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Career Progression: Narrative Study of Impediments Affecting Army Female Officer Advancement from Major to Lieutenant Colonel

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MA, Columbia University, 2021

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Qualitative narrative inquiry was used to understand the accounts and experiences of female officers in the United States Army that were once stationed in South Korea, who did not advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel. In today's military, female officers still face many challenges during their advancement from Major to Lieutenant Colonel, relative to their male counterparts. The specific problem is the underrepresentation of female majors in the Army who compete for promotion to the lieutenant colonel rank. The researcher explored the experiences of 14 female Army officers that served in South Korea who sought out promotions from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Sen's capability theory was used to understand how impediments such as traumatic experiences, family and life stressors, and officer evaluations created a "glass ceiling" that led to low numbers of females in leadership ranks. Sociocultural theory provided a lens to conceptualize why female officers were significantly underrepresented at the major and lieutenant colonel ranks. An oral history narrative was used to re-tell the stories of 14 female officers who experienced the Army's promotion system from major to lieutenant colonel. Data was analyzed with Braun & Clarke's 6-Step Thematic Approach and the MAXQDA program to identify 19 codes: producing 10 themes. Women had to almost reinvent themselves to be promoted in the Army. Results produced recommendations for leaders at echelon to obtain further training on how to effectively incorporate female field grade officers into predominantly male units, address their concerns, provide them key development opportunities the same as they would male officers, and to evaluate them fairly on officer evaluation reports for career progression.

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Dedication

To God be the glory! By being obedient and honest with myself, my dream came true! This dream would not have been possible without the support, love, and inspiration that I have received from my family. To my husband, Jonathan Van, thank you for being my rock and my voice of reason when I need it the most. Thank you for being a wonderful father to our children (Jonathan II, Ariel, and Jya). Every meal that you made, every dish that you washed, and every game that you coached, brought me one step closer to closing out my journey. I love you and I could not have done this without you. To my children, Jonathan II, Ariel, and Jya, and my grandson, Caiden, remember that whatever you put your mind to, you can do. I love you so much. Thank you for inspiring me to finish strong.

To my father, James Harvey Sr., I know that you are smiling down on my success. To my mother, Mimmie J. Harvey, thank you for your encouraging words. To my brother Westley "Bugg" Harvey, thank you for all your smiles and warm hugs.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to all the female officers, female non-commissioned officers, and female Soldiers that have answered the call to serve!

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God, with Him, all things are possible! This journey has been long yet enticing and of course demanding. However, through it all, there are so many people that helped me get to the finish line.

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I am forever grateful to the women that took time to be a part of my research and to everyone else I did not mention but contributed in some fashion to the successful completion of this dissertation, thank you!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

I examined the experiences of underrepresented female officers in the United States Army stationed in South Korea who still needed to advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The focus was on women in the rank of major serving in the United States Army once stationed in South Korea from 2017-2021. I added to the body of knowledge of promotion rates among female officers by retelling their experiences during their time of service in the military.

The Army Regulation 350-100, Officer Active-Duty Service Obligations published updated changes to its promotion process on September 25, 2017. There has been limited research since 2020 on the United States female Army officers that served in South Korea. The need for more knowledge on female officers serving in South Korea at the rank of lieutenant colonel constitutes a gap in research. According to McGregor (2013), gaps in promotional opportunities influenced females serving and remaining in the Army (Henry, 2018). However, the specific problem is the underrepresentation of female majors in the Army who compete for promotion to the lieutenant colonel rank (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2015). Focusing on women in the rank of major that served in the United States Army, and were stationed in South Korea, could add to the body of knowledge on promotion rates among female officers.

Background of The Study

Escobar (2013) argued that women's military leadership is necessary for UNITED STATES national security. Over the past 15 years, women have served and continue to

serve in austere and combat locations (Escobar, 2013). Crowley & Sandhoff (2017) captured the experiences of 12 UNITED STATES Army women combat veterans who served in historically significant roles as the first women to officially serve in combat in the UNITED STATES military, in which the women used performance of masculinity and metaphors of the family to fit into the combat units. Brooks and Greenberg (2018) addressed contributing factors that caused military personnel stress during non-deployment environments, such as leadership, work overload/job demands, work-life balance, and several others. Being forced out of the military was another trend in which Koh (2018) studied how Army officers transitioned from tactical operational to strategic leadership as the nation analyzed wartime performance, drew down military forces under budget constraints, and anticipated future requirements for the Army. The Army's definition of leadership is the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (Oldham, 2021). Glass and Cook's (2016) article addressed factors often misunderstood that have helped to shape the experience and success of women who, "against significant odds, rise above the glass ceiling" (Cook, 2016, p. 53). I explored the accounts and experiences of female officers that served in South Korea by using two instruments: structured interviews and reflective journals.

Problem Statement

The specific problem is the underrepresentation of female majors in the Army previously stationed in South Korea from 2017-2021 and who competed for promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2015). Men outnumber women in the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel. Later in the research, Table 1.1 and 1.2 show the percentages by year, rank, and sex of how many men and women promoted across the Army and other military branches (Department of Defense, 2019). However, what is unknown in the research is the accounts that kept women from being promoted past the rank of major to lieutenant colonel (Dahlstedt, 2017). Previous research mentioned several obstacles and factors, but not one body of research alludes to the gap in research that collectively aligns all the factors that could potentially keep female officers from advancing in rank in the Army. By focusing on women in the rank of major that served in the United States Army and that served in South Korea, I will add to the body of knowledge on promotion and retention rates among female officers in hazardous duty stations or austere locations, thus bridging the gap in research.

Purpose of The Study

This qualitative narrative inquiry aimed to understand the experiences of female officers in the United States Army once stationed in South Korea and who did not advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The glass ceiling concept is an "invisible, artificial barrier that prevents qualified individuals from advancing beyond a certain point within their employing organization" (Wilson, 2014, p. 83). In 2016, female field grade officers made up 18% of Army officers on active duty (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). In the same year, 82% of the field grade officers were male (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). In 2016, there were 9,904; in 2017, there were 9,032; in 2018, the number dropped to 8,913 (Demographics Report, 2016). By examining the lived experiences of female officers, I sought to determine perceptions as to why promotions rates of women in the Army differ from their male counterparts at the lieutenant colonel rank (Dahlstedt, 2017).

Research Question

The research question for this study is:

What are the experiences of female Army officers that served in South Korea who sought promotions from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel?

Additional research questions will be used to explore the problem further.

RQ1. How did female officers choose assignments that led to promotion to the next rank?

RQ2. How did female officers balance motherhood and their military obligation?

RQ3. How did female officers handle discrimination or adversity in the military?

Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural theory is the conceptual framework used as lens to explore how human actions relate to the social context that humans are in and to determine if growth stems from their environment (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). Sociocultural theory stemmed from social constructivism theory; when used together, both entities of the mind and world connect (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). The United States Army represents the environment where real-life stories are used to examine the social context of female officers. The female officer ages are categorized as the silent generation (1925-1940), the WWII generation (1941-1945), the baby boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), and Generation Y (1980-2000). The participant pool will be women stationed in South Korea during 2017-2021. The duty assignment in South Korea is considered a hardship tour in some areas. However, in those areas that are further south on the Korean peninsula, military members can request Command Sponsorship, in which a service member can request approval for their family to accompany them during their tour (Borch III, 2020). It is unknown to several people how intense the workload and additional duties are when stationed in South Korea. Studies have already been conducted on women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 20 years. I compared two previous combat theaters of operation with a more developed theater of operation in the pacific theater of operation.

Most of the themes, such as (a) family; (b) leadership; (c) mentorship; (d) physical capabilities of women; (e) roles of men and women; (f) promotion opportunities; and (g) women in combat, will be presented during the research. Female officers once

stationed in South Korea can attest to their lifestyle in this environment and if it impacted their lifestyle or had an impact on their promotions.

According to The Adjutant General Directorate (TAGD) office (2019), officer selections and promotions are conducted fairly and equitably by boards composed of mature, experienced senior officers. Army Regulation 600-8-29 is the guideline that the Army abides by when considering officer promotions. Army Regulation 600-8-29 lists everything from what types of jobs an officer must complete at their current rank before consideration for promotion to the next rank, known as crucial development jobs, to the amount of time and service an officer must have before also been considered for the next rank. Ranks such as the second lieutenant to captain are almost easier to obtain if the officer does not have anything derogatory in their files.

According to Williams (2019), when an officer becomes a captain, the real competition begins in the Army advancement system. Officers must complete a successful company command of at least 12 months or more for consideration to the rank of major (Williams, 2019). Some officers argue that promotion from captain to major is the most prolonged wait period, which could be a 7 to 8-year wait (Boroff & Boroff, 2018). Thus, the rank from major to lieutenant colonel is the shortest wait period. According to Army Regulation 600-8-29, as officers promote to major; they must complete at a minimum 12 to 24 months of key development jobs (Koh, 2018; Williams, 2019). Officers hold the rank of major for 5-6 years and are notified by the board during that time frame if they are considered to obtain the rank of lieutenant colonel (Koh,

2018). The boards are composed of minorities and representatives who hold a voice across the entire Armed Forces (TAGD, 2019).

The promotion rate from major to lieutenant colonel is a viable and egregious rank to obtain for female officers (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). I will show how and why women are advancing to the next rank and why. Viewing the problem through the lens of female officers provided a more holistic look into the Army's promotion system and standard practices and processes. This could also serve as a baseline for civilian organizations within corporate America and other developing countries.

According to Sandberg (2018), as the research evolves, other branches of the military will be able to compare and contrast their promotion systems and best practices for female field grade officer advancement in order to sustain diversity while maintaining the most qualified personnel.

Interviewing female Army officers that were stationed in South Korea using the epistemological belief produced one on one encounters that the women had when striving to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel (Mercadal, 2016). Their stories explain factors that played a major role in the way the women felt as to why they did not get promoted based on their individual accounts and experiences. Through the lens of sociocultural theory and Sen's (1999) capability theory, each interview and encounter caused different themes to emerge as the women tell their stories (Sen, 1999; Scott & Palincsar, 2013; Ribeiro, 2015). By understanding the complex nature of the participants' objective experiences, the use of MAXQDA for data collection and organization, along with the analysis of their stories, will offer an interpretation of the glass ceiling effect and

why women in the United States Army still remain underrepresented in leadership positions (Glass & Cook, 2016), specifically from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018).

The theoretical base for this study was Sen's (1999) capabilities theory to evaluate the quality of life in reference to freedom and how it assesses a person's well-being (Ribeiro, 2015) while serving as female officers in the United States Army, located or previously located in South Korea. The capabilities theory was used to understand the factors or obstacles that shaped women's experiences in the Army in order for them to obtain or not obtain the rank of lieutenant colonel. Both factors and obstacles can be the differences from one duty station and chain of command to a new rater and senior rater that has different views on how things should be done. An entire environment or command climate change could also be an obstacle for female officers as they continue to remain competitive for the next rank. The concept of Sen's (1999) capabilities theory guided the focus of this research on how female officers assess potential obstacles that impact or interfere with their quality of life and well-being in the Army as they compete for the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

To elaborate on assessing potential theory, for example, the Army trains its personnel on how to be resilient when facing adversity; this training is called Master Resiliency Training. Army personnel were taught how to deal with a great deal of adversity by hunting the positive outcomes, putting things into perspective, and detecting icebergs, just to name a few of the classes taught (Lester, 2018). This research addressed key techniques used by female officers based on the obstacles they faced. As for

promotions, female officers must complete key development jobs at a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 24 months in order to be considered for promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel, as outlined in Army Regulation 600-8-29 (Koh, 2018; Williams, 2019). During the research, themes emerged from the accounts and experiences of female officers that once served in South Korea. Lastly, the concept of the glass ceiling potentially existing in today's military may also be a point of contention as research evolves.

The term glass ceiling, as explained by LeMaster (2018), expounded on the meanings of the word glass and the word ceiling. Glass, as explained in the Salem Press Encyclopedia, is the metaphor used to describe the transparent quality of the actual ceiling because it is not immediately recognized or acknowledged. The word ceiling is used to describe a barrier that women experience as they try to advance within a company or organization (LeMaster, 2018). It was first mentioned in 1984 in a magazine called Adweek by editor Gay Bryant. The term glass ceiling was then mentioned again in 1986 in the Wall Street Journal by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt (LeMaster, 2018). Twenty-one years later, the term is still relevant to women in the workforce (Crowley and Sandhoff, 2017).

According to Murry (2017), women's roles in the intelligence community have proven that women are indeed a necessity on the battlefield in both lethal and non-lethal operations. However, there are a few women that have broken through the glass ceiling in reference to promotions and advancement (Sankey, 2018). Four-star general Ann Dunwoody was one of the few female officers that advanced from lieutenant to general.

There were times when she wanted to end her service, but as she underwent battalion command, she ran across Sergeant First Class Wendell Bowen, who taught her how to survive in order to advance to ranks of greater significance. On top of all of General Dunwoody's accomplishments, she is the first female Four-Star General, thus breaking the glass ceiling and the brass ceiling (Sankey, 2018). Even more remarkable, the first female General from Canada and the combat arms trade, Jennie Carignan, broke through a tough barrier as she became the first one to accomplish the rank in the Canadian Armed Forces (Campbell, 2016). I aimed to shed light on issues that potentially exist in the Army to increase the number of female leaders across the organization at the lieutenant colonel ranks.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for this study was based on Mead and Durkheim's social constructivism theory (Mercadal, 2016). Social constructivism consists of ontological beliefs, epistemological beliefs, axiological beliefs, and methodological beliefs. Ontological beliefs revolve around the study of the nature of reality, all that is or exists, and the different entities or categories within reality (Mercadal, 2016). Axiological beliefs focus on the researcher's values and assessments throughout the stages of the research process (Mercadal, 2016). Methodological beliefs consist of a theoretical analysis of methods used to evaluate the beliefs that apply to a field of study. The epistemological belief is reality that is co-constructed between the researcher and the individual being researched and is shaped by everyone's experiences and will be used to further elaborate on the theories that develop during this research (Mercadal, 2016).

Nature of the Study

This research was a qualitative narrative inquiry that focused on the meaning or quality of true accounts and experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Yin (2009) believed that the usage of a qualitative narrative study approach was an effort to answer *how* and *why* questions and describe a phenomenon in a real-life environment. The philosophical roots of qualitative methodology stems from constructivism and interpretivism, which allows the researcher to understand, describe, or discover theories (Lewis, 2015). The qualitative approach uses the researcher as the data collection instrument, whereas the quantitative approach uses external instruments such as tests or surveys (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

The qualitative narrative approach worked best for this research because it allowed me to explore the idea of the glass ceiling effect in order to make sense of why female officers did not obtain the rank of lieutenant colonel. Narrative inquiry captured the lived experiences of participants, their feelings, emotions, and reactions of past experiences (Rose & Johnson, 2020). An oral history narrative was used to retell the stories of female officers that experienced the Army's promotion process from major to lieutenant colonel.

Definitions

The following terms will be used throughout this study:

Dependents: Family members of a uniformed service sponsor (active duty, reservists or retired) who are eligible to receive care throughout the military health system (Johnson et al., 2007).

Family Advocacy Program (FAP): provides clinical assessment, treatment, and services for military members and their families (DoD, 2016).

Field Grade Officer: according to the Army's rank structure as outlined in Army Regulation 600-8-29, field grade officers are the ranks of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel.

Military Sexual Trauma (MST): includes any sexual activity that a service member was involved with against their will (Holliday & Monteith, 2019).

Operation Enduring Freedom: Wars fought in Afghanistan, Philippines, Somalia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Sahara from 7 October 2001 to 28 December 2014- (We Honor Veterans, 2017).

Operation Iraqi Freedom: Wars fought in Iraq from 20 March 2003 to 18 December 2011 (We Honor Veterans, 2017).

Risk Factors: A characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precedes and is associated with a higher likelihood of problem outcomes (youth.gov, 2017).

Permanente Change of Station (PCS): The official relocation of an active-duty military service member along with any family members living with him or her- to a different duty location, such as a military base (DoD, 2016).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): the most frequently reported psychiatric morbidity among the survivors of natural disasters (Baral and Bhagwati, 2019).

Temporary Additional Duty (TAD for the Marine Corps & Navy)/ Temporary Duty (TDY for the Army and Air Force): A United States Government employee travel

assignment at a location other than the employee's permanent duty station, that is 6 months or less in duration (DoD, 2016).

Assumptions

The participants for the study were female Army officers who chose to terminate their military service at the rank of major. I used purposeful sampling to identify and select individuals who experienced real world incidents that relate to the idea of the glass ceiling effect. My assumption was that the female Army officers would be able to provide accounts of their experiences on the Army's promotion system and how it impacted their military service obligation. A second assumption was that the female Army officers were open and honest in their accounts of their experiences. Another assumption was that serving in South Korea strongly persuaded their decision to compete for promotion to the next rank. An assumption was that family life weighed in on the decision to compete for promotion to the next rank. Also, an assumption was that health issues or stress from toxic leadership led to the decision to not compete to the next rank. These assumptions were necessary to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the lived experiences of why women at the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel are underrepresented.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I addressed obstacles and themes that caused female Army officers to recall instances of verbal abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, sexual abuse, suicidal thoughts, and toxic leadership as they competed with their male peers. Before I began the semi structured interviews, I had a statement for participants to view to determine if they

were still willing to conduct the interview. Participants did not experience any trauma during the semi structured interviews. I provided them with the contact information of a licensed therapist, in the event that it was needed after the completion of the semi structured interviews. The use of reflective journals allowed for clarification of stories told during the semi structured interviews and gave participants a chance to confirm their accounts and experiences before data was placed in MAXQDA for coding. In this study, I only included female Army officers who decided not to continue to serve as field grade officers and did not advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel due to various reasons. Excluded from this study are Army male officers that have advanced to the rank of major and lieutenant colonel. I also excluded female Army officers at the rank of major and lieutenant colonel that serve in the United States Army Reserve and not on active duty.

Limitations

Limitations existed as potential weaknesses for this study. Due to the sample population of this study, the external validity will be limited. 14 female participants were interviewed. The results of the study may not be generalized to a larger population outside the sample population. The study was specific to female Army officers that served in South Korea. Each experience was unique to the individual, and it is unlikely that the descriptions will be generalized to other service members in different branches of the military. The findings are not compromised due to my biases. As the researcher, I explained who I am, why I joined the Army, and the importance of conducting the research. I am a married female Army officer, in the rank of major, still serving to compete for the next rank of lieutenant colonel. In addition, I lived the first 10 years of

my career as a single mother and officer serving in the military. I joined the military at the age of 18 years old as an enlisted Soldier in the rank of Private First Class. I served two tours in Afghanistan: one at the rank of Specialist, and one at the rank of Captain. I served one tour in Iraq at the rank of Second Lieutenant and First Lieutenant. I served 3 years in South Korea at the rank of Major. I answered the research questions that I used to guide the semi structured interviews. I was able to identify my biases through my answers. I identified and monitored my biases during the interviews. I ensured no researcher bias influenced the results of this study and I maintained contact with my committee members throughout this study to discuss any issues. I used data triangulation to ensure validity of the statements taken from the participants. I used two theories, social constructivism and capability theory, to explore the accounts of participants. The use of reflective journals allowed me to review answers given during the structural interview. Through member checking, participants viewed the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Candela, 2019; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Creswell (2013) stated validating the results is important because it helps to determine the accuracy or credibility of the findings. Validation was achieved through semi structured interviews being recorded, transcribed, and with the use of reflective journals. Participants reviewed the transcribed interviews and summaries and ensured that my personal views were not included. In addition, to ensure trustworthiness, each participant verified and validated the accuracy of the data once transcribed.

Significance of the Study

As the Army continues to grow in the 21st Century, it is vital to identify challenges that female service members face and continue to face in this profession (Crowley and Sandhoff, 2017). In 2008, Army women on active duty comprised of 197,765 of which only 34,351 were female officers. In 2017, there were only 39,603 female officers out of more than 204 thousand (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008; 2018). Understanding past and current promotion practices of female officers in the United States Army through individual interviews provided additional insight and candid feedback of those impacted. By researching current and past promotion statuses and the factors that impact them, I provide the Army a more current look into its organization. Studying the experiences of female officers' sheds light on reasons that contributed to decisions the Army makes in retaining the most qualified female officers in its formations and the choices women make to stay or go. Focusing on the concepts of Crowley and Sandhoff (2017) in reference to women veterans that historically served in leadership roles that caused them to portray a more masculine role, while in conjunction with Brooks and Greenberg (2018), addressed the factors that caused stress to its military members while either serving in combat or garrison operations.

Significance to Practice

In the 20th Century, research shows that women in the military continue to be underrepresented in the lieutenant colonel rank (Mills, 2013). The research problem addressed what was considered as a major accomplishment or career advancement for women that had obtained and superseded the rank of lieutenant colonel and determined if

the glass ceiling phenomenon potentially existed among female officers in reference to their military careers. The Army has several regulations that govern officer promotions and duty obligations in the Army. These regulations outline the final decision authority for officers to get promoted, regardless of gender and also the assignments and schooling that they must obtain in order to be eligible for promotion to the next rank. Army Regulation 600-8-29 specifically covers Army Officer Promotions (Department of the Army, 2005). Army Regulation 350-100 explains Officer Active-Duty Service Obligations (Department of the Army, 2017). Career success for many United States Army personnel has been associated with leadership and advancement through the ranks, regardless of gender, personality, or levels of resilience (Evans & Bae, 2018).

Significance to Theory

Using Sen's (1999) capability theory to understand why women in the military continue to remain underrepresented in the lieutenant colonel rank could contribute to assessing and addressing the glass ceiling phenomenon. Factors that influenced female officer's quality of life was accessed using Sen's capability theory to determine if those factors interfered with the advancement of the officer's careers (Harel-Shalev et al., 2017). For example, Alvinius et al. (2018) conducted a grounded study that brought about two main themes: visibility of women as leaders and differentiation of women as leaders. Their research modeled more ways that leaders should be developed to be eligible to obtain higher leadership positions from a gender perspective. Research could be further explored by using Sen's capability theory that could advance knowledge in the discipline on how female officers had the burden of navigating through challenges and

obstacles that oftentimes were designed to prevent them from breaking through the glass ceiling. Female officers communicated their concerns to higher powers that can affect their outcome, and on the emplacement and process of obtaining the best person for the position or job at hand (Galbreath & Deni, 2018).

Significance to Social Change

Actions consistent with the existence of a glass ceiling are still present in the 21st Century military (Crowley and Sandhoff, 2017). The result of this study increases the awareness of members of military promotion boards and the Senate, when considering women for promotion past the field grade ranks thus opening more diversity across the Army's formations. The Army Regulation 600-8-29 for Officer Promotions was written in 1994 and last updated in 2005 (Department of Defense, 2005). Re-evaluating the current promotion process so that it reflects the 21st Century population, could allow the Army to be more effective as it strives to win its nation's wars. This could then change the dynamics of Soldiers and junior officers as more female leaders obtain promotions and leadership positions at higher levels in which those same Soldiers and junior officers may aspire to be. Results from this research changes the mindset of not only the Secretary of the Army, the Senate, and the senior leaders in the Army when it comes to female promotions, but also senior leaders in the Air Force, Navy, Marines, and the Coast Guard. In the next chapter, literature that supports the research question was explored in more detail to address factors that contributed to the underrepresentation of female officers in the Army.

Summary

I examined the experiences of underrepresented female officers, in the United States Army and stationed in South Korea, who did not advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The focus on women in the rank of major, serving in the United States Army, that were once stationed in in South Korea from 2017-2021 adds to the body of knowledge in retrospect to obstacles and barriers that female officers experienced. To capture and further explore the accounts of participants, social constructivism, and capability theories were used. Both theories allowed me to add to the body of knowledge of promotion rates among female officers in the rank of major by retelling their experiences during their time of service in the military.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review discussed themes related to the underrepresentation of female officers in the rank of major to lieutenant colonel with retrospect to the Army's promotion system, job assignments and evaluations, motherhood and military obligation, and handling adversity. For the purposes of this literature review, a female is defined as the sex that can bear offspring or produce eggs, distinguished biologically by the production of gametes (ova), which can be fertilized by male gametes (Merriam-Webster, 2018). This is not to discredit Transgender women. The literature focused on why females join the Army and the obstacles that cause them to not remain in the Army and advance to the next rank. Reynolds and Shendruk (2018) suggested that there was a shortage of female leadership at higher levels, but it mostly focused on health and resiliency at multiple levels of why there was minimal representation of female leaders. The gap in literature highlighted the reasons that female officers at the rank of major did not make it to the rank of lieutenant colonel due to subjective experiences, and with this shortage, it left less female leadership as females continued to progress in the Army (Henry, 2018). The lack of knowledge on female officers serving in South Korea at the rank of lieutenant colonel constituted a gap in research. According to McGregor (2013), there were gaps in promotional opportunities that influenced females that served and those retained in the Army (Henry, 2018). The possibility of the concept of the glass ceiling could exist knowing that females are not the majority in the Army, and that they are highly unrepresented past the field grade officer ranks. The literature review

addressed the research strategy, theoretical framework, and the following themes: (a) commissioning sources, (b) Army's promotions system and job assignments, (c) barriers, (d) evaluations and advancement, and (e) motherhood and military obligation.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy consisted of words and or phrases based around the phenomenon of the glass ceiling effect in reference to female officers serving in the military. The Boolean search was used with Sage and the Business Source Complete data base, EBSCO, several peer reviewed journals, periodicals, certified military documents, google scholar, and the Military data base provided by Walden University.

Key phrases searched using Walden's Library both Sage, Business Source Complete, and EBSCO data bases were the following results: *glass ceiling effect (5,544), females or female officers (208), UNITED STATES Army (65), rank (344), major (263), lieutenant colonel (26), key development (94,000),* and *terminate service (5).* The following are key words that also factored into the lack of females receiving promotions and continuing in the military: *promotions (344), advancement (80), military changes (629), family (1,448), motherhood (19,500), job assignment (17,000),* and *leadership (378).*

The words *glass ceiling effect* were included in several data base searches early on during the research. These specific words as related to females receiving promotions to the next rank were not common to find during the data gathering process. However, *females or female officers* in correlation with *promotions* or *advancement* were used to first broaden the search, and then to pick out key data that would begin to help narrow the

topic down. When searching *females* or *females* in the *Army* in reference to *promotions* or *advancement* to the next *rank;* research would often just show charts from *military* documents that categorized the promotions by rank, race, gender, and type.

Theoretical Foundation

Sociocultural theory of constructivism was developed by post-revolutionary Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, with the understanding that knowledge an individual develops is shaped through social interaction (Devi, 2019). Mead and Durkheim during the Enlightenment Era, often referred to as the "Great Age of Reason," used social constructivism as an attempt to understand how people form worldviews and perceived reality. Based on Vygotsky, Mead, and Durkheim's views, the concept of social constructivism theory was rooted deep in the human experience (Lombardo & Kantola, 2021). The human experience included everything from marriage to children, divorce, and stress on the job (Mercadal, 2016; Lombardo & Kantola, 2021). The theoretical foundation for the literature review was based on Mead and Durkheim's views on social constructivism theory (Mercadal, 2016; Lombardo & Kantola, 2021). Social constructivism consists of (a) ontological beliefs, (b) epistemological beliefs, (c) axiological beliefs, and (d) methodological beliefs. Ontological beliefs revolve around the study of the nature of reality, all that is or exists, and the different entities or categories within reality. Axiological beliefs focus on the researcher's values and assessments throughout the stages of the research process. Methodological beliefs consist of a theoretical analysis of methods used to evaluate the beliefs that apply to a field of study. The epistemological belief is reality that is co-constructed between the researcher and the

individual being researched and is shaped by everyone's experiences and were used to further elaborate on the theories that were developed during this research (Mercadal, 2016; Lombardo & Kantola, 2021).

The Glass Ceiling

Marilyn Loder coined the term "glass ceiling" about 40 years ago during a Females' Exposition in New York City in 1978 (Perilo & Brandt, 2021). Loder was as mid-level manager at a telephone company trying to move up in position (Perilo & Brandt, 2021). In 1978, Loder realized that invisible barriers existed that held females back from obtaining positions of authority (Perilo & Brandt, 2021). In the 21st Century, Babic and Hansez (2021) explained that the glass ceiling happens when a qualified person aims to advance to a higher position in his/her organization and is stopped at a lower level due to a discrimination most often based on sexism or racism. The glass ceiling refers to vertical discrimination most frequently against females in companies (Babic & Hansez, 2021; Starks, 2021). The glass ceiling is also known as discriminatory barriers that keep females from advancing to positions of increased responsibility (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

The glass ceiling can be categorized by barriers and by type (Starks, 2021). Glass ceiling barriers can be categorized as societal or difference. Societal barriers affect opportunities and achievements (Starks, 2021). Difference barriers are characterized by stereotypes, bias, prejudice, and judgment based on ethnicity and gender (Starks, 2021). Glass ceiling types are categorized by gender bias, cultural, and racial discrimination (Starks, 2021). A gender bias glass ceiling puts one gender at a

disadvantage for opportunity in the workplace (Marcinova, 2018; Starks, 2021). For example, the probability of females being hired is higher by 25% to 46% if the application is blindly conducted (Starks, 2021). Cultural glass ceilings occur when an organization chooses to not hire people from different cultural backgrounds. Not having a diverse workforce automatically places the organization at a disadvantage (Starks, 2021). Racial glass ceiling refers to people of color immediately being shut down or not even considered by an organization because of their color and race (Starks, 2021). In a racial glass ceiling, people can undergo direct or indirect discrimination (Starks, 2021).

Females In the Military

For the purpose of this literature review, a female is defined as the sex that can bear offspring or produce eggs, distinguished biologically by the production of gametes (ova) which can be fertilized by male gametes (Merriam-Webster, 2018). During World War II, females were given the opportunity to serve their country in support roles (Boilard, 2019). Until that time, military service had been limited to men. This at once created a gap for future factors that females would have to fight for in order to be considered for similar jobs that men could obtain. With the help of Eleanor Roosevelt, the Females' Corps was established in 1941, right after the start of the war. In 1942, the Females' Army Auxiliary Corps was established. Over 350,000 females served during World War II thus opening the door for females to serve in secretarial and clerical job positions; thus, freeing up men to serve in combat roles (Boilard, 2019). At one point, females joining the military brought about different issues and specific problems that were not the same as it would be with having men only. Female officers were subject to

sexual harassment and intimidation. They were also expected to remain “lady like” with their behavior and language and to keep their chastity and temperance (Boilard, 2019). Overall, females’ roles in World War II paved the way in which the military would begin to change for the better. Even to this day, females joining the military and the advancement of females’ military service continued to be examined which now allows females to serve in combat positions (Boilard, 2019).

Lieutenant General Thomas Seamands, the Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G1 stated that the Army was on path to meet its fiscal year 2019 recruiting mission. The recruiting mission confirmed the following: 68,000 Active-Duty Component Soldiers, 15,000 Army Reserve Soldiers, and 39,000 Army National Guard Soldiers. According to Lieutenant General Thomas Seamands, “To date, the Army has successfully accessed and transferred more than 1,000 females into the previously closed occupations of infantry, armor, and field artillery, branches.” "Currently, 80 female officers are assigned to infantry or armor positions at Forts Hood, Bragg, Carson, Bliss, and Campbell" (Army News Service, May 21, 2019). In 2019, the Army opened more assignments for female officers at Forts Stewart, Drum, Riley, Polk, and in Italy.

Since Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, the rate of females joining the military had increased immensely (Mankowski et al, 2015). In 2015, females made of 15% of the Armed Forces, and in 2020 they made up approximately 20% of the Armed Forces (Mankowski et al, 2015). The same study showed that White and Black females had similar reasons for joining the military and that they normally joined for opportunity, it was their calling, and for specific outcomes (Mankowski et al,

2015). Reynolds and Shendruk (2018) examined the specifics on the diversity of the United States Military. The authors explained through bar charts and line graphs on the make-up of personnel that join the military, both males and females, and noted the regions in which they joined the military.

Before the draft ended in 1973, the United States military consisted of 2.2 million service members to include males and females. Today, its strength is at approximately 1.2 million service members to include both men and females. The Department of Defense Personnel, Workforce, Reports & Publications data showed the differences in how female officers on active-duty promotions increased and decreased from June 2019 to June 2021. Table 1.2 shows the number of personnel that served in all branches from June 2019 to June 2021. The comparison from Table 1.1 to Table 1.2 was that female officers in the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel depicted a very small portion of the overall number of personnel serving in the Army during that time.

Table 1.1

DoD Active-Duty Females Officer Statistics

DoD personnel, workforce, reports, & publications for active-duty officers (Females only)			
Rank	Month	Year	Total serving
Major	June	2021	3,006
Lieutenant Colonel	June	2021	1,561
Major	June	2020	3,061
Lieutenant Colonel	June	2020	1,513
Major	June	2019	3,003
Lieutenant Colonel	June	2019	1,431

Table 1.2

Armed Forces Officer Strength Figures for June 2019 to June 2021

	06/30/19	06/30/20	06/30/21
Army	93,183	92,990	94,423
Navy	55,475	56,248	56,698
Marine Corps	21,769	21,941	22,062
Air Force	64,053	64,758	64,395
Total DoD	234,480	235,937	237,578

Diversity within the ranks remained consistent throughout all military branches per Reynolds and Shendruk (2018). Females joined the military knowing that there was a chance that they would be significantly outnumbered due to the organization being predominately male (Strong, 2020). As parenting became a more equal partnership, society still expected females to be primary caregivers as they continued their day jobs (Arsenault 2018). Females indirectly chose which branch of the military best suited them, by competing amongst their peers (Senft, Caddell, & Lensing, 2019). Females had to make choices to take care of their families and to maintain other tasks that duty called them to do (El'Tanya, 2020). Competing for the next rank was very intense (Senft, Caddell, & Lensing, 2019).

Females ultimately joined the military looking for greater opportunities. Some fathomed a career, while some wanted to do something different from the norm. Ultimately, they wanted to be able to provide for their families, be great leaders, and achieve higher ranks throughout their years of service. Mankowski et al, (n. D) conducted a qualitative study that revealed three themes on why females joined the military. Females joined the military because of the opportunity it promised, the calling they felt to serve their country, and because of the outcomes which offers security, benefits, and structure. Research showed that even though the military offered these things to female service members, it may have also resulted in a hostile work environment.

In an article to the UNITED STATES Virgin Islands press on recruiting techniques, Lieutenant General Timothy Kadavy, then Army National Guard Director

(2018) agreed that the majority of both male and females that joined do so in hopes of mobilizing and deploying somewhere in service to their country (Cavallaro, 2018). The Army National Guard, Reserves, and Active Duty all have deployed and returned with the same issue of integration after a deployment. Female service members and veterans had their post-military reintegration issues weigh heavily on them which led to important issues for research initiatives in the Social Work field of study. In the Social Work field, research has been conducted to show the male to female ratio across all branches of the military. Previous research also explored minorities; specifically African American female officers that have struggled to get promoted through the ranks (Davis, 2018). Separate from previous research, this research focused on female officers in the United States Army.

Decades continue to pass by as females continue to achieve more as they did during the earlier years when females served in previous wars, which still involved different levels of stress. According to Pless Kaiser, et al (2017) over 1,300 females that served in the military and with Red Cross during the Vietnam War underwent several stressors both positive and negative. In this qualitative study, themes evolved around the actual living conditions, work conditions, and interpersonal relationships that females who served dealt with during their deployments and daily life in the military. The authors evaluated associations between themes and psychological well-being of the females for an accurate assessment. Based on Pless Kaiser, et al (2017) stress could be a systemic issue that affected females on their quest for advancement or promotions within the military.

Stress resurfaced constantly as females fought in wars during the past decade and continued to do so today. Greer (2017) conducted a qualitative study that focused on female veterans that served in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 10 years, with many not able to easily transition to civilian employment upon the ending of their military service contract. Like Reppert, Buzzetta and Rose (2014), a gap exists in completely understanding how female veterans served their time in the military, how they were promoted, and to understand their quality of life during that time. Transition theory was used to further explore the unemployment rate among female veterans. Human Resources department professionals assisted with several successful transitions to civilian employment for female veterans. Understanding female veterans' military lifestyle helped counselors to effectively assist the female veterans to find appropriate work and to have a life after they completed service to their country.

Commissioning Sources

Females that decided to join the Army did so using several different options to commission as officers. The routes females go to join the Army as officers are called commissioning sources (Koh, 2018). The commissioning sources are Officer Candidate School, Reserve Officer's Training Corps, The United States Military Academy, and Direct Commission (Baglini, 2021).

Females that joined the Army immediately after graduating from high school are considered to be enlisted Soldiers. As they exceled as non-commissioned officers, their chain of command advocated for them to become commissioned officers (Koh, 2018). Once identified by the chain of command, the females competed to attend Officer

Candidate School (OCS) in order to cross over from being a non-commissioned officer to obtaining commission as an officer. OCS programs are full-time, and the duration varied from 10 to 16 weeks (Baglini, 2021). The requirement to attend Officer Candidate School was to have a bachelor's degree by the time you are commissioned as an Officer (Koh, 2018; Baglini, 2021). The general age requirement was between 19 and 32. Soldiers also had to be eligible for a secret security clearance. According to Baglini (2021) Officers commissioning through OCS had already graduated from a university and were a part of the smallest commissioning source. The age of OCS commissioners was on average higher than the ages of ROTC commissioners, therefore one could expect that those who became Officers through OCS had thought more about their choices and thereby were more committed to stay in the Army as a careerist (Baglini, 2021). Noncommissioned officers could not have more than six years of active service before joining OCS (Koh, 2018).

The Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) was another commissioning source that females chose after graduating high school and attending a four-year university. Through the ROTC commissioning source, females obtained a bachelor's degree, and commissioned as officers upon graduation. During the pandemic, the numbers dropped significantly, leaving just over 1,100 to commission (USACC Public Affairs Office June 11, 2020). In 2021, the Cadet Command's goal was to commission up to 6,000 Army officers. The ROTC program produces over 70% of the Army's officers each year (USACC Public Affairs Office June 11, 2020).

The United States Military Academy (USMA) is another commissioning source (Baglini, 2021). The USMA requires 24-hour a day instruction and training over a four-year period (Baglini, 2021). As USMA cadets commission into the Army, they have a five-year service obligation (Spain, Lin, & Young, 2020). According to Baglini (2021) USMA officers faced both pull and push factors to leave the Army, officers from this source usually had multiple opportunities available to them outside the military (pull factor) and from survey results usually found that their experiences in the active-duty Army did not meet their initial expectations (push factor).

Direct Commissioning was another source for female officers to serve in the capacity as an officer in the Army (Baglini, 2021). Direct Commission Officers completed a three-to-five-week course before being commissioned (Baglini, 2021).

Upon commissioning from any source an Officer obtained an 8-year service obligation, of which 2-5 years must be served on active-duty dependent on commissioning source. Each route of commissioning as an officer came with a specific obligation. The Army ROTC was a four-year, part-time program (Baglini, 2021). Commissioning through a Reserve Officer's training Corps program was at least a four-year commitment to serve in the Army (Baglini, 2021). Persons that served in the Army as noncommissioned officers that cross over to be officers through Officer Candidate School must serve at least three years in the Army on active duty (Koh, 2018). Officers tend to promote to Major (O-4) after 10 years of service, well after any initial service obligation had expired (Baglini, 2021).

The various commissioning sources mentioned all have specific requirements that the candidates must complete prior to commissioning. Candidates had to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) that consisted of push-ups, sit ups, and a two-mile run. To date, the Army implemented the Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) as the new fitness test for record, became effective March 2022 (Baglini, 2021). The ACFT consists of six events; maximum deadlift, standing power throw, hand release push-ups, sprint drag carry, 2-minuteplank, and a two-mile run. Alternate include a 2 ½ mile walk, 5km row, 1km swim, 12km bike in lieu of the 2-mile run cardio event. While the ACFT was pending final approval in the Army, some institutions required the officer candidates to pass the new fitness test prior to commissioning. The fitness requirement affected how officers competed for duty assignments and branches prior to commissioning (Baglini, 2021).

The Army Combat Fitness Test was designed to improve Soldier and Unit Readiness (Army, 2020). The test was tailored to depict actions that often happened when Soldiers are in combat situations. Several surveys were conducted among the ranks at every level prior to revamping the previous Army Physical Fitness Test. The Army Combat Fitness Test transformed the Army's fitness culture, reduce preventable injuries and attrition. The test was designed to enhance mental toughness and stamina. Although most commissioning sources had already trained future officers on the Army Combat Fitness Field Test prior to its release, selected units across the Army had taken quarterly not-for-record ACFTs.

The scoring for the new ACFT has been broken down by gender, age, and job, which was different from the current Army Physical Fitness Test. Instead, the new ACFT scoring is based on the unit and or Military Occupational Skill (MOS) that are not distinguishable based on male and female standards. The Army has worked incredibly hard to implement one standard with the new Army Combat Fitness Test, however the test continued to undergo changes (Army, 2020). The United States Forces Command (FORSCOM) conducted 106,000 ACFTs in 2021 (Army, 2021). The raw data showed that 44% of females continued to fail the ACFT compared to 7% of males (Lee, 2021). According to the Army Times, 53% of female enlisted Soldiers and 23% of female officers have failed the ACFT. As with current evaluations and assessments, the Army Combat Fitness Test is now visible on officer evaluation reports (Lee, 2021).

Army Promotion System

The Office Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness manages officer promotions and procedures (Army Publishing Directorate, 2020). Department of Defense Instruction 1320.14 governs the Department of Defense Commissioned Officer Promotion Program procedures (Army Publishing Directorate, 2020). In accordance with the authority in DoD Directive 5124.02, this issuance establishes policy, assigns responsibilities, and provides procedures for administering the DoD Commissioned Officer Promotion Program pursuant to Title 10, United States Code (United States.). Officers get promoted based on time in service (TIS), time in grade (TIG), and based on key development jobs that they have successfully completed (Army Publishing Directorate, 2020).

Officer promotions are governed by Army Regulation 623-105: Officer Evaluation Record (Shi, Caddell, & Lensing, 2019). The officer that was being assessed was referred to as the rated officer (Green & Rahmani, 2021). Officers were assessed on their performance in the jobs that they obtain by a senior ranking officer, referred to as their rater (Green & Rahmani, 2021). An officer also received an assessment based on their potential, by a senior ranking officer, referred to as their senior rater (Green & Rahmani, 2021). This process was referred to as a rating scheme. A rating scheme underlined who was being assessed, who was assessing them, and when their officer evaluation reports (OER) were due. The time in which an evaluation was due was referred to as the rating period. A rating period could be short or long depending on the officer's situation.

Officer evaluation reports were captured on DA Form 67-1. During counseling sessions, an officer's pre-assessment was captured by the rater or senior rater on an Officer Evaluation Support Form DA 67-9-1 or a counseling form, DA 4856 (Shi, Caddell, & Lensing, 2019). The purpose of the counseling sessions was to let the rated officers know how they were doing in the job they possessed, how they could improve, and how they were ranked among their peers or other officers in the unit's command. Counseling was conducted quarterly (Shi, Caddell, & Lensing, 2019). However, when an officer's evaluation was due, the officer would receive a close out OER counseling from their rater and senior rater. After evaluations were complete, the evaluation was signed by the rated officer, rater, and senior rater. Signatures must be received in order, beginning with the rater, and ending with the rated officer. The senior rater then

submitted the completed OER into the Evaluation Entry System on the Human Resources Command (HRC) website. The evaluation gets reviewed by the team at HRC and then gets posted into the rated officers' professional file (Shi, Caddell, & Lensing, 2019).

The process of job assignment in the Army was competitive (Bostic, 2021). The process of choosing and getting assigned to duty stations were based on the needs of the Army (Koh, 2018). All officers compete with other officers in their year groups to get the job assignment and the duty station that they prefer (Bostic, 2021). An officer's year group referred to the year that the officer was commissioned into the Army (Koh, 2018; Bostic, 2021). In 2015, Secretary of Defense Ash Carter declared that females could serve in every branch of the Army, which extended service to include Special Operations (Swan, 2020). The opportunity created more diverse roles and opportunities for females and allowed the Army to advance as an organization (Swan, 2020).

For officers to get promoted in the Army, they must hold key development jobs at each specified rank based on their branch. Key development jobs were often referred to as KD jobs which were defined as positions an officer must hold in order to get promoted in the Army (Geis, 2019). At the second lieutenant rank, an example of a key development job was platoon leader, which was normally a 12-month assignment. At the first lieutenant rank, an example of a key development job was a company level executive officer (XO), which was also a 12-month assignment. At the rank of captain, a key development job was a Company Commander. The time length in which the officer serves as a Company Commander was 12 months or more. At the rank of major, an officer is now considered to be a field grade officer. Major's must serve in a key development job for 24 months, in

which they can serve in two separate positions a year each or serve 24 months in one position. Key development job assignments for majors could be a Brigade/Battalion Executive officer, Brigade/Battalion S3, Support Operations Officer in the Logistics Branch, or a Company Commander in special units (Geis, 2019).

Key Development jobs in the Army was the way that the Army showcased its talent management. KD was used to rank order officers that do well and those that do not do so well (Geis, 2019). As officers operated in KD assignments, their raters assessed their performance, while their senior raters assessed their potential as leaders and as assets to the Army. The outcome of the officer's assessments affects their careers in the Army (Geis, 2019). Some officers argued that where officers complete their KD time matters towards promotion. It mattered if the officer continued to compete for the next rank and also attended the next Army level education associated with promotion to the next rank. Successful key development jobs helped officers obtain the next promotion and greater responsibilities at follow-on assignments. A follow-on assignment refers to the next job lined up after completion of the current job assignment (Geis, 2019).

Evaluations and Advancement

The Army's definition of leadership is "the process of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation while operating to accomplish the mission and improve the organization" (Department of Defense, 2012, p. 93). Evaluations and advancement were not just measured by their ability to lead others, but often measured by a person's physical appearance and physical fitness. Marcinova (2018) explained in *Gender and Leadership in the Military* how females had fought alongside men for many

years in combat, and yet it still remained to be a struggle today for females to hold similar leadership positions that men held. Marcinova (2018) explained obstacles that females faced all over the world in their attempts at military leadership progression. Army Regulation 600-8-29, Officer Promotions does not outline duty positions by gender. It was often left up to the officer's gaining unit and the branch manager on who and what type of officer who took specific positions.

Deployments

Escobar (2013) explained the history of females' military service from 1948 to the present day. He explained how females contributed to organizational behavior and success and argued that females' military leadership was necessary for United States national security. For example, Greenburg (2017) showed how females were used specifically to perform counterinsurgency during the deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003-2013. Females were as lethal as their male counterparts as they operated in all female's counterinsurgency teams, provided medical assistance to Afghan females and children, and searched females as needed. According to Greenburg (2017), the females operated in elevated combat areas alongside Green Berets and Army Rangers. Based on military and policy documents, his first-hand observations of military trainings, and interviews with military trainers, extensively showed how females were integrated into ground combat "through the promotion of certain gender essentialisms, such as feminine domesticity, alongside military violence". As research shows, these actions emphasized females' lethality and flexibility during combat operations (Greenburg, 2017). Unlike Marcinova's (2018) attempt to uncover the obstacles females face, Escobar believed that

if this is indeed the case, females should be further along in their military careers. Two phrases have been uncovered during this research, *glass ceiling* and *brass ceiling*. Glass and Cook's (2016) article addressed the factors that are often misunderstood that have helped to shape the experiences and success of females who, "against significant odds, rise above the glass ceiling" (p 51).

Dichter and True (2015) mentioned the term of the "brass ceiling" which meant that females' opportunities for advancement were limited to their male peers. Based on a theory that females' participation in the armed forces would expand and contract based solely on the military's demand for personnel, led to the fact that females who served in the military benefited from unique opportunities but faced strains as a minority population and compared to men, reported greater dissatisfaction with their service and had shorter military careers (Dichter & True, 2015). Dichter and True (2015) interviewed 35 United States female veterans about their decisions to enter and leave military service. Premature separation—leaving military service before one plan, expects, or wants to—was a prominent theme and was often precipitated by gender-based experiences, including interpersonal violence, harassment, and caregiving needs. Findings inform efforts to improve the length and quality of females' military careers and to support females during and after service.

Performance Evaluations

Similar to Dichter and True (2015), Inesi and Cable (n. d.) explained in a quantitative study reason in which many females focus on obtaining career-relevant competence signals because they assume it led to greater career success. The authors

explored the possibility that although females may start off with a strong competence signal to obtain a job, it could also come back to haunt them in the future leading towards their performance evaluations, known as the *Officer Evaluation Report*. Since competence signals build throughout a females' career, positive performance ratings eventually became harder and harder for females to obtain as their careers progress. Officer evaluations were governed by Army Regulation 623-3, *Evaluation Reporting System*, which was recently revised on June 14, 2019. The regulation explained thoroughly how officers were to be evaluated, and the differences in who evaluated performance and who evaluated potential. Issues could arise when a female officer feels as if she was not evaluated correctly, thus placing her in an awkward position; either to speak up for herself, or accept the evaluation, knowing that she will not advance to the next rank. Explanations on how to identify glass ceilings that were highlighted in this article shed light on how the ratings on performance evaluations tend to keep females out of top management positions.

Barriers

A phenomenological study conducted by Thompson (2016) focused directly on African American female field grade officers but showed insight on the factors that make most females want to resign their commission from the military instead of advancing. The study involved 20 female officers on Active Duty in which they were asked several detailed questions over a 60-minute period. The participants reported on challenges and barriers that worked against them based on their gender and not their race (Thompson, 2016). Some females in the study brought up having to choose between raising a family

or continuing service in the military. In some cases, the choices made by the female officers were viewed differently unlike their male counterparts. This study shed light on not just African American female officers, but female officers in general. As previously stated, a lot of treatment of the female officers caused them to resign their commission was based on acts against them because of their gender and not necessarily their race (Thompson, 2016).

Henry (2018) perceived barriers to promotional advancement as an issue among military females. During this qualitative single case study, the female officers were categorized in four age groups: the Silent Generation (1925-1940), the World War II Generation (1941-1945), the Baby Boomers (1946-1954), Baby Boomers II (1955-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), and Millennials (1981-1996), Generation Z (1997-2012). Out of the 17 females interviewed, Henry (2018) explained that mentoring possibilities from inception into the Army through the promotion process to retain qualified female officers was just one of the main barriers that existed. Miller (2016) defined advancement as promotional opportunities the act or fact of being raised in position or rank. Military promotions and processes are managed and driven by the Officer of Personnel Management. Aside from Miller's (2016) definition of advancement opportunities in the Army, Henry (2018) uncovered several themes that continue to exist among females failing to get promoted in the Army. The themes that cause disparities among females not being promoted in the Army consist of the following: a) family; (b) leadership; (c) mentorship; (d) physical capabilities of females; (e) roles of men and females; (f) promotion opportunities; and (g) females in combat.

Motherhood and Military Obligations

According to the Department of Defense (2018) female active-duty officers make up 18% of the United States Military entirely. About half of all United States military personnel are married, and 39% have children; single parents make up about 6% of the total armed forces (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020). About 5% of military personnel are married to another member of the Armed Forces (Robinson & O'Hanlon). Female officers in the military that have chosen to make the military a career, usually commit by the time that they begin to have families (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020). Those that commit fall into different categories, such as female officers that are married with no children, married with children, single with children, single without children, divorced children, divorced without children, widowed with children, and widowed without children. Since the United States Army is a volunteer force, there are specific obligations that its personnel must adhere to while they are serving (Isham, 2021). Female officers consider work-life balance throughout their time in service to the Army (Sirgy et al, 2019). Work-life balance in the military can include choosing the military as a career path, being a mother, leaving your family behind to deploy or absentee parenting, and for some, being the head of the household (Sirgy et al, 2019). Females that have chosen to serve, have encountered motherhood and military obligations at different costs, was explored throughout this literature review (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020).

Career

Choosing the military as a career over having a family was a hard decision for females to make (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020). According to Robinson and O'Hanlon

(2020) the military needed more females in the senior ranks of the military; it was not enough just to do better with the younger and more junior demographics, which meant finding ways for females to return and continue their careers after they had children (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020). Most females chose to serve because it provided them the same pay as everyone else, regardless of race or gender (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020). Females also got to travel the world (business and pleasure) and do things that they may not have normally done had they not joined the military and made it a career (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020).

Brooks, and Greenberg (2018) addressed contributing factors that caused military personnel stress during non-deployment environments, such as leadership, work overload/job demands, work-life balance, and several other factors. These factors integrated with what Mercadal (2018) explained in reference to Mead and Durkheim's views on social constructivism, which was developed during the Enlightenment era. Social constructivism was developed as an attempt to understand how people form worldviews and perceived reality. The concept of this theory was rooted deep in the human experience. The human experience included everything from marriage to children, divorce, and stress on the job. The experiences noted by female officers in the Army shed insight on what family and life stressors were that contributed or heavily influenced the females' decisions in reference to their military careers.

Motherhood

For the purposes of this literature review, motherhood was defined as the state or experience of having or raising a child (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Female officers that

became mothers were immediately faced with challenges that caused them to make decisions to stay or to leave the military (Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, 2020). According to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (2020) females that joined the military left at higher rates than men. In a study conducted a few years ago, female veterans in the study agreed that pregnancy and caregiving responsibilities were key reasons as to why many of them left the military (Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, 2020). Single mothers and divorced mothers dealt with obstacles when trying to secure childcare at a moment's notice as well as paying the expenses for extended hours and holidays (Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, 2020).

Martin et al (2015) conducted a study to evaluate perceptions of active-duty military females on breast-feeding support while serving in the United States Armed Forces. The results showed that 318 active-duty females participated in the online study, and based on the percentages from each branch, the Army had significantly lower Workplace Breast-feeding Support Scale scores. Enlisted females had lower scores than Officers that breast-fed and Hispanic females also had very low scores. The Department of Defense has since reviewed its policies and regulations to support efforts for mothers in all branches of service. Today breast-feeding rooms are located throughout unit areas in order to accommodate breast-feeding mothers, both civilian and military.

In Army Regulation 600-8-10, Section IV: Task: Granting Convalescent Leave When Soldiers Return to Unit After Illness or Injury the Army updated its policy on convalescent leave after childbirth (Brading, 2020). Convalescent leave is a non-

chargeable absence from duty granted to expedite a military member's return to full duty after illness, injury or childbirth, typically for 30 days or less (Brading, 2020). In the Army's updated convalescent leave policy, females or the birth parent, now receive 42 weeks of non-chargeable leave off work in order to spend time with their newborn prior to returning back to duty (Brading, 2020). The policy also updated convalescent leave for the non-birth parent, to receive 12-weeks of non-chargeable leave to spend time bonding with their newborn as well (Brading, 2020).

Second Shift

The term, second shift referred to the time that was spent after a person has worked all day on a job, gets off work and goes to work at another job, thus working a double day (Brailey & Slatton). In 1989, Arlie Hochschild, a Sociologist from Berkeley, coined the term second shift (Brailey & Slatton, 2019). Hochschild (1989) highlighted the complexity of females' roles as mothers, wives, and workers (Brailey & Slatton, 2019). According to Hochschild, workers performed a first shift in the paid labor force and a second shift of unpaid labor in their households (Brailey & Slatton, 2019). Although the term second shift has not been used referring to female officers and how they balance active-duty life in their careers and then their family lives after a normal workday, it proves to be relevant (Young, 2021; Rossiter & Ling, 2022). After a normal duty day, females are expected to nurture their families (Young, 2021). Males are expected to do the same, but the expectation for females is extremely higher (Young, 2021).

Deployment

For the purposes of this literature review, deployment was defined as a scheduled time away from the normal duty station, usually outside of the United States (Merriam-Webster, 2018). South Korea is a forward deployed duty assignment (Lee, Prins, & Wiegand, 2021). Although South Korea is a hazardous duty station, families can go with the military Soldier depending on where the Soldier is templated to be stationed on the peninsula (Lee, Prins, & Wiegand, 2021). After notification of a deployment, female officers can deploy in large or small groups or even individually. Many female officers will do pre-deployment training at large training centers such as the National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California, the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, Louisiana, or at specific training centers located at bases across the country (Siteanu, 2021). An average deployment cycle will include months of training at their home base and at specialized courses depending on their branch or unit (Siteanu, 2021).

Since 2001, more than 700,000 US children had a parent deployed to the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq (O'Neal & Mancini, 2021). Deployment creates another barrier of separation, and the idea of absentee parenting among its military members (O'Neal & Mancini, 2021). Even as female officers are deployed, they still must balance work and life (Ragsdale, Kochert, & Beehr, 2021). Actions such as calling home often, taking the time to facetime children and spouses, and mailing souvenirs home while deployed are ways to remain connected during deployments (Louie, Barlaan, & Cromer, 2021). Female officers consider time spent away from newborn babies and small children in order to serve their country (Louie, Barlaan, & Cromer, 2021). Due to deployments,

female officers struggle to find the right time in their careers to have children (Williamson, Baumann, & Murphy, 2021).

Plummer (2018) conducted an online survey of 564 United States females on active duty that served in the Republic of Korea to see how they managed work and family balance. The comparison of the likelihood of females to have children was greater for enlisted females than it was for officers. Research proved that the more satisfied females were with their job, position, or career success, the less likely they were to have children. The statement pertained to female officers more so than the enlisted females. Female officers also received more gendered work and family conflict than the enlisted females which attests to the need to be and remain competitive in the officer arena (Plummer, 2018).

Ippolito, et al (2017) conducted a study to determine if deployments to Afghanistan due to its all-encompassing environment, had a role in females having miscarriages upon their return. Over a 3-year follow-up period, 31% to 11% of the females reported that they had miscarriages and impaired fecundity after returning from the Afghanistan deployment. After re-arranging the demographics, the research showed that deployment experiences and life stressors, were not associated with the miscarriages. The research also showed that an Afghanistan deployment differed from that of another theater such as Iraq or Kuwait. Unlike female officers, during deployments, male officers do not encounter the same stressors, obligations, or obstacles that the female officers face at points in their Army careers.

Absentee Parenthood

For the purposes of this literature review, absentee parenthood was defined as a caregiver of a child that was supposed to be present to provide care for the child but was no longer present to provide care for the child physically (Merriam-Webster, 2018). According to the New York Times, both men and women served in the military had encountered the disparities that came from absentee parenthood (Grose, 2020). In some instances, both parents were Armed Forces members and had to request assistance from other family members to care for their children when duty called (Grose, 2020). According to Army Regulation 600-20, paragraph 5-5b, Dual Military and Single parents were required to have a valid Family Care Plan established within 30 days of arrival at a unit and the plan were verified quarterly by the unit commander (Plummer, 2019). The Family Care Plan ensured that the children would be cared for in the absence of the legal guardian due to a military obligation (Plummer, 2019). According to a 2020 report from the Government Accountability Office, "female military veterans cited difficulties being separated from their children for long time periods as a reason for ending military service. These difficulties were both emotional and practical, including limited stable and safe placement options for children while mothers were deployed." (Grose, 2020)

Head of Household

Several different examples of females' lifestyles either while serving or after they portrayed significant differences that females had verses their male counterparts. Southwell and Macdermid (2016) conducted a study on the lives of military families, where the females who served and the men were stay at home dads. In this mixed

methods study, which homed in on military family life; 20 civilian husbands were interviewed across 11 states around the United States. Empirical evidence showed that females service members had higher divorce rates or remarriage and divorce than service men with civilian wives. The civilian men reported low marital satisfaction, less support from the community, and less satisfaction with the military lifestyle. All of these things cause stress at home and at work for female service members.

As Southwell and Macdermid (2016) said the particulars on what causes females stress while serving in the military, Reppert, Buzzetta, and Rose (2014) explained the needs of female veterans once they transition from the military. The authors used transition theory to understand the lived experiences of females in the military and to gain more knowledge of the military culture. As female veterans transitioned from the military to civilian life, they took with them baggage from their everyday job in their military fields. Understanding the jobs that they had to do and how they were able to function; life after the military, could uncover known theories on why females either retire or leave the military and also what rank they decide to leave.

Summary

The literature review explored themes related to the underrepresentation of female officers in the rank of major to lieutenant colonel with retrospect to the Army's promotion system, job assignments and evaluations, motherhood and military obligation, and handling adversity. For the purposes of the literature review, females were defined as the sex that can bear offspring or produce eggs, distinguished biologically by the production of gametes (ova) which can be fertilized by male gametes (Merriam-Webster, 2018). The definition nor the literature was not meant to discredit Transgender women. The research strategy included searches through databases to obtain facts in relation to the glass ceiling barriers, females serving in the Army, military mothers serving, duty assignments, and promotions and advancements. Mead and Durkheim's views on social constructivism theory will be used during the structured interviews to obtain female officer's world views and their reality on the underrepresentation of women in regard to promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Barriers females undergo in relation to the glass ceiling concept were explored in detail.

The literature explored reasons why females joined the military in conjunction with the reality of what actually happens to females once they were actively serving in the military. Research on traumatic experiences that females underwent at some point in time in their military service, showed why most females either terminate their military service or continued to serve, but eventually left due an array of reasons. The Army's evaluation and promotion program is governed by Army Regulation 350-100, *Officer Active-Duty Service Obligations*, which was recently updated September 25, 2017

(Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2015). However, research shows that evaluations and advancement of female officers was a major factor on how far they would promote through the ranks. Several reasons were listed during the literature that showed obstacles that the females officers faced when trying to advance. Unlike their male counterparts, female officers were automatically expected to balance family and life stressors that in some cases were determining factors of whether or not they would continue to serve (Plummer, 2018). The next chapter aims to explain the potential of the glass ceiling phenomenon by using a qualitative narrative inquiry to fully explore the quality of life and lived experiences of female officers in the Army that did or did not advance past the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to examine why females in the United States Army stationed in South Korea were underrepresented at the lieutenant colonel rank. Through the examination of lived experiences of female officers, I interviewed female officers to determine why promotion rates of females in the Army differ from their male counterparts at the lieutenant colonel rank (Dahlstedt, 2017). The research consists of a qualitative narrative inquiry that focuses on the meaning or females' quality of life while serving and potential barriers in relation to the glass ceiling concept (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Mead and Durkheim's (2016) on social constructivism theory were used to understand how females perceived their reality to be while serving. Sen's (1999) capability theory was used to capture the experiences of what females while actively serving in the Army.

Research Design

According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), the narrative approach to qualitative research is both a product and a method. It is a study of stories or narrative or descriptions of a series of events that accounts for human experiences (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). The qualitative narrative worked best for this research because it allowed me to explore the idea of the glass ceiling effect in relation to the accounts of how female officers did not obtain the rank of lieutenant colonel while serving in a forward deployed combat zone, and non-deployment assignments. South Korea is set to go to war at a moment's notice, yet female officers still elect to serve in its capacity (Glenn, 2020). The

narrative inquiry captures the lived experiences of participants by capturing their feelings, emotions, and reactions of past experiences (Rose & Johnson, (2020)). Two instruments were used during the research: structured interviews and reflective journals. The structured interviews used guided the discussion of female's accounts as they reflected on where they began as female officers and how far they went in their careers. I used reflective journals to ensure credibility and transferability of each participant's account. Each experience was different and unique to each participant. I used an oral history narrative to retell the stories of female officers that had experienced the Army's promotion process from major to lieutenant colonel. Things that the females deemed as obstacles or factors that were relevant to them were discussed and saved using MAXQDA to sort the data.

Role of the Researcher

As a 40-year-old African American female officer in the Army, at the rank of major, having served 22 years and counting, I am an appropriate researcher for this type of study. I joined the Army at the age of 18 in the rank of private first class. Before I was 20 years old, I deployed to Afghanistan at the rank of specialist. I was pinned the rank of sergeant at the age of 21 and had my daughter at the age of 22. I remained in the Army Reserves and then later joined the Reserve Officer's Training Corps at Jackson State University. I commissioned as a Quartermaster Officer in May 2006 at the age of 23 and decided to go full time in the Army. I was married and divorced at my first duty station from a military Armor Officer prior to my deployment to Iraq. After I served a tour in Iraq at the age of 26 in the rank of a second lieutenant, I got promoted to first lieutenant

while deployed. I served a second tour in Afghanistan at the age of 31 in the rank of captain. As a single mother the first 10 years of my Active-Duty career, I was married at the age of 31 and had my son by the age of 32. I have a blended family with two daughters and our son, increasing our home from two to five. In order to fully understand the underrepresentation of female officers, with which I have lived with throughout my military career, being able to interview other females that had left the military was not only vital to another female's success that continues to serve, but also my own career success in the Army. I am more than qualified to gain the trust of these females as I conducted their interviews. I remained unbiased and eager to hear about their experiences in the Army and why they chose to make the decisions that they made to get them to their current place.

Research Methodology

Yin (2009) believed that the usage of a qualitative narrative study approach was an effort to answer *how* and *why* questions and to describe the possibility of the glass ceiling phenomenon existing in a military related environment, while capturing stories of female officers. The philosophical roots of qualitative methodology stem from constructivism and interpretivism, which allowed the me to understand, describe, or discover theories (Lewis, 2015). With the qualitative approach, the researcher was the data collection instrument, whereas external instruments were used for quantitative research, instruments such as tests or surveys (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I conducted interviews on Zoom with females that were once located on Camp Humphreys, Camp Casey, Camp Henry, and Camp Walker in South Korea.

Measures

Using the narrative approach, 14female officers from the ages of 30+ were interviewed if they wore the rank of major and served in South Korea from 2017-2021. The rank of major is the beginning of the field grade officer rank according to the Army's rank structure as outlined in Army Regulation 600-8-29. Structured interviews were conducted using Zoom in order to capture firsthand accounts and experiences of female officers and their views and opinions on the reality of their time spent serving their country and the jobs or positions they obtained in preparation for promotion to the next rank. During the semi-structured interviews, I asked participants to state only facts, and at a certain point near the end, their overall opinion on how the Army's promotion and evaluations processes either benefited them or defeated them, if that was indeed their case. To help guide each interview, topics such as family, motherhood, and work-life balance were a part of the interview questions. Participants signed a letter of consent to allow the interview to be recorded and used for research purposes. The record feature on Zoom was used to capture conversations during the interviews. The Temi app was used as a backup recording device. MAXQDA was used to code data responses. After the collection and categorization of responses, positively identified themes that coincided with the concept of the glass ceiling were coded in each transcript.

Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to understand the accounts and experiences of female officers in the United States Army that were once stationed in South Korea, who did not advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The research was

relevant to shedding light on female officers' experiences by using social constructivism theory to explore what contributed to the underrepresentation of female officers in the United States Army, once stationed in South Korea. The research question is:

What are the experiences of female Army officers that served in South Korea who sought promotions from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel?

Additional research questions will be used to further explore the problem.

RQ1. How did female officers choose assignments that led to promotion to the next rank?

RQ2. How did female officers balance motherhood and their military obligation?

RQ3. How did female officers handle discrimination or adversity in the military?

Participants Selection

Participants for this research includes 14 females United States Army Officers over 30 years old that served in South Korea from 2017-2021. The females held the rank of major or lieutenant colonel. Both ranks are field grade officer ranks according to the Army's rank structure as outlined in Army Regulation 600-8-29. Zoom interviews determined themes that emerged which pertained to their journeys in the Army. The focus was on their first-hand experiences as female Army officers and their views opinions on the reality of their time spent serving their country and the jobs or positions that they obtained to get to their current rank. I recruited females by posting on Facebook to capture female Army majors or lieutenant colonels interested in conducting the study.

Procedures

I sent emails to military acquaintances to ask for support and to inform others of the study. I provided contact information for those interested in participating. I sent out public notices on Facebook that were on display on my individual page. The public notice described the study and criteria for participation. The public notice also contained my contact information. Participants in the study were prescreened with the use of a brief questionnaire to ensure they met the criteria for participation in the study. An informed letter of study and consent form for participants were emailed to those who met the criteria to participate. Once I received the signed consent form, I contacted the eligible participants to schedule Zoom interviews. A debriefing took place after the interview that concluded with me completing my reflection journal. I conducted all Zoom interviews, recordings, debriefing, and transcribing. Each participant was able to review their transcribed interviews and I wrote in my reflective journal to validate accuracy of the data collected. I analyzed the transcripts and developed independent interpretations and themes. I adhered to all ethical protections of the participants' information in the study.

Data Analysis

I collected data by conducting Zoom semi-structured interviews with participants and by maintaining my reflective journal to confirm everything discussed. The temi app was used as a backup recording device. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. I scheduled structured interviews as needed to collect the data and to allow time for transferability of data. Zoom provided a way to collect data from participants outside the geographical area; I used these primarily due to the availability of the participants due to

military training and the time zone difference from West Point, New York where I am currently stationed. I organized and created a file for each participant. All files were filed and organized by participant an in order of receipt. All files (i.e., audio, transcribed interviews, all paperwork) are stored in my home office in a safe.

Verification of Findings

In conducting qualitative research, it is imperative to use a lens and theory in order to understand the participants' lived experiences. In qualitative research, the study must demonstrate credibility (Rose & Johnson, 2020)). To ensure the findings are accurate, data triangulation was used for validation. I used the techniques of clarifying research bias, rich, thick description, and member checking to triangulate the data for credibility, transferability, and validation (Erlandson et al., 1993; Candela, 2019). Further, I relied on Rose and Johnson's (2020) technique of clarifying researcher bias to communicate with each participant prior to the interview so that they understood how I fit into the research and to ensure that I did not push my views on them. According to Lincoln and Guba, member checking is the most critical technique for establishing credibility (Candela, 2019). After each interview, I used member checking take data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the account. The validation strategies above contribute to the accuracy of the findings. Likewise, I used different strategies to ensure the reliability of this study. I used the computer program MAXQDA to analyze, code, and organize the data from the study to further reliability and transferability in the research.

Ethical Protection

In this research, the participants were adults 21 years of age or older. Participants read the consent form prior to the interview session and stated, "I agree" or "I disagree" via Zoom and Temi recording. I explained the research intent to the participants so that they understood their roles in the research, what the research was used for, and participate willingly. Participants were not exposed to harm during this study. Participants could retract their consent to be interviewed at any time if the questions had triggered an emotional or mental pulse that caused them to go into depression, anger, or anxiety during the interview. I maintained participants' confidentiality using a pseudonym for each participant. I stored all information collected to include paperwork, files, audiotapes, consents, and transcripts in a private locked desk located in my home office. In addition, all paperwork will be stored for a minimum of 5 years.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I determined that it was not known how the accounts and experiences of female officers, underrepresented in the United States Army, that were once stationed in South Korea, contributed to their advancement to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The specific problem was the underrepresentation of female majors in the Army that were previously stationed in South Korea from 2017-2021, who competed for promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2015). The qualitative narrative inquiry was used to understand the experiences of female officers in the United States Army that were once stationed in South Korea, who did not advance to the rank of lieutenant colonel. This research aimed to explore the lives

of female officers and obstacles and factors that they encountered that led to them not being promoted to the next rank. Two theories were used to conduct this research. Factors that influenced female officer's quality of life were accessed using Sen's capability theory to determine if those factors interfered with the advancement of the officer's careers (Harel-Shalev, Huss, Daphna-Tekoah, & Cwikel, 2017). Sociocultural theory was the conceptual framework used as the lens to explore how human actions related to the social context that humans were in, and to determine if growth stemmed from their environment (Scott, & Palincsar, (2013).

In Chapter 2, the following themes emerged during the literature review: a) family; (b) leadership; (c) mentorship; (d) physical capabilities of females; (e) roles of men and females; (f) promotion opportunities; and (g) females in combat. The literature showed reasons why females joined the military in conjunction with the reality of what actually happened to females once they were actively serving in the military. Research on work-life balances that females underwent at some point in time in their military service, showed why most females either terminated their military service or continued to serve. I aimed to explore the themes in Chapter 2 by using the qualitative narrative design to understand the stories and experiences of the females that served.

In Chapter 3, I will used the qualitative narrative inquiry to explore several factors and themes identified during literature review. After IRB approval, the accounts of 14 female officers were retrieved using Zoom, with Temi as a backup, structured interviews, and reflective journals as instruments during the study. Once all accounts were completed, I conducted triangulation to ensure credibility, transferability, and validity of

data obtained. Member checking was used to ensure data was captured correctly during the interview. Participants were given the chance to look back at the interview recordings. MAXQDA was the software used to compile and organize the data collected.

In Chapter 4, the findings focused on the key reasons why females in the rank of major, that served in the United States Army, and were stationed in South Korea, did not promote to lieutenant colonel. Chapter 5 will inform the community of scholars about the new knowledge this research will contribute to the field and why it remains meaningful and significant. The research adds to the body of knowledge on promotion rates among female officers in the Army and the obstacles that involved their underrepresentation at the lieutenant colonel rank.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research was to understand how impediments such as traumatic experiences, family and life stressors, and officer evaluations created a "glass ceiling" that led to significant underrepresentation of females in the leadership ranks. The intent was to find out why these women were significantly underrepresented at the major and lieutenant colonel ranks. The women represented all served in South Korea between 2017-2021 and each of their experiences were captured in accordance with Sen's (1999) capability theory. Needing and wanting to understand their life's experiences was vital to uncovering the cause and effect of how female officers progress or not progress within the Army from the rank of major to lieutenant colonel.

The research question used in this study: What are the experiences of female Army officers that served in South Korea who sought promotions from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel? Additional questions that helped to further explore the research question were:

RQ1. How did female officers choose assignments that led to promotion to the next rank?

RQ2. How did female officers balance motherhood and their military obligation?

RQ3. How did female officers handle discrimination or adversity in the military?

This chapter outlines the study itself, demographics of the participants, data collection and analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and the study results.

Research Setting

During the periods of time covered in the research, female officers served in South Korea in the rank of major. From 2017 to 2018, known as the North Korea Crisis, tensions were high between North Korea and the United States. North Korea conducted a series of missile and nuclear tests that demonstrated its ability to launch ballistic missiles beyond its region. The United States Intelligence Agency had not assessed North Korea's nuclear program to be that advanced. North Korea also threatened the United States and South Korea during a peninsula-wide exercise that ensures both forces are ready to at a moment's notice, "Fight Tonight." North Korea also threatened Australia twice during this time with nuclear strikes. By 2018, tensions began to ease as North Korea agreed to hold talks with South Korea.

In 2018, the United States and South Korea came back to the table to discuss Article V of the Agreement under Article IV of the Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of South Korea regarding facilities, areas, and the status of the United States Armed Forces in the Republic of South Korea. The original agreement was signed in Seoul on July 9, 1966. Under President Trump, the United States went back to the negotiation table to discuss budget cuts in the Defense spending bill. During this time, there were periods of time where Korean Nationals that were working and co-located at United States. military bases in South Korea were forced to take leave without pay. Budget cuts caused the United States to review how it planned to maintain the original agreement with its South Korean partners. This caused strains on

relationships between United States service members that were serving in South Korea and their Korean partners.

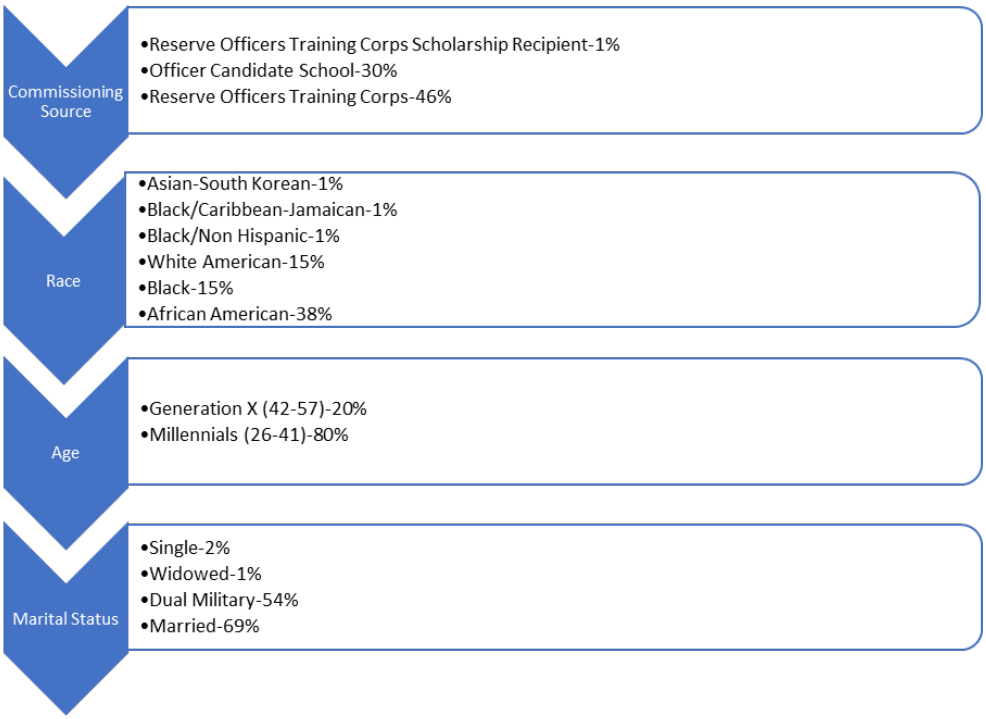
In 2019, the Coronavirus or COVID-19 Pandemic hit South Korea as it did the rest of the world. The COVID-19 disease was caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). In 2019, South Korea had 25, 760,701 confirmed cases, 1,073 severe cases, 29, 315 deaths, and a 11% fatality rate. United States Forces serving in South Korea during that time were immediately locked down. Travel from one area of South Korea to another area, needed the approval of the General Officer in charge of that specific area. Army leadership at all levels had to keep their personnel calm, safe, and informed as COVID-19 protective measures were being developed. Tensions were again heightened as the United States Forces Korea Command worked with its units across the peninsula to protect the force.

Demographics

The Korean Theater of Operations is deemed to be unique in the opportunities that it provided for female officers that served during 2017-2021. Demographics (Figure 1) used to explore the population of female officers were: age, race, commissioning source, marital status, dependents, and years served in South Korea.

Figure 1

Demographics



Age

Fourteen female officers participated in the study. The ages of female officers at the time that they obtained the rank of major were categorized between Generation X (42-57 years old) and millennials (26-41 years old). Under 20% of female officers were Generation X, and over 80% of female officers were millennials during the time they obtained the rank of major and served in South Korea.

Race

Of the 14 female officers that served in South Korea from 2017-2021, 38% identified as African Americans, 15% identified as Black, 12% identified as White-

Americans, 1% identified as Black/Non-Hispanic, 1% identified as Black Caribbean-Jamaican, 1% identified as Hebrew, and 1% identified as Asian-South Korean.

Commissioning Source

Female participants became officers by attending Officer Candidate School, Reserve Officers Training Corps, The United States Military Academy, and Direct Commission (Baglini, 2021). About 46% of the participants were commissioned through the Reserve Officers Training Corps. Of the 46% that commissioned through that source, 1% received scholarships. The remaining 30% commissioned through Officer Candidate School.

Marital Status and Dependents

Of the 14 participants, 69% were married. Of the 69% married, 54% were dual military to include 1% widowed. Dual military means that the participant was married to another service member. Of the 14 participants, 2% were single. Female officers that provided care for another person(s) while serving in South Korea included 62% of participants. Of the 62%, 46% of participants had more than one dependent child, 1% had a parent as a dependent, and 15% were single parents while serving in South Korea.

Service in South Korea

Some participants served multiple years in South Korea, whereas some only served one year, but multiple tours. Of the 14 participants, 46% served in South Korea from 2017-2018 during increased political tensions and conflict with North Korea. Of the 14 participants, 54% served during 2018-2019 at a time of max budget cuts, as Korean Nationals and service members awaited the results of the Special Measures Agreement.

Of the 14 participants, 54% of participants served from 2019-2020 when South Korea had its initial wave of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Of the 14 participants, 23% served from 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Data Collection

This research began when the researcher posted the flyer on Facebook and Twitter social media platforms. I also submitted an email and flyer to Walden's Participant Pool. As participants reached out to the number on the flyer, weekly interview sessions were scheduled. Once participants were scheduled, a Zoom calendar invite was sent to the participant with a time and link. All interviews took place from the researcher's home office, on an iMac computer. All data collected were saved on my iMac computer. Only audio was used and recorded on Zoom, no videos.

Interviews began at the end of July 2022 and ended mid October 2022. Interview sessions were scheduled for an hour and a half, but sometimes ran longer or shorter based on how much detail the participants wanted to share and the time they had available. Half of the interview sessions took place in the early mornings and half were late evenings. Two of the 14 interviews were captured from participants that were actively residing overseas. Time considerations were made to capture the best time to conduct the overseas interviews.

The qualitative approach uses the researcher as the main data collection instrument (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I was the main data instrument for this study. Zoom was used as the primary data recording instrument during participant interviews. No videos were used, audio only. Temi was used as a backup data recording instrument

to Zoom to capture the conversations of each participant and to have the conversation transcribed onto a word document. Data were also captured by hand, and later used as notes by the researcher for each participant. The sheet that was used for manual notes was a printed off copy of the demographic and semi-structured research questions. I annotated the participant's alphabet letter, date, and time on the manual note sheet and on the transcript.

The original participant number for the research was supposed to be between 10 to 12 participants. More interest was expressed from participants and the research number increased. The research included 14 participants of different races and ages. Each participant was asked for their consent on Zoom after I explained the basis of the research, which was read directly from the consent form. During this time, participants were given a chance to ask the researcher questions and to change their mind if they no longer wanted to participate in the study.

All participants were recorded saying, "I consent," and I proceeded with the interview asking eight demographic questions. The demographic questions addressed age at the rank of major, commissioning source, race/ethnicity/national origin, civilian education, gender orientation, marital status, children or care to another adult, and the years served in South Korea. Next, I informed the participants that twelve semi-structured questions would be asked. It was also explained that if a participant answered another semi-structured question, that would have been addressed later; I would make a note of the participant's response and continue the interview. Out of the semi-structured questions, topics about the Army's Height and Weight and fairness of the Army's new

Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) were mentioned. These topics were not on the original semi-structured list but added great value to my understanding of programs that could affect a female officers' chance of promotion to the next rank.

After all data were collected, files were moved from Microsoft Word on my iMac to the MAXQDA data analysis program for iMac's. No names or identifiers of participants were used, only letters to distinguish one participant from another. I listened to each Temi file of all 14 participants several times, capturing additional notes and phrases that would feed into the manual coding process and into the MAXQDA program, which marked the beginning of the data analysis process. The MAXQDA program was used to interpret and digitally code the data. The software was used to identify like words and phrases. Once the software identified words and phrases in all 14 transcripts, codes were developed by color and listed in the bottom window of the MAXQDA program.

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was listening to each audio recording alone first, then listening while following along with the transcript, and then using MAXQDA to upload transcripts for further data analysis. Before beginning the coding process in MAXQDA, each transcript was manually scrubbed and coded, which was the first-time broad themes began to surface. Each participant was randomly assigned a letter of the alphabet. No names were used during the interview process. By combining manual coding and the use of MAXQDA it served as a form of triangulation. The use of triangulation strategy helped the researcher's overall understanding of how complex the

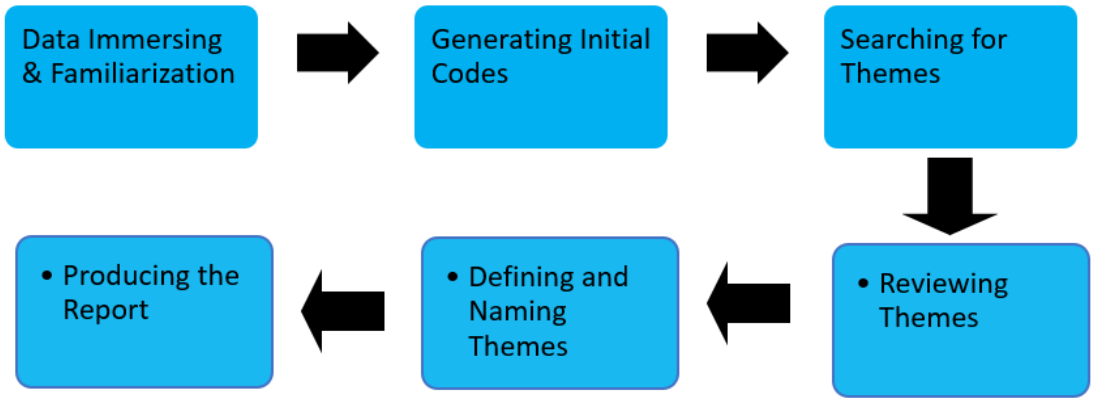
research was and kept the researcher from making inaccurate assumptions or results about the phenomenon referred to as the glass ceiling.

After interviewing 8 participants, the researcher determined that data saturation was obtained. The researcher realized that common codes continued to appear which tied into broad themes. The first form of analysis used to arrive at broad themes, was simply by reading through the transcripts and manually coding words and phrases in each transcript. Once transcripts were uploaded into MAXQDA, the researcher assigned each code a color and was able to see more themes that arose throughout participants' lived experiences.

Using Braun and Clarke (2006) 6-Phase Thematic Analysis (Figure 2), the researcher worked step by step to identify codes and categories within the research. 19 codes were identified initially. Of the 19 codes, 8 were broken down into categories that later became overarching themes. After conducting the semi-structured interviews, the 8 overarching themes resulted in 10 findings from the research.

Figure 2

Data Analysis Method. Braun & Clarke's six step approach



Using MAXQDA, the 19 broad codes that surfaced are defined in more detail below. The codes below are aligned with three research questions that are nested with the main research question.

RQ1. How did female officers choose assignments that led to promotion to the next rank?

RQ2. How did female officers balance motherhood and their military obligation?

RQ3. How did female officers handle discrimination or adversity in the military?

Kuwait (1), Iraq (2) and Afghanistan (3): Codes that referred to deployment locations that participants were obligated to serve at during their time as military officers prior to deployment to South Korea. Aligned with RQ1 and RQ2.

Bachelor's Degree (4) and master's degree (5): Codes that referred to the highest level of civilian education that female Army officers received. Aligned with RQ1.

Work and Life Balance (6): Code referred to how female Army officers handled duties and managed time both on and off duty. Also explored the amount of involvement with their families during what is often referred to as the "second shift" after arriving home from work. Aligned with RQ2.

Mental Health (7): Code referred to trauma, behavior, and stressors that female Army officers encountered during their time in South Korea. Aligned with RQ3.

Sexual Assault (8): Code referred to traumatic experiences that female Army officers endured during deployments and or while serving in male-dominated units. Aligned with RQ3.

Key Development Jobs (9): Code refers to positions or jobs that female Army officers must obtain and successfully complete to be considered for promotion to the next rank. Aligned with RQ1.

Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) (10): Code referred to the Army's new physical fitness test that is now in full effect as of October 2022. It replaced the old Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). Instead of three events in the old test, the new ACFT consists of 6 events. Aligned with RQ1 and RQ2.

Equality of Army's Promotion System (11): Code referred to comments made in reference to the equality of the Army's promotion system based on female officers, based on their race, and based on being properly evaluated. Aligned with RQ3.

Discrimination or Adversity (12): Code referred to times and events expressed by female Army officers on what they perceived to be discrimination and or how they overcame adversity. Aligned with RQ3.

Challenges (13): Code refers to obstacles specifically involving issues with leadership; to include subordinates, peers, and superiors. Aligned with RQ3.

Children or Kids (14): Codes referred to female Army officers that had children that depended on them for support or that accompanied or did not accompany the officers to South Korea. Aligned with RQ2.

Dual Military (15): Code referred to female Army officers that were married to a spouse that was also a servicemember in the military. Aligned with RQ2.

Married/Single/Divorced/Widowed (16): Code referred to the relationship status of female Army officers while serving in South Korea. Aligned with RQ2.

Race or Ethnicity (17): Code referred to how female Army officers identified themselves. Aligned with Demographic Question 2.

Commissioning Source (18): Code referred to which type of programs female Army officers used to become commissioned officers in the Army. Aligned with Demographic Question 1.

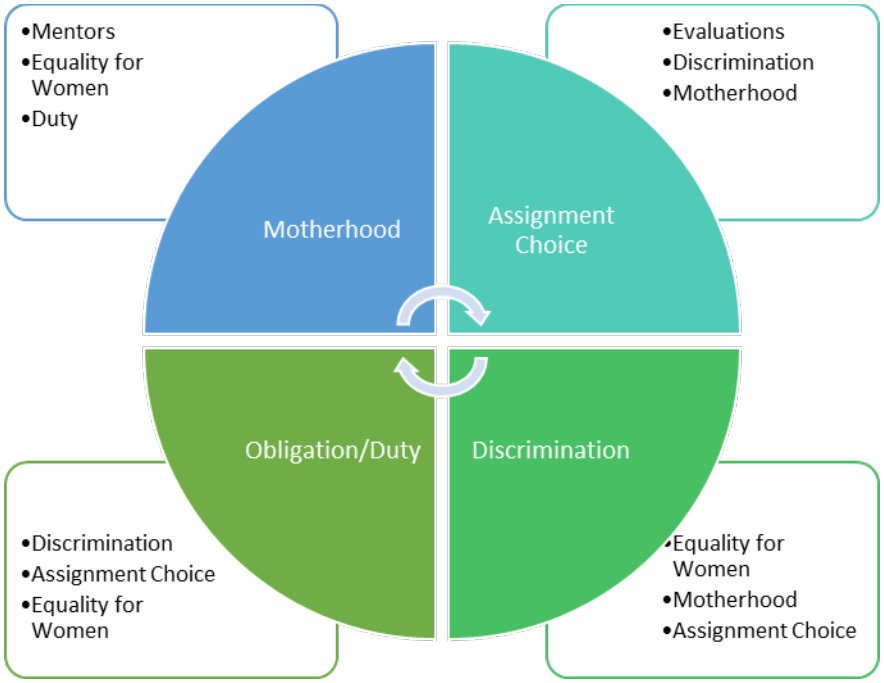
Age (19): Code referred to how old female Army officers were when they pinned the rank of major. Provides a perspective on how much time they served, and their level of experience compared to others that served. Aligned with Demographic Question 3.

After analyzing the data, I identified 8 overarching themes (Figure 3) reflecting 10 findings (Table 2). These were as follows: (a) assignment choice, (b) motherhood, (c) obligation/duty, (d) discrimination, (e) equality for women, (f) mentors, (g) evaluations, and (h) deployments. New themes also emerged such as biases in relation to the Army Combat Fitness Test and Height and Weight. In this section, I discussed 8 themes based

on how they were explained by the participants' perspectives of their lived experiences at the rank of major, thus seeking promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Figure 3

Overarching Themes



The 8 overarching themes coincide with each other to provide a holistic view of factors that contributed to the career progression of female Army officers.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is a critical aspect throughout the entire research. To ensure that the research is trustworthy, the researcher incorporated Lincoln and Guba's (1982) Research Project Guidelines. The guidelines outline how to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of the criteria are essential to help achieve research trustworthiness. The researcher incorporated strategies

to address the two criteria; credibility and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) to support the research's trustworthiness.

Credibility

According to Rose and Johnson (2020), qualitative research must demonstrate credibility and refer to the degree to which an actual audience will accept and or agree to the findings of the study. The researcher utilized measures to bolster credibility and reduce threats to the research. Using two sources of data fostered data triangulation, which helped to minimize threats. To support triangulation through the data collection process, the researcher gathered data using different days and times during the collection weeks (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, member checking was used during the interviews to ensure the respondent's accuracy and to minimize biases. The researcher confirmed data to the participants and had the participants analyze their responses for accuracy.

Walden's IRB will have the final approval to ensure the process and results of the study are credible, ethical, and without bias. The fact that the researcher is still serving in the Army, on active duty, created the possibility of personal bias, which the researcher acknowledged. To ensure the findings are accurate, the researcher kept a reflective journal of my procedures, outlining step by step Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-Phase Thematic Data analysis process. The researcher also used member checking by offering participants a chance to confirm all data as it was collected and recorded. There were a few times where participants needed to revise a statement for clarity or expound on a specific definition or new term introduced during the interviews. The researcher

determined that data saturation was accomplished after no more new concepts or issues arose after obtaining 8 interviews.

Transferability

The research's transferability refers to the findings' to be applied to other studies or circumstances (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transferability of the research was enhanced by outlining a detailed and clear description of the research data collection and analysis. The researcher used purposive sampling to enhance overall trustworthiness and developed a demographic instrument that represents the participants' characteristics related to age, race, commissioning source, marital status, dependents, and service time in South Korea (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; see Appendix A). The results reflected quotes verbatim from participants' answers to questions as they reflected to talk about their lived experiences. Answers per questions that were tied to themes that emerged were explained in more detail to allow the audience a chance to put themselves in the shoes of the participants. The study results can be easily transferred to other contexts for multipurpose uses in the civilian and military sectors. The researcher incorporated triangulation strategies to enhance transferability. Utilizing triangulation, the researcher used two data sources: semi-structured interview and reflective journal. Denzin (2009) noted that multiple sources of data would enhance transferability and reliability.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research addresses the stability of the findings over a period through participants' evaluation and interpretation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A threat to dependability and in qualitative research is the misinterpretation of data and

personal bias (Connelly, 2016; Kornbluh, 2015). To help reduce threats and biases in the research, the researcher incorporated three strategies: semi-structured interviews, member checking, and data triangulation into the data collection process.

To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher used three instruments; semi-structured interviews, member checking, and a reflective journal as sources of data to promote data triangulation and data saturation to help reduce bias (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). After each interview, participants ensured the interpretation and accuracy of their transcripts in order to eliminate bias. Interpretation accuracy was incorporated throughout the interview by having the participants confirm specific verbiage and acronyms during the interview as well for the researcher to capture participants thoughts and their experiences correctly.

Lastly, the researcher will store collected data securely and safely for five years following the completion of this study in order to facilitate dependability in the event of any audit. The researcher will provide a detailed description of the processes used to collect and analyze data. Through documentation of this study, it will be available with the intent to be used or compared with future investigations on this topic.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to neutrality; the data and findings can be corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). The researcher incorporated three strategies to enhance confirmability; development of a codebook to achieve saturation during thematic analysis, maintained a reflective journal, and conducted an audit trail. All raw data, recordings, discussions, and manual documents

were labeled appropriately by date, numeric value, time, and stored separately to limit data misplacement and help establish an audit trail to bolster research trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Bowen (2009) noted that audit trails include the proper labeling and placement of research data that enhances research confirmability. During the coding process, a codebook was incorporated. The codebook refers to the justification of the research sample size, how saturation was achieved, and an analysis of all participants' interviews and codes (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). Lastly, a reflective journal was maintained to ensure data was captured without bias from the researcher, but to also include and compare data from semi-structured interviews.

Study Results

The research question of this study was: What are the experiences of female Army officers that served in South Korea who sought promotions from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel? Following the data collection and analysis outlined above, the researcher reviewed data that was not directly tied to the research if it added more context to answer the research question. Eight themes emerged to describe the experiences of female officers that served in South Korea; the researcher derived these from analyzing over 100 individual line by line statements (see Figure 3). Two additional themes emerged as identified by the participants in this study.

Table 2

Final Findings with Supporting Participants

Associated Research Question & Results	Total supporting participants (N=14)
RQ1-Lack of KD Opportunities	6
RQ1-Having Mentors	8
RQ2-Motherhood	7
RQ3-Gender Discrimination	5
RQ3-Race Discrimination	6
RQ3-Lack of OER Equality	8
RQ1-Promotion System Equality	6
RQ2-ACFT Adaptation	14
RQ2-Outdated Height & Weight Standards	9
RQ3-Health Issues	5

Table 2 depicts responses that participants elaborated on during their semi-structured interviews. Some of the participant's experiences were alike and some were different. Most responses varied based on race and duty assignment positions. The narratives that were explored contributed to factors regarding the underrepresentation of female Army officers, serving at the field grade rank in South Korea from 2017 to 2021.

Finding 1: Lack of Key Development (KD) Opportunities

This theme indicates that while South Korea is a desired location to go right into key development assignments, others struggled to get the opportunity to obtain one. Based on a female officer's branches (i.e., Logistics, Adjutant, etc.), there are specific job opportunities needed for promotion to the next rank. Some of the key development job titles that the participants occupied were Brigade/Battalion S1, Division Strength Manager, Support Operations Officer, Planning and Exercise Chief, Brigade/Battalion Executive Officer, Brigade/Battalion Operations Officer, and Division Transportation

Officer. 80% of participants held key development positions while serving in South Korea. 40% of participants held positions that did not help them towards promotion to lieutenant colonel. The comments below support this theme.

> "Females must fight to get the top positions and they get burnt out. Then they get out. Some make it and some don't" (Participant Beta).
>
> "I did what I did, but if I don't make lieutenant colonel, it's not because I didn't try" (Participant Foxtrot).
>
> "Especially female officers, there's a lot of potential out there that gets overlooked because they're not put in the jobs that let them shine" (Participant Charlie).
>
> "I was removed from my KD job and another person that needed KD was given my position. The person didn't have nowhere near the responsibilities I had in that same position" (Participant Lima).

Finding 2: Having Mentors

This theme supports the claim that most female officers go through their careers and do not have a mentor until they reach the rank of captain or major. Mentors help advise officers on career decisions that not only affect the officer, but their families. Career decisions can make the difference between an officer's promotion to the next rank or transition out of the military. 10% of participants had mentors that aided in their decision to go to South Korea. 40% of participants did not have a mentor to aid in their decision to go to South Korea. 50% of participants had no mentor at all. The comments below support this theme.

"I wish I hadn't taken things personally, when maybe I shouldn't have. I would've looked for a mentor early on in my career" (Participant Mike).

"My mentor is a female General Officer; she did not want me to leave the Army. but I knew when I went to South Korea that I wanted to retire. I chose not to sacrifice my kids, and I didn't like the direction the Army was going" (Participant Delta).

"I mentor others, none look like me or have the same gender or demographics. Some people only help people that look like them" (Participant Charlie).

"I did have a mentor, so I was able to kind of network my way to jobs" (Participant November).

Finding 3: Motherhood

This theme indicates the decisions that female officers must consider as mothers serving and as dual military couples (married to another service member). Often participants juggled their military duties with the help of others while serving in South Korea. 43% of participants chose South Korea because it gave the family a chance to remain together during the tour. 14% of participants deployed to South Korea as single parents. All participants were required to be an officer 24 hours a day and nurture their kids during what is often referred to as the second shift. Work and life balance in South Korea did place an unspoken strain on participants that wore the hat of mother and officer. The comments below support this theme.

"No sponsor; I arrived with kids; single parent." I'm told, "Go to the field next week." I don't even have a house" (Participant Beta).

"I didn't pay attention to discrimination until after I had my kids" (Participant Golf).

"I went to Korea unaccompanied and stayed 6 months before going to the states, in which I chose to bring my son back" (Participant Lima).

"There's never a good time to have a baby in the Army. They didn't issue us the family. That moment was a breakthrough for me" (Participant Charlie).

"Expectation management with my family. My family knows that I may not be able to have dinner with them every night" (Participant Kilo).

> "It was hard having three kids being at three different levels in school…my eldest, required a bit more attention from me specifically. I'd work late and then go home and still try to make time for my eldest" (Participant November).

Finding 4: Gender Discrimination

This theme indicates several instances where female officers felt discriminated against because of their gender. Most often participants served in mostly male-dominated units in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, and Egypt, prior to their deployment to South Korea. They faced gender discrimination due to lack of knowledge and maturity levels of their male counterparts, peers, and superiors. Based on the interviews, South Korea was not the first time that most of the participants felt what they perceived to be discrimination.

For some participants, South Korea was their first duty station that seemed to be the most diverse. The comments below support this theme.

"I feel like it's my responsibility to continue to stand up and educate them." "I don't think they were discriminating against me; I think they were more comfortable working with "males" (Participant Kilo).

“First deployment to Korea, I received gender discrimination from my Battalion Commander, who was later removed from command” (Participant Charlie).

“I don’t know if it was because I was black or if it was because I was female or if it was both, but it was blatant” (Participant Mike).

“My new enlisted advisor undermined my decision to work late. He was new to our operation and didn’t agree with me. If I were a man, my decision would have never been questioned” (Participant Hotel).

“There were always obstacles and roadblocks. If I looked differently, I would’ve had a different experience”. “I was in a combat arms unit. It was the first time the unit had a female non-combat arms officer as their Brigade Executive Officer” (Participant Echo).

“It’s like every time you go to a new unit and you’re a woman, you always gotta prove something” (Participant Juliet).

Finding 5: Race Discrimination

This theme recalls several incidents in which participants felt what they perceived to be discrimination because of their race or ethnicity. Based on their race or ethnicity, participants recall what they perceived to be race discrimination from their peers, other female officers, and their superiors. Instances could have occurred in meetings, during evaluations, major exercises, during decision making, and daily operations within a unit. The comments below support this theme.

“It’s like we’re playing with a different set of rules. I was seeing and hearing things I probably shouldn’t have heard or seen” (Participant Alpha).

"I was challenged when I disagreed with a decision. I was a Black Female amongst senior leaders." "The higher I went up in rank, the more I was disrespected as a female officer" (Participant Foxtrot).

"The higher you go up; the mix of females is not what you expect." "I'm more one of the minorities" (Participant Charlie).

"They only take care of certain people" (Participant India).

"I look like them, I speak fluent Korean, but I wear the UNITED STATES Flag" (Participant Kilo).

"My Battalion Commander (male) said to me, 'don't worry about this evaluation because the Army needs black females, so they have to meet a quota. You'll be fine'" (Participant Echo).

"I tried to tell my rater things about specific topics related to the mission, maybe it was because I'm a black female that he'd always go around me and ask someone else the same question….as long as I was providing the information, it was always questionable" (Participant November).

Finding 6: Lack of Officer Evaluation Report (OER) Equality

This theme indicates the lack of equality of the use of the Officer Evaluation Report (OER) when determining an officer's performance and potential to progress to the next rank. The most important part of the evaluation report is the how the report is created and the senior rater's comments that explains the promotion potential to the promotion board. Of the participants, 64% had input of their OER with their Raters. Of the participants, 50% had input on their OER with their Senior Raters. 43% of

participants said their performance was captured in their evaluation report. 30% of participants said their performance was not captured in their evaluation report. The comments below support this theme.

"I ended up writing my first OER, because there were really no mentors, and my first rater was a little more senior in rank than me" (Participant Lima).

"I didn't get the top block because another officer was being looked at for promotion, even though I earned it" (Participant Alpha).

"My senior rater retaliated against me with my OER for speaking up. Other people noticed the lieutenant colonel's behaviors to silence me" (Participant Foxtrot).

"I went to Equal Opportunity on my senior rater. He retaliated against me on my OER. Peers and other leaders saw this and knew I deserved better" (Participant Echo).

"He had never worked with females before. I still talk to him. He was an Infantry Ranger. I think he realized that he'd made a mistake with my OER rating" (Participant Kilo).

"Sometimes 'throwaway OERs' are done to take care of another officer. If you're doing top block work, you should get the top block regardless" (Participant India).

"I ended up getting a top block, but I honestly felt like they probably didn't want to deal with me; knowing that I would raise a fuss about it if I didn't get it" (Participant Delta).

Finding 7: Promotion System Equality

This theme indicates the fairness or equality of the Army's promotion system and how the participants perceive it. 8 participants believe that the promotion system is fair. 6

participants believe that the promotion system is not fair. The comments below support this theme.

"It's partially equitable. Females have to run faster than males and females of the opposite race" (Participant Beta).

"Promotion system is overall fair, where I see the disparity is in getting the jobs" (Participant Charlie).

"Sometimes the promotion boards send mixed messages; like taking away a KD job that once was a KD job, hindered my chances" (Participant Golf).

"No, it's not equal. It's still a lot of biases. Vast majority of leadership are white males. The Army Interactive Marketplace (AIM) operates on the good old boy system" (Participant Mike).

"You can't just sit back, and you know, let the system work, because it doesn't work" (Participant Delta).

"I have mixed feelings about the Army's promotion system…. I never know what they are looking for" (Participant Alpha).

"I was selected below the zone for promotion to major, came back on active duty and had to fight to get my right rank and updated pay" (Participant Foxtrot).

"The promotion system is fair depending on the situation" (Participant Lima).

"I'm confident to say that I trust our promotion system, the process and the procedure" (Participant Kilo).

Finding 8: Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT) Adaptation

This theme indicates the challenges, concerns, and comments surrounding the new Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT). The participants originally joined the Army years ago conducting the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), push-ups, sit-ups, and two-mile run. Participants voiced ideas of medical conditions, age, scoring, health issues, gender biases, and sustainability when referencing the new ACFT. The majority of the participants fall into the Millennials age category and a few falls into the Generation X category. Both categories have voiced how they feel and what they have experienced so far with the new Army Combat Fitness Test. The comments below support this theme.

"ACFT, once size does not fit all. I've never had to run 2 miles in combat" (Participant Echo).

"ACFT focuses on physical, emotional, and mental health, because it shows a more holistic fitness approach for those serving" (Participant Hotel).

"With my age, I'm kind of worried about it being 6 events. It will be a challenge for me, but I am training for it" (Participant India).

"We go out and we wanna do our best. The original standards set were discriminating because there were certain things a woman's body could not easily do" (Participant Hotel).

"ACFT is rigged for males to do better. Women have to work hard to meet the minimum standards" (Participant Golf).

"My success early on was because of my physical performance. I could run with the Infantrymen. As women, our physical activity levels are not the same as they were at 20, 30, 40 years old" (Participant Mike).

"The Army is going to lose a lot of stellar officers because they can't pass the ACFT" (Participant Echo).

Finding 9: Outdated Height and Weight Standards

This theme references the Army's Height and Weight Standards that have been implemented in the Army since 1960. The passing measurements and weight are based off of Caucasian male/female standard. Although the Army has changed what is being measured over the years, the body type being measured and weighed still shows standards of a Caucasian male/female. Participants in the study voice their perceptions and lived experiences in relation to the Army's outdated height and weight standards. The comments below support this theme.

"Height and weight standards are being re-looked…. all of our bodies are not the same. That's always been a factor for women of color." "We're just asking for a fair shake, so that when it comes time for height and weight, we're not having to starve ourselves a week to try to meet a thinner weight that does not encompass our body type" (Participant Hotel).

"I do feel that it may be discriminatory slightly against black females because our body postures are different" (Participant November).

"I'm not worried about passing the ACFT, I'm worried about the height and weight" (Participant Charlie).

"Every time I have to do height and weight, I get so stressed. I starve myself for days until I do it" (Participant India).

"Your weight does not determine what type of officer you are. Officers are killing themselves trying to accomplish a standard that I don't think we really understood why it exists" (Participant Echo).

Finding 10: Health Issues

This theme indicates a combination of experiences that participants had that either caused post-traumatic stress, grief, anxiety, depression, recovering from injuries or received mistreatment due to being sexually assaulted and actually reporting it. This theme also covers how participants perceive what they must be or what they must hide in order to remain competitive in the hunt for promotion to the next rank. The comments below support this theme.

"The same Subject had assaulted other females. He was considered to be the golden child. All victims, including me, were treated poorly back then" (Participant Echo).

"I always feel like I'm in a battle in the Army" (Participant Juliet).

"You're human! Like you don't always have to be the strong leader. Take time to grieve. I returned to work too soon" (Participant Hotel).

"I prayed a lot, talked to my family, and males to get their perspective. I was able to try to manage it" (Participant Beta).

"I was not able to get the professional help I needed in Korea, so I was referred to another doctor via telephone when everything happened with COVID. I was physically, mentally, and emotionally drained" (Participant Lima).

"I've been around the Army since 1996 and it's just not the Army that I grew up in. Do your work, and it will speak for you. We're not in that Army anymore" (Participant Delta).

The Army's promotion system, along with the officer evaluation reports that are fed to the promotion board can mean the difference of a female officer continuing to the next rank or not. Measures must be put in place to ensure the fairness of officer evaluation reports. Promising a "top block" to an officer, knowing that the officer did not earn it has proven to be detrimental to an officer's career that did earn the "top block" but was not given it based on several different reasons, one being "the good old boy system". Acts such as these and other factors such as the Army's outdated Height and Weight program and the new Army Combat Fitness Test, will provide challenges for female officers over the ages of 35 that continue to serve. Research shows that female Army officers were willing to work on their own weaknesses in order to remain competitive, but at what cost? Some have had dietary issues, mental health problems, traumatic experiences that canceled fostering relationships of trust with those in which they serve with. Female Army officers have encountered a lot in the process of striving to the field grade level. Many of them have asked themselves, if they could have done it over again and changed one thing, what would that one thing be? Below are some of the things female Army officers said they would do differently:

"I wish I had invested more time into my subordinates" (Participant Kilo).

"I would have not selected logistics if I could do it over again" (Participant Echo).

"I would've chosen to be a Warrant Officer, they're more specialized". (Participant Foxtrot)

"I would've changed my field to Army Nursing, I could've done something I loved" (Participant Delta).

"I should've spoken up more. I could've changed the outcome or had them see it differently by saying something" (Participant Alpha).

"I would've asked for help and/or seek out mentors" (Participant Lima).

"I wouldn't change anything about being in Korea. I met some amazing people and now have long life friendships" (Participant India).

"It was luck, timing, and family decisions that got me where I am. Korea was my first duty station with my family. I would not change a thing" (Participant Charlie).

"I wouldn't change anything if I did it again. Experience is the best teacher; it helps you gain different perspectives by leading others" (Participant Hotel).

"I should've done KD and took a break before going right into another KD. I didn't give myself time to decompress and the level of work increased" (Participant Beta).

"I wish I hadn't taken things personally, when maybe I shouldn't have; I would've looked for a mentor early on in my career" (Participant Mike).

"For black female officers, it's important to have a mixed network… so that you have people that can speak up for you when needed" (Participant Golf).

“I probably would've volunteered the second time, just so I could've stayed with my husband. Um, I almost put the military before my family on that” (Participant Juliet). “I could’ve come back to the states after the second year versus staying over in Korea and having a few family and personal challenges” (Participant November).

Summary

Chapter 4 reviewed the findings, implications, and recommendations associated with female Army officers at the rank of major, their views on the fairness of the Army’s promotion system, and other factors officers considered when competing for the next rank. The study included 14 participants that served in South Korea from 2017-2021. Chapter 4 also detailed common themes that demonstrated incidents of female officers who served in South Korea during high tension with North Korea, during a time of budget cuts, and during the outbreak of the COVID 19 Pandemic.

Themes were identified and expounded on with the use of actual quotes from participants. Initially 19 codes were identified and later categorized into eight themes. The eight themes were identified, and two more themes emerged during the data collection analysis. The data demonstrated trustworthiness. Participants were willing to share their most vulnerable and uncomfortable moments in their career that indeed got them to this point. Issues and concerns voiced during semi-structured interviews with the participants, if packaged and presented for transferability, could shed light on officer evaluations and overall management of talent in respect to the entirety of female officer’s careers.

Chapter 5 reiterates the purpose and nature of this study and why it was conducted. The author discusses other implications of the findings, and the need for future research. The impact on social change will allow leaders in every branch of service to recognize the perspectives of women in reference to the fairness of promotion systems, and their identities as leaders, mothers, and wives. Leaders at echelon will be made aware of an ongoing issue of women being underrepresented the higher they attempt to ascend across all branches of the military.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to understand how impediments such as traumatic experiences, the new Army Combat Fitness Test, height and weight, different types of discrimination, family and life stressors, and officer evaluations created a "glass ceiling" that continues to lead to significant underrepresentation of females in leadership ranks. The intent was to find out why women are significantly underrepresented at the lieutenant colonel rank in the Army. An oral history narrative was used to retell the stories of female officers that had experienced the Army's promotion process from major to lieutenant colonel, while serving in South Korea.

Key findings suggest that from 19 codes, 10 themes evolved from 14 participants' semi-structured interviews, which provided the evidence of the underrepresentation of women at the field grade ranks, and most importantly, the factors that caused female officers stress and anxiety as they competed for the next rank.

Interpretation of Findings

I determined that it was not known how the accounts and experiences of female officers, underrepresented in the United States Army, who were once stationed in South Korea, contributed to their advancement to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The specific problem is the underrepresentation of female majors in the Army that were previously stationed in South Korea from 2017-2021 who competed for promotion to the rank of lieutenant colonel (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2015). The qualitative narrative inquiry was used to understand the experiences of female officers in the United States Army that were once stationed in South Korea, who did not advance to the rank of

lieutenant colonel. I explored the lives of female officers and obstacles and factors that they encountered that led to them not being promoted or challenged them to make decisions that affected their career plans. Two theories were used to conduct this research. Factors that influence female officers' quality of life were accessed using Sen's capability theory to determine if those factors interfered with the advancement of the officer's careers (Harel-Shalev et al., 2017). Sociocultural theory was the conceptual framework used as the lens to explore how human actions related to the social context that humans were in, and to determine if growth stemmed from their environment (Scott, & Palincsar, 2013).

The use of qualitative narrative allowed me to be used as the primary instrument during the research. Narratives allowed the female Army officers the freedom to express how they truly felt about the Army's officer evaluation reports, opportunities for key development positions, and challenges in reference to the Army's promotion system. During the interviews, other challenges or factors were mentioned that also contributed to the underrepresentation of female Army officers at the field grade level. The narrative inquiry was used to allow the researcher to visualize themselves in the same space as the participants as they talked about their experiences. Meeting participants right where they were during the qualitative approach provided the researcher a rich encounter with firsthand experiences while using Sen's capability theory.

Often noted during participant interviews, though not the focus of the research, was cultural differences, which presented a gap that should be explored in future research. There were cultural differences with female officers and their male

subordinates, peers, and superiors, there were also cultural differences that female officers had with other female officers. This could also be another factor as to why female Army officers do not reach out to others in terms of help, advice, or company when deployed in places like South Korea.

The study's significance presented challenges as they relate to what female Army officers and females that serve in the Army face throughout their careers, regardless of duty station. South Korea is a rigorous and high operational tempo duty station. When tensions get high, so does the level of stress of those serving, whether they are serving at the tactical level, operational level, or strategic level. Female Army officers that served in South Korea, based on their positions, and whether they were in charge of other people/Soldiers, themselves, Korean nationals, a large mission set, their families, and the relationship with the United States and The Republic of South Korea. Female officers are expected to perform and perform well; there is no room for error, an emotional display of feelings, or indecisiveness. It was repeated throughout the research from several participants that as female officers, they must "do more and work harder" than their male counterparts. Research shows that actions consistent with the existence of a *glass ceiling* are still present in the 21st Century military (Crowley and Sandhoff, 2017). The results of this study increases the awareness of members of military promotion boards and the Senate, when considering women for promotion past the field grade ranks thus opening up more diversity across the Army's formations. The Army Regulation 600-8-29 for Officer Promotions was written in 1994 and last updated in 2005 (Department of Defense, 2005). Re-evaluating the current promotion process to reflect the 21st Century

population, enables the Army to be more effective as it strives to win its nation's wars. This will change the dynamics of Soldiers and junior officers as more female leaders obtain promotions and leadership positions at higher levels thus showing diversity among the ranks at echelon.

I explored the underrepresentation of female officers that served in South Korea through the lens of the participants. Sen's (1999) capability theory was used to capture the officer's lived experiences. Three research questions were used to further understand the factors that contributed to female officer's experiences as they competed at the rank of majors to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Sociocultural theory provided the conceptual framework used as the lens to explore how participants' actions related to the terms of how they were viewed as female officers and how their performance was conveyed with the usage of officer evaluation reports that fed into their promotion to the next rank. Sociocultural theory also provided context of the environment (South Korea and units served in) participants were in, and to determine if growth (promotion) stemmed from their environment (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). What are the experiences of female Army officers that served in South Korea who sought promotion from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel?

RQ1: How did female officers choose assignments that led to promotion to the next rank?

RQ2: How did female officers in the rank of major balance their motherhood and military obligations?

RQ3: How did female officers serving in the military handle what they perceived to be discrimination and or adversity in the military?

An interpretation of findings for this study will now be confirmed, disconfirmed or an extension to knowledge in the discipline by comparing what has been found in peer-reviewed literature from Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, the following themes emerged during the literature review: (a) family; (b) leadership; (c) mentorship; (d) physical capabilities of females; (e) roles of men and females; (f) promotion opportunities; and (g) females in combat. In Chapter 4, those same themes emerged into 19 codes that were narrowed down for a more direct understanding of what factors cause the underrepresentation of female officers at the field grade ranks. Female Army officers endured situations and conversations or the lack thereof that their male counterparts will never face. Female Army officers that continue to serve have paved the way for those that will follow in their footsteps. Whether they decided to continue to fight their way to the top or end their careers, female Army officers have provided a great service to the nation. What these women encountered and continue to encounter will no longer go unrecognized. They serve because they are the voices of reason, hope, and stability persisting throughout the field grade ranks.

Limitations of the Study

Creswell (2013) stated validating the results is important because it helps to determine the accuracy or credibility of the findings. Validation was achieved through semi structured interviews being recorded on Zoom audio only and Temi, transcribed, and with the use of reflective journals. During each step of the data collection process all

the way to the data analysis, I maintained a reflective journal to keep all thoughts clear and unbiased. As a female field grade officer, I ensured that I acknowledged and checked my own biases before each interview. Several times throughout the semi structured interviews, I reread what was annotated in my notes based on what the participants described. At times, I would ask for clarification of acronyms or duty positions that I was not familiar with. Participants also reviewed the transcribed interviews and summaries and ensured that my personal views were not included. In addition, to ensure trustworthiness, each participant verified and validated the accuracy of the data once transcribed.

Recommendations

This section includes recommendations for future research based on the results of the current research. This qualitative narrative inquiry provided insight on factors that cause female Army officers to continue to be underrepresented at the field grade officer ranks and identified factors that cause the Army's promotion system to be perceived as inequitable. The participants' stories and experiences expressed through narrative form provided rich responses shared through a sociocultural lens in consistency with how females serve and how they progress within the ranks. The findings are not relevant to not just female Army officers that served in South Korea, but all females that serve in the Army. Although the recommendations are broad, they can provide the understanding of female officer progression with the Army's current promotion system and also create a dialogue through awareness. Future recommendations are made in the following section.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on this study's findings, I suggest future research be conducted to educate policy makers, promotion board members, and senior raters within all branches of services on how their actions affect female officers' career progression, while feeding into the concept of the glass ceiling in today's military. The findings could provide a greater understanding of why female officers are significantly underrepresented at the field grade officer ranks in the Army and the factors that cause them to remain underrepresented. The recommendations below would also add to the body of knowledge regarding organizational leadership and how concepts of the glass ceiling and other unspoken stereotypes affect the career progression of female officers. The recommendation will also address the gaps in research around promotional opportunities that influence females serving and being retained in the Army (Henry, 2018), and research that collectively aligns all of the factors together that could potentially keep female officers from advancing in rank in the Army. Additional research recommendations are as follows:

1. In the future, this study could be replicated to include other branches of service to understand factors that cause underrepresentation of female officers in their formations.
2. This study could also be replicated using only female field grade officers that are dual military, with children, and factors that contribute to career progression.

3. This study could also be replicated using married female field grade officers versus single female field grade officers and the success rate of career progression to lieutenant colonel.
4. This study could be replicated using other high OPTEMO theaters of operation with the focus of promotion rates of female field grade officers from captain to major and major to lieutenant colonel.
5. This study could be replicated using female field grade officers that had mentors versus those that did not have mentors to see if there is a gap in the promotion rate from major to lieutenant colonel.
6. This study could be replicated using single parent female field grade officers that progress through the ranks and the factors that contribute to their success.
7. A future researcher could implement this study using a quantitative methodology. This allows for the participant sample size to be expanded and it can identify specific variables and seek correlation through numerical data.

Recommendations for Future Practice

This study adds to the field of leadership and organizational change by viewing existing cultures and behaviors within an organization that immediately impacts the promotion rate of female field grade officers in the Army. This study may benefit leaders in the Army who may not fully understand the impacts and behaviors caused to female Army officers that receive different treatment, whether spoken or unspoken than their male counterparts, when competing to the next rank. The findings of this study revealed participants found themselves experiencing gender and race biases, trauma and mental

health issues, anxiety due to height and weight stipulations, discrimination and unfairness with officer evaluation reports and the promotion system; all while having to compete against “the good old boys” system and being able to be mothers and wives to their families while continuing to serve.

Further, there needs to be a formal Army mentorship program for female officers in general. There continues to be a shortage of information that provides an understanding of the underrepresentation of female Army officers at the field grade officer rank of lieutenant colonel (Dahlstedt, 2017). The findings revealed the need for additional resources to support this population. The following recommendations provide an opportunity for future practice:

1. Development of a formal mentorship program that specifically engages and supports female Army officers from company grade (second lieutenant to captain) to field grade (major to colonel).
2. Develop or integrate this study’s findings during officer development schools or training as a way to inform leaders at the company, battalion, and brigade levels. This will provide leaders a greater understanding of signs, behaviors, and communication that impacts female officers and their decisions to remain in the Army as a careerist.
3. Provide a more flexible and affordable childcare system to support female Army officers in South Korea and abroad. Hours should be flexible specifically during major training exercises and remain open longer during normal duty days.

4. Develop an updated program that explains to senior raters how to effectively manage their profiles when assigning "top blocks" to officers during evaluation periods.

Implications

So many times, females in the Army at all ranks have either dealt with adversity or challenges that caused them to second guess themselves and their abilities. This study provides a lens for other military branches to look inside the perspectives of female officers, serving overseas in high OPTEMPO units. Actions, decisions, situations, and traumas described add truths to the persona of how female officers are treated by both male and female counterparts, subordinates, and superior officers. This study shows the importance of the Army's promotion system and the evaluations used to promote officers within that system. By understanding the root cause of why female officers are or are not promoted to the next rank could be contributed to the concept of the glass ceiling. For this study, Sen's capability theory was used to understand the lived experiences of the female officers and how they perceived specific incidents when things happened to them. As outlined in Chapter 4, at the end of each interview, female officers were asked what they would have done differently if they could change anything about their journey as female officers in the Army. The next paragraph highlights what was explained in Chapter 4 on how this study has the potential to impact positive social change at the following levels: (a) individual, (b) family, and (c) organizational.

Individuals

Self-awareness is the most positive impact towards social change. Self-awareness from the participants in this study, caused them to take a deeper look inside how their own actions contributed or the lack thereof to how they were being treated by subordinates, peers, and superiors. In a safe space, female Army officers reflected on what they could have done differently to advocate for themselves. Speaking up is not always easy. Yet some of them realized that if they had spoken up the first time, they felt discriminated against, harassed, or cheated on an evaluation report, the outcome may have been different. Some female Army officers found that years later, the male officer that had misjudged them came back to either apologize or ask for guidance on how to work more efficiently with female counterparts. Being self-aware enough to have the conversation with male leaders is the start to a path that could lead to success. Having the conversation can mean the difference of what an officer perceives to be something negative but could just be a misunderstanding and yet rectified once brought to the table with no fear of retaliation.

Family

Family is another positive impact towards social change. Female Army officers made decisions with their families in mind. Being able to care for their families with the chance to not be separated due to an actual deployment is what drew most families to South Korea. This built and maintained morale for female officers even when days seemed hard. Some days were longer than others due to different mission sets, but overall female officers were able to go home at night to their families. South Korea afforded the

chance for some families to live together for the first time in the officer's career. During high OPTEMPO operations, some officers realized that they had stayed too long in South Korea with their families and needed to go back to the states for more resources for their families. Younger female officers being able to see senior officers with families, at the field grade rank, shows them early on that they too can have families and serve efficiently.

Organizational

A change in the Army's organizational culture would have a significant positive impact on social change. Units in the Army that are male, or predominantly one race must be diversified to allow for a difference of ideas, talent, and to allow the organization to move forward. The Army recruits Soldiers from vastly different backgrounds. Leaders as well come from different backgrounds, but when united, the organization will thrive. Leaders at echelon in the Army, must set aside their own biases and step outside of themselves and embrace different cultures, genders, races, and religions alike. The tone of a unit follows the tone of its leader. Therefore, everyone should be treated fairly and as a member of the team. the actions of senior leaders echo throughout its formations. An understanding leader in a positive command climate, will impact social change in how female officers are viewed and treated under that command.

Theoretical Implications

The study data provides the experiences of 14 female Army officers that hold the rank of major that served in South Korea from 2017 to 2021; who experienced the Army's promotion system. The current study was guided by Sen's (1999) Capability

Theory and Vygotsky's (2019) Sociocultural theory. Both theories focused on the experiences of the participants and the effects those experiences had on decisions they made based on the environment in which they served. The concept of capability theory is to understand the lived experiences of an individual and how the environment that they were in affected the outcome of their experience. The concept of sociocultural theory is understanding that knowledge an individual develops is shaped through social interaction (Devi, 2019). Mead and Durkheim during the Enlightenment Era, often referred to as the 'Great Age of Reason' used social constructivism as an attempt to understand how people form worldviews and perceive reality. Based on Vygotsky, Mead, and Durkheim's views, the concept of social constructivism theory is rooted deep in the human experience (Lombardo & Kantola, 2021). This current study advanced both theories by understanding the specific actions, behaviors, and perceptions of the 14 participants.

The foundational factors associated with capability theory and sociocultural theory were observed in this study. There were several experiences and actions from subordinates, peers, raters, and senior raters that impacted female Army officers on their journey to compete for the next rank. Although some participants are waiting to compete again, all of the participants' experiences as they recalled during the study, prompted them to make decisions about their families, duty location, and futures in the Army. This knowledge is essential because it opens up the doors for the Army to begin to have the conversation about behaviors and cultures that are created and somehow maintained within organizations that question the talent, ability, and performance of women.

Practical Implications

Although there has been advancement in the military on inclusiveness, there is an issue with understanding the experiences of female officers that serve in either predominantly male units or in high OTEMPO duty stations and not receiving fair assessments according to their performance and thus not advancing at the same rate as males to the rank of lieutenant colonel. The researcher revealed two practical implications in this study. This was described by the participants and derived directly from the data. The first practical implication of this is to develop and implement formalized training for raters and senior raters to better understand how counterproductive behavior contributes to the underrepresentation of female Army officers at the field grade level. This training should be interactive to include role playing and after-action reviews informing leaders on what they did well and what they need to work on. Female Army officers need to be assured that the leaders they are working for, care about them as women, mothers, wives, and officers. Most participants still feel a lack of trust, anxiety, and repercussions from the age-old, “good old boys" system that still resides in some organizations. To the participants, it was implied that they had to work harder and be twice as good to compete with their male counterparts. Next, the Army should develop a female mentorship or networking program that allows female officers to reach out and connect with leaders who have been where they are trying to go and understand the path to get there. Having honest conversations with professional leaders can make a difference in how female Army officers view their experiences with the Army’s evaluation reports and promotion system.

Conclusions

This study is more than the issues of inequality due to rank, race, and gender. Women have had to almost reinvent themselves in order to successfully be promoted in the Army. The concept of "second shift" and working in a heterosexual male dominated profession, not only speaks to that of the glass ceiling, but it speaks to the level that female officers probably struggle with their identity of who they need to be as a mother, spouse, and officer. The study completed on the underrepresentation of female field grade officers in the United States Army that once served in South Korea at the rank of major represents female officers serving in the Army abroad. This study provided challenges based on recurring themes that female officers faced while trying to obtain the next field grade rank of lieutenant colonel. The literature review specified that male officers outnumber female officers within the field grade ranks. Sen's capability theory showed the lived experiences of female field grade officers that served in South Korea; deemed to be a high OPTEMPO environment. Sacrifices were made for their families, for their units, their Soldiers, and for themselves. Female field grade officers in the Army naturally want to do well in their careers. However, leadership at echelon are numb to the factors and challenges that female officers face in order to remain competitive, progress to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and to maintain their families. This study produces recommendations for leaders at echelon to obtain further training on how to effectively incorporate female field grade officers into predominantly male units, address their concerns, provide them key development opportunities the same as they would male officers, and evaluate them fairly in terms of giving them what they earned on their

officer evaluation reports. These factors aggressively impact the future or career progression of female field grade officers from the rank of major to the rank of lieutenant colonel. Changes in an officer's career path not only affects them, but it also affects their families.

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Appendix A: Narrative Inquiry Interview Protocol

A. I will introduce the interview, research topic using zoom audio recording only, obtain the participants consent verbally after covering the consent form, and then move right into the interview.

B. I will ask the participants if I can audio record, no videos in order to go back and revisit data captured during the interview. I will explain that the recording is for research use only and it will take at least 1-2 hours.

C. Try to paraphrase feedback from the participants as may be needed.

D. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth understanding.

E. I will wrap up the interview by thanking the participants and providing a quick recap of my notes during the interview.

Follow-up and Member Checking Interview

During the member checking interviews, I will:

- Introduce recap of interview while on zoom audio.
- Ask a probing question related to any information that I found during the interview and related to the research topic.
- Walkthrough each question, read the interpretation and ask: Did I miss anything? Or what would you like to add?
- Wrap up member checking by thanking the participant.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

***Do not discuss sensitive operational information, or information injurious to the Army or any individuals.**

Demographic Questions

1. What commissioning source did you use to join the Army?

2. What is your race, ethnicity, national origin or how do you identify?

3. How old were you when you were promoted to the rank of major?

4. What is the highest level of civilian education that you have obtained while serving in the Army?

5. Are you single/domestic partner/married/widowed?

6. Do you have children or provide full time care to another person?

7. Do you identify as a female?

8. What year(s) did you serve in South Korea?

Semi-Structured Questions

1. Prior to South Korea, were there any more deployments and what challenges were faced during that time? While stationed in South Korea, were you faced with similar challenges? RQ3

2. What were some of the deciding factors when you chose South Korea as a duty station and what year(s) did you serve there? RQ1

3. Did you have a person or professional mentor that aided you in your decision to go to South Korea? RQ1

4. What was your duty description in South Korea? Can you describe what a typical duty day looked like? Were any of these positions' key development jobs? RQ2/3

5. From your experience which positions could either help or hinder the chance to be promoted to lieutenant colonel? RQ1

6. Please take a moment to describe the requirements for being promoted from major to lieutenant colonel. What is your perception of the Army's promotion system? Is it equitable for female field grade officers? RQ1

7. How much input did you have on your Officer Evaluation Report (OER), and do you feel that your rater/senior rater accurately captured your true performance and potential on your OER? How often did your rater/senior rater discuss your performance and potential during the evaluation period? RQ1

8. Tell me about any instances where you experienced what you perceived to be discrimination as a female officer and was it from a superior, peer, or subordinate? RQ3

9. Tell me about any instances where you had to overcome adversity as a female officer while serving in South Korea and how often did instances like this occur? RQ3

10. If you have a spouse/family/significant other, what were the deciding factors to take/leave behind your family with you to South Korea? How did work and life balance factor into the decision? RQ2

11. Based on your experience as a female field grade officer serving in South Korea, reflecting, what you would have done differently in your career?