and one’s actual self. Current scholars of working life have debated the impacts of the post-modern workplace on the worker’s sense of self (Casey, 1995; Gergen, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Sennett, 1998; Hochschild, 2003a). At the heart of the matter is the reality that change is occurring at an unprecedented pace (Eriksen, 2001; 2005), and workers are often expected to meet those demands by accommodating their very selves to meet each new situation (Hochschild, 2003a). Giddens (1991) refers to this phenomenon as the development of the “reflexive self,” and suggests that an authentic self can be maintained if one takes on the construction of oneself as a creative and mindful endeavor. However, faced with the onslaught of multiple demands for change from post-modern life, it is easy to become fragmented and for a false self to emerge.

Some of the stories shared by the participants of this study exemplify Giddens’ (1991) claim. A lifestyle of frequent relocation and constant accommodation requires a military wife to become a reflexive self or risk losing a significant part of herself completely. As I described in

the previous chapter, military wives who find it difficult to create a fit between themselves, their work, and their military life may face such a loss. The difficulty of constant adaptation is apparent in the themes of ambivalence expressed by these women about their lives: Relocation is an adventure that has made them strong and resourceful, but the military life is hard and can lead to feelings of despair, depression, and loss of one's true self. Just as post-modern, white-collar workers in the civilian world are asked to adapt to a fast pace of change, military wives face constant adaptation in order to survive their daily lives. The lessons of these stories provide some insight into those who are able to maintain a reflexive self and those who are not.

Finally, the findings from this study offer a wide range of applications to the various experiences of working women in the civilian world. This is true because military wives are simply a subset of American civilian women. Although it is tempting to see ourselves as separate, we military wives are hardly different or unique in many ways. Our separateness is an illusion that only serves to keep us feeling isolated from our civilian sisters, many of whom share our desires to craft a satisfying working life in spite of the gender-based obstacles facing us. When I read about the working poor (Ehrenreich, 2001), I picture Serena trying to eke out a living through multiple low-wage jobs. When I read about the "second shift" (Hochschild, 2003b) taken on by women with husbands reluctant to share in the housework, I picture Brenda trying to re-enter the workforce while maintaining all her obligations at home. When I read about the experiences of civilian trailing spouses who move for their husband's career (Bielby & Bielby, 1992), I think of Maria sacrificing her legal career or Lisa abandoning her dream to fly. When I read about women who have approached their careers with an attitude of improvisation and creativity (Bateson, 1989), I think of Vanessa growing a business out of her photography hobby, and Olivia finding the resourcefulness to work in 11 different locations over 26 years.

When I read about the depression and dissatisfaction experienced by many housewives over the years (Friedan, 1963; Lopata, 1971), I think of Phoebe and Tanya struggling to make peace with their roles at home.

The connections that can be made between the experiences of military wives and civilian wives are endless, precisely because we share so much of our experience based in gender role expectations. The experiences of military wives are illuminating for women in general, because it is a stark depiction of an extreme circumstance: lives that are based in constant upheaval while upholding a conservative tradition. By highlighting this extreme lifestyle, we are able to see the dynamics of gender roles more clearly. They jump out in a way that is perhaps more subtle and less readily seen in civilian life.

Geoffrey Vickers (1970) offers the analogy of the “invisible trap” that I believe is an apt metaphor, both for the systemic nature of the military wife’s experience, and the impact of gender roles in general. Vickers contends that as human beings we often remain stuck in invisible traps, because we don’t understand how they work or even that they exist. Freedom is only possible when we see the existence of the trap, understand how it works, and can avoid being caught in its grasp. The challenges faced by military wives exemplify such an invisible trap. Some elements of the trap are easier to see than others: Frequent relocation is a visible barrier, while strongly imbedded gender roles remain elusive and unspoken. Only by making these aspects visible will we begin to see the trap for what it is, both in the military world and in all walks of life.

## EPILOGUE – RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

As I described in Chapter 1, my personal experience was a significant motivator for this research. I have moved six times during 11 years of marriage, which has made it difficult to maintain a stable working life. I know that my experience as a military wife has impacted my life in a dramatic way. It has limited my work opportunities, and has also changed the way I see myself. At the same time, being a military wife has led me down paths I would not otherwise have taken, such as self-employment or pursuing a doctorate. At this point in my life, I have rationally accepted the good and bad consequences of my military life, but on an emotional level I still struggle to make meaning of the experiences behind me and those ahead of me. This Epilogue represents my own reflections about my experiences as I conclude this research.

Like the stories told by my study participants, my proposed model of work, self, and military life can also represent my own life. Interestingly, I found myself experiencing aspects of this model during the research process itself, and felt varying emotions to match different points in the process. For example, when I first began my interviews for this study, I remember feeling extremely excited and joyful about the process. During those initial weeks, I experienced an enormous sense of happiness and woke up every day with a great deal of energy for the work ahead. On some level, I simply loved the work of interviewing, and felt quite satisfied by the process. On another level, I almost felt the same way one feels when one is first falling in love. All was right with the world, and nothing could bother me. I believe I was replicating the feelings of “initial entry” that military wives feel during their honeymoon period. A few months later, when I was immersed in the data, I found myself overwhelmed by periods of sadness and anger for no apparent reason. It is no surprise that such an emotion-filled topic would evoke a personal reaction; however, I also believe I was playing out the emotions of my participants. I

began the research process full of joy, hope, and romance, but then encountered a myriad of strong emotions along the way.

In my own military life, I have also played out the cycle of work and self, described in this study. As I described in the introductory chapter, my first difficult self-assessment occurred with my husband's first overseas assignment to Turkey. During the previous two assignments of our marriage (Hawaii and California), I was able to maintain my employment with a consulting firm. Having this continuity in my work life allowed me to retain an identity separate from the military, and I did not see myself as a typical military wife. As in the stories of Grace and Charlotte, my work allowed me to feel both special and normal at the same time, and kept me from becoming incorporated into the military community.

When I could not work in Turkey, my initial reaction was one of despair and depression. I recognize myself in Felice's current experience as she struggles to find her self-worth as an unemployed newlywed living in a foreign country. As we prepared for our move to Turkey, I began to experience health problems, and was diagnosed with a cardiac arrhythmia. This is a health condition I continue to live with, and I've learned that quite literally my heart will fall out of sync whenever I feel a conflict between the self I am and the self I wish to be. I remember literally crying on my husband's shoulder a few days before our arrival in Turkey, overcome by a feeling of worthlessness because I was no longer doing anything of value.

My experience in Turkey was particularly intense, since this was my first experience living overseas, my first time as a "real" military spouse incorporated into the military community, and this period happened to coincide with the beginning of the Iraq war in 2003. Shortly after we arrived in Turkey, my husband was given protective gear and anthrax vaccinations in anticipation of a chemical attack, while I was told to pack my bags and evacuate

temporarily back to the United States. Going home for a period of months because of a war-related evacuation only highlighted the intensity of my emotions. During this brief assignment in Turkey, I alternated between feelings of depression over my situation and feelings of relief to be free from work. Suddenly, I could spend my time however I wished without any expectations. Like Roberta, I emerged from my initial sadness to find myself quite lucky to be living a life of luxury. At times, I still bristled over my unemployed status, and I had a strong desire to prove that I was somehow different from other military wives. I remember walking with a friend one morning, another military wife, who commented on my Harvard t-shirt. She asked if my husband was a Harvard alumnus, never stopping to think that I was probably wearing the t-shirt of my own alma mater. No matter how comfortable I think I have become with my military spouse identity, interactions such as these still occur, and bring me back to those days of initial culture shock and degradation.

Eventually, I used several coping strategies to accommodate to the situation in Turkey and attempt to find a sense of fit. While I began with a sense of despair and loss of self that resulted in physical health problems, I felt better about my situation once I changed my self-perception, and found work that was a reasonable fit for me. Finding part-time work as an adjunct professor helped restore some of the loss I felt, and helped reconnect me to a professional part of myself. However, the fact that I still felt significantly underemployed prevented me from feeling a high degree of fit between my work-related desires and my military life. In addition, this experience forced me to acknowledge that I must find self-worth and value outside of work. I still felt that there was a poor fit with work, self, and military life, but I began to see possibilities for improvement.

When we arrived at my husband's next duty station in Las Vegas, I returned to the United States with a desire to start a family and ambivalent feelings about working. Working was still important to me, but I was reluctant to resume a full-time corporate job. Instead I found satisfaction in independent consulting work, and found a reasonably good fit between this approach and my military life. When we adopted our daughter, I decided to stop working and stay home with our new baby for a year.

Like Turkey, this assignment in Las Vegas was also a period of significant change for me. For the first time, I now understood what was in store for me as a military spouse, and I began thinking realistically about a career path that would fit my military life. Independent consulting was one idea that I tested in Las Vegas, and I found that I enjoyed the role and the flexibility it offers, even though I experienced periods of underemployment. But my experience with this work was short-lived since I chose not to work when my daughter was born. Like Brenda, I saw the opportunity to stay home with my infant daughter as an incredible gift, and leaving my work temporarily was an easy decision. At this stage in my life, I was comfortable with the level of fit between my military life and my work-related desires at the time.

When we left Las Vegas for Washington, DC, I had high expectations for myself. My daughter was now a toddler, and I felt ready to go back to work. I hoped that work would include a combination of consulting and doctoral studies. Knowing we would move again during my doctoral studies, I chose a program that allowed me to live anywhere in the world. Moreover, based on my Las Vegas experience, I was confident that I would be able to find consulting work in Washington, DC. In hindsight, these goals were more ambitious than I had realized. First, I had never been a working mother before. When the local Army childcare center called to say a spot in their facility had opened up earlier than they expected, I found that

my heart palpitations returned. Although rationally I thought it was perfectly reasonable to return to work, I felt anxious and conflicted about “leaving” my child in childcare. I’m sure that she sensed her mother’s anxiety, and cried every day for the first 2 months of her childcare experience.

During this time, I was also trying to cultivate some consulting business in a brand new location, and set up our new house. To the latter point, this was the first time I had been faced with a serious gender-role conflict in my marriage. When my husband and I both worked, we shared household responsibilities. During my consulting years, he took on more household tasks than I did because I was often away from home. When I did not work, I took responsibility for most of the daily household chores. In both situations, there was no significant conflict. When we both worked outside the home, we shared the work at home too. When I didn’t work, I was happy to be in charge of the housework. Suddenly, I was faced with a situation where I was attempting to get back to work, but still held the responsibility for most household duties. Just as Brenda experienced, there seemed to be a stickiness to our roles. Once I took them on, it was hard to give them back. To some extent we renegotiated tasks and found a new division of labor, but it has never quite returned to the equal sharing we once enjoyed.

In addition to the stress involved with moving, beginning doctoral studies, returning to work, and renegotiating home roles, this initial transition to Washington, DC became particularly stressful when my stepfather died and my mother in California became terminally ill. Knowing that I needed time in California, my work-related desires, family obligations, and military life no longer fit together very well at all. I decided to continue my doctoral studies and abandon my attempts to find consulting business, because I wanted to maintain a completely flexible schedule. In addition, I concluded that it was not worth investing in a consulting business that I

would have to close again the next time we moved. Although it seemed like a reasonable decision, I was devastated to give up any prospect of employment. Again, I was revisited by feelings of low self-worth and lack of real purpose in my life.

Three years later, we prepared for our next move, this time to Ramstein, Germany. My mother had passed away, our daughter was 4 years old, and we had just adopted a newborn son. At this stage, I was again feeling a good fit between my work and my military life. During the first few years of my doctoral studies, I began to see this process as my work, and found a great deal of fulfillment in the process. In this cycle, I adapted my work, or rather my definition of work, to fit my current situation. As I prepared for the move to Germany, I looked forward to the move with little reservation or feelings of conflict. I knew I could complete my doctoral studies overseas, and was already planning to conduct my research on Ramstein. Perhaps for the first time ever, I felt a sense of wholeness in my work and a sense of fit with my military and family life.

As I write this, I am approaching the end of our time in Germany, and am preparing to move back to Washington, DC. My feeling of fit with my current situation has continued, although I am anticipating the next round of self-assessment to be significant. When my doctoral studies are finished, what will be the next solution for me? Armed with the knowledge gained from this research, I take heart in knowing that I am not alone in my ambivalent feelings about military life, or in my attempts to find a temporary personal solution to a pervasive and systemic problem.

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## **Appendix A: Recruiting E-mail Message**

April 1, 2011

Subject: Opportunity to Participate in Study of Air Force Wives

Hello,

I am seeking volunteers in the KMC from all ranks and backgrounds to participate in a study of Air Force wives who are either employed or wish they were. This is a great opportunity to share your story and contribute to your community. You do not have to be working currently to participate, and it's okay if you have never worked. I am a doctoral student at Fielding Graduate University, conducting this study as a PhD dissertation. As the wife of an Air Force OSI officer, I know that wanting to work as a military spouse can be challenging, difficult, fascinating, depressing, rewarding . . . a mixed bag! Please help me raise awareness of these issues by sharing your experiences with me in this study. This study is in no way sponsored by the Air Force or OSI, and the data that I include in my report will be anonymous, so you will not be identifiable.

### **Benefits to You**

- Share the story of your own experiences in an individual interview
- An opportunity to talk with other wives in a group discussion of the study results (if you wish)
- Contribute to a study that will raise awareness of the working life issues facing military spouses
- Reimbursement of childcare expenses

### **Study Components**

- Brief questionnaire
- 1-2 hour interview

### **You Must Meet all of the Following Characteristics**

- You are a civilian (not active duty or reserve military member)
- You are the wife of an active duty Air Force member of any rank stationed in the KMC
- You have an interest in paid employment, whether currently employed or not
- You have PCS'd at least once every three years on average during your marriage
- You have at least 6 months remaining on station before the next PCS
- You are at least 18 years old

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at [mmehta@email.fielding.edu](mailto:mmehta@email.fielding.edu) NO LATER THAN MONDAY, APRIL 18. Thank you for volunteering to help with this important topic!

Michelle Mehta

**Appendix B: Announcement for Local Newspaper, Websites and Blogs**

Are you an Air Force wife in the KMC? Do you work or wish you could work? You may be able to participate in a new study on the working lives of Air Force wives. This will only take 2 hours of your time, and participation will be confidential. Deadline for participation is Monday, April 18.

### **Appendix C: Volunteer Questionnaire**

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE – STUDY OF AIR FORCE WIVES AND WORKING LIFE**

Thank you for your interest in this study of Air Force wives who are either employed or wish they were. This questionnaire will be used to identify a diverse pool of study participants, and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Please mark your responses below.

1. Are you currently the wife of an active duty Air Force member stationed in the KMC?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

2. Are you currently an active duty or reserve member of the armed forces?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

3. How many years have you been married to your husband?

\_\_\_\_\_ YEARS

4. How many years has your husband been an active duty member of the Air Force?

\_\_\_\_\_ YEARS

5. How many PCS moves have you experienced during your current marriage?

\_\_\_\_\_ PCS MOVES

6. Do you expect to PCS within the next 6 months?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW

7. What is your husband's current rank?

\_\_\_\_\_ E1 – E4

\_\_\_\_\_ E5 - E9

\_\_\_\_\_ O1 – O3

\_\_\_\_\_ O4 – O6

8. What is your race? (Choose as many as apply)

\_\_\_\_\_ African-American / Black

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian / Pacific Islander

\_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian / White

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic / Latino

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_ )

9. Are you at least 18 years of age?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

10. Are you currently working in paid employment?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

11. If you are not currently employed, would you like to be?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ Not applicable

12. Please share your preferred contact information so I can follow up with you:

First name \_\_\_\_\_ Last name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone where you wish to be reached: \_\_\_\_\_

May I leave a message at this number? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

(PSC Address)

\_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your interest in this study! I will be in contact regarding your participation. **You may return this survey either via e-mail or via regular mail at the addresses below NO LATER THAN APRIL 18.** Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.*

Michelle Still Mehta

PSC 3 Box 1515

APO, AE 09021

[mmehta@email.fielding.edu](mailto:mmehta@email.fielding.edu)

0160-9222-0209

**Appendix D - Decline E-mail due to Ineligibility**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you very much for your interest in my study of the working lives of Air Force wives. Based on the questionnaire that you returned, it appears that you do not quite meet all of the criteria that I need for participants in this study, which are the following:

- civilian (not active duty or reserve military member)
- wife of an Airman of any rank stationed in the KMC
- has an interest in paid employment, whether currently employed or not
- has PCS'd at least once every three years on average during one's marriage
- has at least 6 months remaining on station before the next PCS
- is at least 18 years old

I appreciate your willingness to participate, and am sorry that I cannot include you in this study. If you would like to receive a summary of my final report, I would be happy to send you a copy. Please let me know of your interest by responding to this e-mail.

Kind Regards,

Michelle Still Mehta  
0160-9222-0209

**Appendix E – Selection Grid**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Pay Grade</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Rank</b>
9	White	Junior enlisted	No	Enlisted
13	White	Junior officer	No	Officer
11	White	Junior officer	No	Officer
22	Asian	Senior officer	No	Officer
30	White	Senior officer	No	Officer
28	White	Senior officer	No	Officer
26	White	Senior officer	No	Officer
10	White	Junior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
31	White	Junior officer	Yes	Officer
14	White	Junior officer	Yes	Officer
19	Asian	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
15	White	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
16	White	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
17	White	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
18	White	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
20	White	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
21	White	Senior enlisted	Yes	Enlisted
29	White	Senior officer	Yes	Officer
23	White	Senior officer	Yes	Officer
24	White	Senior officer	Yes	Officer

## **Appendix F – Acceptance Script**

Hello,

This is Michelle Mehta. I recently received your questionnaire volunteering for the study I'm conducting on the working lives of Air Force wives. I really appreciate your interest in participating, and I would like to include you in my interviews if you are still interested.

[CONFIRM INTEREST TO PROCEED]

I'd like to take a few minutes to introduce myself, tell you a little more about the study, and schedule an interview time with you. Do you have time to talk now?

[PROCEED OR FIND A TIME TO CALL BACK]

Ok, great. Let me tell you a little bit about myself so you know who I am and why I'm doing this study. I've been an Air Force wife for 10 years, and my husband is an OSI agent currently stationed here. Germany is our 6<sup>th</sup> assignment in 10 years, and one of the biggest challenges for me of military life has been crafting a working life for myself. During some assignments I've worked full-time, others I've worked part-time or not at all. Right now I'm in graduate school doing this study for my doctoral dissertation. I'm doing this because I really want to raise awareness of the experiences of military spouses who want to work while they moving around with their husbands. I hope it will be beneficial to women in the study, but also to those who come after us.

I'd like to also say something about how this study will work. I won't share your name with anyone outside the study, including anyone in the Air Force, OSI, or my own family, friends, or colleagues. The results in my summary report will be reported anonymously. After I have completed all of the interviews, if you choose to participate in the group discussion, you will have the opportunity to hear my findings from the interviews and discuss them with other women in the study. Also, I will make a summary of my final report available to you and anyone else who might be interested in getting a copy. Again, I want to emphasize that I'm doing this study independently and this research is not sponsored by the Air Force in any way.

[DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT WHAT I'VE SHARED SO FAR?]

As far as logistics go, we'll start with a one-on-one interview to talk about your experiences as a spouse with an interest in paid employment. I'll be asking you to reflect on your Air Force assignments to date and describe what it was like for you over different points in time. I anticipate that this interview will last 1-2 hours. I plan to tape record the interview so that I can focus on listening to you rather than taking notes. But only the transcriptionist and I will ever listen to the tape. Also, if you incur any childcare expenses while you are participating in the interview, I will be happy to reimburse you for that.

[DOES THAT SOUND OK?]

After I've completed the study I will invite you to an optional group discussion with the other interview participants. I want to offer you the chance to hear my study results and discuss them with each other.

[DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS BASED ON WHAT I'VE SHARED WITH YOU? ]

The last thing I'd like to do is to schedule our one-on-one interview. I am conducting most interviews on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9am and 3pm in Ramstein village. Are you available during those times?

[SCHEDULE INTERVIEW AT MUTUALLY AGREEABLE TIME. IF AVAILABLE TIMES DO NOT WORK FOR PARTICIPANT, OFFER OPTION TO INTERVIEW AT MY HOME AT AN ALTERNATE TIME]

I will send you an email confirming the time and place for the interview. [CONFIRM CORRECT EMAIL ADDRESS] Do you have a GPS if I send you the address?

Thank you so much for volunteering for this study. I'm looking forward to meeting you and hearing your story. If any questions or conflicts come up before we meet, please feel free to contact me at 0160-9222-0209 or [mmehta@email.fielding.edu](mailto:mmehta@email.fielding.edu).



## **Appendix H – Interview Protocol**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you so much for coming to this interview today, and for taking the time to participate in this study. I hope it is a good experience for you, and also, if you decide to participate in the group discussion where I'll present the results of the study, I think that should be really interesting for us as a group of women to talk together about this topic. As you know, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Air Force wives who have some desire for a working life of their own through paid employment.

Before we get started, I'd like to go over an Informed Consent form with you, and ask you to sign it. This basically reviews my commitment to keep your participation anonymous and outlines the guidelines I will follow in this study. Please take a few minutes to read through this and let me know if you have any questions.

[GIVE TIME TO REVIEW AND SIGN CONSENT FORM. PARTICIPANT RECEIVES ONE COPY.]

Do you have any questions before we get started?

### **ASSIGNMENT GRID**

I'd like to start by just getting an overview list of your current and past Air Force assignments, and how those correspond to any paid employment you've had. Then, after we do this, we can talk in more detail about your various experiences. Let's fill this out together, starting with your current assignment, and working backwards.

[COMPLETE FOR EACH ASSIGNMENT – LOCATION, DATES, WORKED? (Y/N), JOBS WORKED]

Have you ever been married to a member of the Air Force prior to your current marriage?

[IF YES, ONE GRID FOR EACH ADDITIONAL MARRIAGE]

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

*[If participant lists 5 or fewer assignments – Now that we've got all your assignments listed, let's talk about each one in a little more detail, especially how you felt or thought about working at the time. Let's start with your first assignment...]*

*[If participant lists more than 5 assignments – Now that we've got all your assignments listed, let's pick a few that you'd like to talk about in more detail, especially how you felt or thought about working at the time. How about if we pick a couple from your early days and a couple from your more recent assignments?]*

1. *Discussion of specific assignments (discuss in chronological order, earliest to latest):*

a. Let's talk a bit more about this assignment.

i. Were you able to get paid work?

ii. (If person worked ) Was it the kind of work you wanted?

- How did you feel about (not) getting the kind of work you wanted?

- As you think back, what other feelings did you have about (not) getting the kind of work you wanted? (*keep asking a slight variation of this, until they say 'can't think of any other feelings'*)

iii. (If person didn't work) How did you feel about not getting paid work during this assignment?

- As you think back, what other feelings did you have about not getting paid working during this assignment (*keep asking until they say 'can't think of any others feelings'*)

b. How strongly would you say you felt at the time about wanting to get paid work? Can you talk about that a bit for me? If you put yourself back in your shoes then, how badly did you feel like you wanted to have a job during that assignment?

- Any other thoughts about how you were feeling at that time about the importance of getting paid work – or maybe why you felt that way?

c. Now, still trying to put yourself back in that situation for a moment, and really remembering how you were feeling about *yourself* at the time, how would you say you felt about yourself, about who you were, especially in relation to

having that job and that working life?

or

not having been able to find paid work and not have a working life during that assignment?

- Yes, interesting. Are there any other feelings you can remember that you had about *yourself* related to

having that job?

or

not having been able to find a job?

*(keep asking a slight variation of this until no more feelings)*

d. Can you remember how you felt near the end of your time in \_\_\_\_\_, when you found out about where your next assignment was going to be, as you started to contemplate paid work possibilities in that new assignment? How did you feel in anticipation of that next assignment in \_\_\_\_\_ *(fill in from their list)*?

- Can you think of any other feelings you had then, or perhaps thoughts or expectations that you had as you were contemplating the possibility of paid work in that next assignment in \_\_\_\_\_? any concerns, or maybe anticipations? *(keep asking until they say they can't think of any more)*

*Then go back up and start next assignment to be described*

### *General Questions*

1. Looking back across all of these assignments and your experience with wanting to have paid work as a military spouse, how would you say the overall experience has affected how you see yourself – how you think about yourself, and how you feel about yourself?
2. Any other thoughts or feelings you can think of, especially what impact you think it has had on how you think or feel about yourself? *(keep asking a slight variant)*
3. Is there anything else you want to share with me about your experiences of wanting paid work as a military spouse?

### **WRAP-UP**

Well, those were all the questions I wanted to ask you. I enjoyed hearing your story, and I really appreciate your time. I'll be sure to invite you to attend a group discussion once I'm ready to share the results of my study. I hope you will come to hear the results and to discuss this topic with other wives who share similar experiences.

I'm also going to leave you with a list of counseling resources. I hope that today's discussion was a good experience for you. But, if you find later on that this discussion is troubling you, I want to make sure you have this information if you decide you want to talk with someone else about this.

Also, I can reimburse you for any childcare costs you had to pay so you could come to this interview. Do you need to be reimbursed? [IF YES, OFFER REIMBURSEMENT FORM]

Thank you again for sharing your story. It's really important and I think it will help a lot of other women. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns later. Do you still have my contact information? [GIVE CONTACT INFORMATION IF NEEDED]

## **Appendix I - Informed Consent Form**

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Michelle Still Mehta (the Researcher), a doctoral student in the School of Human and Organizational Development at Fielding Graduate University, Santa Barbara, CA. This study is supervised by Dr. Margo Okazawa-Rey. This research involves a study of the working lives of Air Force wives, and is part of the Researcher's Fielding dissertation. You are being asked to participate in this study to share your experience as an Air Force wife with an interest in paid employment.

The study includes participation in a 1-2 hour individual interview. After the study is complete, the Researcher will invite you to attend an optional group discussion where she will share the results of the study and provide an opportunity for further discussion with other participants.

The Researcher will take steps to ensure your anonymity, to prevent anyone from ascertaining that you participated in this study. The informed consent forms and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data. All materials will be kept in a locked file box in the Researcher's home office. The interviews will be recorded, and the electronic audio recordings will be stored in a password-protected folder to which only the Researcher has access. The tape recordings will be listened to only by the Researcher and a Research Assistant, who has signed the attached Professional Assistance Confidentiality Agreement. Any records that would identify you as a participant in this study, such as informed consent forms, will be destroyed by paper shredder approximately 3 years after the study is completed. The results of this research will be published in my dissertation, and possibly in subsequent journals or books, but your participation will not be revealed in those publications. I do plan to share the location of my research as Ramstein Air Base in any future publications of my study, but again will not reveal any identifying information about the study participants.

As a result of your participation, you may benefit from sharing your experiences with others and learning from theirs as well. The risks to you are considered minimal. The Researcher will provide you with a list of counseling resources should you experience any emotional discomfort as a result of this study.

You may withdraw from this study at any time, either during or after your participation, without negative consequences. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed.

No direct compensation will be provided for participation. You will be reimbursed for any childcare expenses incurred from your participation in interviews and focus groups. You may request a copy of the summary of the final results by indicating your interest at the end of this form.

If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, please tell the Researcher before signing this form. You may also contact the supervising faculty if you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study. The supervising faculty has provided contact information at the bottom of this form. If at any time you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, contact the Fielding Graduate University IRB by e-mail at [irb@fielding.edu](mailto:irb@fielding.edu) or by telephone at 001-805-898-4033.

Two copies of this informed consent form have been provided. Please sign both, indicating you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this research. Return one to the Researcher and keep the other for your files. The Institutional Review Board of Fielding Graduate University retains the right to access to all signed informed consent forms.

---

NAME OF PARTICIPANT (please print)

---

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

---

DATE

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0160-9222-0209

Yes, please send a summary of the study results to me via (check one)  e-mail or  paper mail using the address below:

---

PSC / Box Number

---

APO, AE, Zip

---

E-mail Address

## **Appendix J - Community Resources**

Thank you for participating in this study. I hope you found it an enjoyable experience. you experience distress related to this interview (or any other event), a good selection of confidential counseling services are available in the local community. The services offered by the organizations below are free of charge to military family members:

### **Career & Transition Counseling**

- Pulaski ACS Employment Readiness Center – DSN 489-7217 or Civilian 0631-536-7217
- Ramstein Airman and Family Readiness Center – DSN 480-5900 or Civilian 06371-47-5900

### **Chaplains (All Denominations)**

- Landstuhl Chapel – DSN 486-8399 or Civilian 06371-86-8399
- Pulaski Religious Activities Center – 489-7266 or Civilian 0631-536-7266
- Ramstein Chaplains' Office – DSN 480-6148 or Civilian 06371-47-6148
- Vogelweh Chaplains' Office – DSN 489-6859 or Civilian 0631-536-6859

### **General Wellness Counseling**

- Ramstein Health and Wellness Center – DSN 480-4292 or Civilian 06371-47-4292

### **Mental Health Professionals**

- Ramstein Mental Health Clinic -- DSN 479-2390 or Civilian 06371-46-2390
- Landstuhl Community Counseling Center – DSN 486-1710 or Civilian 06371-86-1710

**Appendix K****Professional Assistance Confidentiality Agreement - Transcriptionist**

Title of Project: "Crafting a Working Life on the Move: The Experiences of U.S. Air Force Wives"

Name of Researcher and Affiliation with Fielding: Michelle Still Mehta, Doctoral Student

I have agreed to assist Michelle Still Mehta in her research study on the working lives of Air Force wives, in the role of transcriptionist.

I understand that all participants in this study have been assured that their responses will be kept anonymous. I agree to maintain that anonymity. I agree that no materials will remain in my possession beyond the operation of this research study. I further agree that I will make no independent use of any of the research materials from this project.

Signature marcy thorne

Date 1-24-11

Printed Name marcy thorne

Title owner - A Better type

## **Appendix L – Final Coding Scheme**

- I) *Thoughts and feelings about working*
- A) Makes me feel good
    - 1) The work I do matters, makes a difference
    - 2) I feel fulfilled
    - 3) I feel independent
    - 4) Other people are proud of me, recognize me
    - 5) My work defines who I am, gives me purpose
    - 6) Gives me a sense of accomplishment
    - 7) This is a time/place just for me
    - 8) Is fun, enjoyable
    - 9) Allows me to make a contribution to our household
    - 10) Gives me something to do
    - 11) Provides structure
    - 12) Provides social interaction
    - 13) I am helping people, contributing to society
    - 14) Is an opportunity for growth
    - 15) I feel like I have power
    - 16) Gives me confidence
    - 17) Gives me self-worth
  - B) Isn't always satisfying or rewarding
  - C) Pays the bills, gives me extra money
  - D) Impacts my family
    - 1) Negatively impacts my family
    - 2) Positively impacts my family
  - E) Isn't possible in my situation
  - F) Negatively impacts my health and well-being
  - G) Has to be worth the costs
  - H) Career isn't the same as a job
  - I) Showing advancement is important to me
  - J) I am following my mother's example
  - K) Requires my husband's support
  - L) Is secondary to my husband's career
  - M) I feel underemployed
  - N) Leaving a job is hard
  - O) I feel detached, less motivated because it is temporary
  - P) Getting work is easy for me

II) *Thoughts and feelings about not working*

A) Makes me feel bad

- 1) I lost a piece of myself, my identity
- 2) I have lost self-worth
- 3) I feel depressed, sad, anxious
- 4) I feel bored, stuck in the house
- 5) I feel dependent on my husband
- 6) I feel like I have no purpose
- 7) I feel like I'm not important, don't matter
- 8) I feel angry, resentful
- 9) Being a full-time mother isn't always satisfying, or doesn't feel like enough
- 10) Housework isn't satisfying
- 11) I feel lonely
- 12) I feel lazy, lost without any structure
- 13) I worry about setting an example for my children
- 14) I feel guilty for not working
- 15) I feel like a failure
- 16) I am ashamed / I worry what others will think of me
- 17) I feel helpless, like I can't do anything
- 18) I feel hopeless, defeated, have given up
- 19) I feel like I'm not interesting, or that people are not interested in me
- 20) I feel like my husband/other people don't understand
- 21) I am concerned about the impact to my career
- 22) Job searching is frustrating
- 23) I don't know what to do with my time
- 24) I feel less confident
- 25) I am less sure about my goals now
- 26) I feel scared
- 27) I need to feel validated, recognized
- 28) I feel like I'm losing my skills
- 29) I feel envious of my husband
- 30) I need the paycheck
- 31) I miss the work
- 32) Not working creates stress in my marriage
- 33) I feel like I'm not contributing

B) I have accepted my situation

C) Has some advantages

- 1) I feel lucky to have the option not to work
- 2) I am able to be there for my children
- 3) I have less stress
- 4) I have the opportunity to focus on other things besides work
- 5) It feels good to be able to rely on my husband
- 6) It's nice to take a break

D) I can find other ways to contribute and show my worth

E) My job is to be the primary homemaker

- F) My emotions are a roller coaster
- G) I am reluctant to use the childcare I would need
- H) I have less to do because I don't have children
- I) Not working is okay as long as my husband agrees
- J) I feel comforted to know it's not just me

*III) Thoughts and feelings about being a military spouse*

- A) Difference between initial expectations and actual experience
- B) Impact of moving
  - 1) Positive impacts
  - 2) Negative impacts
- C) Life of sacrifice and flexibility
- D) Feeling of strength, pride
- E) Means financial security for our family
- F) Lifestyle discourages working
- G) Pressure to marry or have children prematurely
- H) Treated differently from member
- I) Feelings about reality of war
- J) Conflicted feelings about military spouse identity

**Appendix M – Content Analysis Themes Sorted by Frequency**

**Summary of Content Analysis  
(Total number of codes = 90)**

*Dimension 1: Thoughts and Feelings about Working (32 codes)*

<b>CODE</b>	<b>Times Mentioned</b>	<b>Participants</b>
M) I feel underemployed	40	16
A8) Is fun, enjoyable	31	15
G) Has to be worth the costs	50	15
A6) Gives me a sense of accomplishment	39	13
A13) I am helping people, contributing to society	25	12
C) Pays the bills, gives me extra money	31	12
A10) Gives me something to do	24	11
A12) Provides social interaction	21	11
D) Showing advancement is important to me	24	11
A5) My work defines who I am, gives me purpose	19	10
A7) This is a time/place just for me	13	9
F) Negatively impacts my health and well-being	24	9
H) Career isn't the same as a job	16	9
J) I am following my mother's example	13	9
B) Isn't always satisfying or rewarding	31	8
N) Leaving a job is hard	16	8
A1) The work I do matters, makes a difference	11	7
A2) I feel fulfilled	13	7
A3) I feel independent	15	6
A9) Allows me to make a contribution to our household	11	6
A17) Gives me self-worth	12	6
D2) Positively impacts my family	10	6
A4) Other people are proud of me, recognize me	7	5
E) Isn't possible in my situation	14	5
K) Requires my husband's support	12	5
A14) Is an opportunity for growth	4	4
D1) Negatively impacts my family	12	4
A11) Provides structure	8	3
A15) I feel like I have power	5	3
A16) Gives me confidence	3	3
P) Getting work is easy for me	5	2
O) I feel detached, less motivated because it is temporary	3	1

*Dimension 2: Thoughts and Feelings about Not Working (47 codes)*

<b>CODE</b>	<b>Times Mentioned</b>	<b>Participants</b>
A22) Job searching is frustrating	38	14
B) I have accepted my situation	25	13
A9) Being a full-time mother isn't always satisfying, or doesn't feel like enough	26	11*
A33) I feel like I'm not contributing	23	11
A4) I feel bored, stuck in the house	21	10
A5) I feel dependent on my husband	32	10
C1) I feel lucky to have the option not to work	19	9
C2) I am able to be there for my children	19	9
C4) I have the opportunity to focus on other things besides work	17	9
D) I can find other ways to contribute and show my worth	16	9
21) I am concerned about the impact to my career	13	8
E) My job is to be the primary homemaker	17	8
A2) I have lost self-worth	13	7
G) I am reluctant to use the childcare I would need	11	7
A1) I lost a piece of myself, my identity	7	6
A10) Housework isn't satisfying	11	6
A11) I feel lonely	9	6
A12) I feel lazy, lost without any structure	15	6
A18) I feel hopeless, defeated, have given up	25	6
A8) I feel angry, resentful	9	5
A14) I feel guilty for not working	11	5
A23) I don't know what to do with my time	7	5
A32) Not working creates stress in my marriage	11	5
A3) I feel depressed, sad, anxious	13	4
A6) I feel like I have no purpose	4	4
A13) I worry about setting an example for my children	7	4
A17) I feel helpless, like I can't do anything	8	4
A19) I feel like I'm not interesting, or that people are not interested in me	4	4
A25) I am less sure about my goals now	4	4
H) I have less to do because I don't have children	6	4
A20) I feel like my husband/other people don't understand	10	3
A28) I feel like I'm losing my skills	7	3
A30) I need the paycheck	3	3
A31) I miss the work	3	3
C5) It feels good to be able to rely on my husband	3	3
C6) It's nice to take a break	7	3

F) My emotions are a roller coaster	4	3
I) Not working is okay as long as my husband agrees	4	3
A24) I feel less confident	5	2
A26) I feel scared	4	2
A27) I need to feel validated, recognized	5	2
C3) I have less stress	2	2
J) I feel comforted to know it's not just me	2	2
A7) I feel like I'm not important, don't matter	5	1
A15) I feel like a failure	4	1
A16) I am ashamed / I worry what others will think of me	2	1
A29) I feel envious of my husband	1	1

\*15 out of 21 participants had children

*Dimension 3: Thoughts and Feelings about Being a Military Spouse (11 codes)*

<b>CODE</b>	<b>Times Mentioned</b>	<b>Participants</b>
B2) Negative impacts of moving	42	18
B1) Positive impacts of moving	36	17
A) Difference between initial expectations and actual experience	36	12
J) Conflicted feelings about military spouse identity	30	11
C) Life of sacrifice and flexibility	17	9
F) Lifestyle discourages working	10	6
D) Feeling of strength, pride	11	5
I) Feelings about reality of war	8	3
E) Means financial security for our family	11	2
G) Pressure to marry or have children prematurely	3	2
H) Treated differently from member	17	2