AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS AND HIGHER EDUCATION: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Nicholai Ivaschenko

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who decide to pursue a college degree. The study focused on the experiences of 10 current Air Force intelligence professionals who have completed an intelligence studies (or related) program and are currently serving in an intelligence operations group. The philosophical foundation used in this study was Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, and the secondary theoretical framework that was applied was the expectancy-value theory, which provides the underlying constructs and propositions for how Air Force intelligence professionals make sense of their careers. Lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals were collected through interviews, document analysis, and focus groups. Explication was centered on generating interviews, synthesizing situated narratives into general narratives, and generating general descriptions that produced thematic analysis appropriate to hermeneutic phenomenology. This study focused on the gap regarding the unknown lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals' pursuit of higher education. Through the collection of data, the themes that were identified from the collection of interviews were Convenience and Transferability, Marketability, and Outlier Data and Findings.

Keywords: Hermeneutic, phenomenology, intelligence professionals.

Copyright Page

Dedication

Above all, this dissertation is dedicated to God who has given me the tremendous strength and will power to persevere until the work was done. Knowing that I could do all things through Christ who strengthens me, I was able to complete this extraordinary milestone. I dedicate this dissertation to my family who have given me tremendous love and support. I thank my wife, Blia, for always encouraging me and being by my side every step of the way. My kids, Constantine and Ophelia, gave me the inspiration and motivation to never quit. Last but certainly not least, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Lyudmila, who is my role model and exemplary example of a person with great character and grit to carry on through any challenge.

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I would like to express my tremendous gratitude for Dr. Jeffrey Savage who has served as my dissertation chair. Dr. Savage spent countless hours providing mentorship that was above and beyond what I could have imagined. Without Dr. Savage's extensive and timely reviews and feedback, I would not have been able to complete this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Barry Dotson who served as the committee member for my dissertation. I was lucky to have Dr. Dotson as one of my first professors at Liberty University and Dr. Dotson encouraged my doctoral efforts from the beginning of my doctoral journey until the end.

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List of Abbreviations

Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC)

American Military University (AMU)

Career Field Education Training Plan (CFETP)

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

Global War on Terror (GWOT)

Just war theory (JWT)

National Intelligence University (NIU)

Structured Analytic Techniques (SAT)

Talent Management Framework (TMF)

University of Maryland (UMD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In current research regarding higher education and U.S. servicemembers, Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences involving higher education pursuits have not been represented. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative theoretical approach that enables a study to gather new understandings of an unknown subject (Heidegger, 2008). Before identifying research related to the identified gap, chapter one will establish the foundation for the study by discussing the historical, societal, and theoretical concepts that relate to Air Force intelligence professionals' educational expectations, which involves the intelligence studies discipline. Then, the problem and purpose statements, significance of the study, and research questions will be presented. By the end of this chapter, the primary contextual concepts that underpin the current study will be discussed.

Background

The background section provides a foundational introduction to the history, theoretical framework, personal impact, and general guide for the research conducted. It is important to note that the intelligence studies discipline will be presented as the higher education program of choice because Air Force intelligence professionals have various developmental guides that prescribe an intelligence studies (or related field) degree, and those guides will be discussed in chapter two. Historically, the field of intelligence studies has been under rapid development, the demand for an intelligence studies graduate is increasing, and the increase in demand will be discussed later in the study. As for the foundational philosophical framework, I will apply Heidegger's hermeneutic theory of phenomenology to my study because the theory focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and results in a complete understanding of the combined

experiences (Heidegger, 2008). A thorough discussion on Heidegger's hermeneutic theory will be explored in the literature review. For the start of this study and an important aspect of Heidegger's approach to a phenomenological study is to identify assumptions or biases that may influence a study (Peoples, 2021). The supportive content-based theoretical framework will be the expectancy-value based theory which will help guide the study in predicting and explaining the Air Force intelligence professionals' task choices, learning persistence, and academic performance (Galla et al., 2018; Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). In addition, my personal connection to the study will be discussed and my assumptions will be identified.

Historical Context

As a discipline, the field of intelligence studies does not have a considerable history as philosophy, math, or the sciences. Instead, the intelligence studies field has received recent attention and growth due to the modern nature of global threats and international security (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). For the U.S., the shock and devastation of 9/11 were horrifying and raised questions about how we could have improved our intelligence or situational awareness. Michael and Kornbluth (2019) would argue that the Global War on Terror since 9/11 has academized intelligence, and Canada, U.K., and the U.S. are leading the effort. Topics that can be taught in intelligence studies include counterintelligence, cyber terrorism, espionage, misinformation, propaganda, etc. Some of the intent is to study adversaries' motives, strategy, technique, and capabilities. With the threat of global terrorism and growing interest in intelligence studies, researchers have studied the curriculum and use of intelligence studies programs.

Social Context

Given that 20 years have passed since the attacks of 9/11, the social environment

surrounding intelligence studies' educational development has centered on the inquiry of applicability and effectiveness of intelligence studies in higher education. One of the most prominent topics discussed across the intelligence studies discipline focuses on American intelligence education and the curriculum's history. Coulhart and Crosston (2015) wrote the first known article on degree-granting programs in intelligence studies and found that 26 different intelligence studies degrees can were available through the last two decades. Given the growth in degree-granting programs, there has been an increase in research to investigate the quality of the programs and type of institutions that offer them. Generally, when it comes to Air Force intelligence professionals, American Military University (AMU) and National Intelligence University (NIU) are the two dominant institutions pursued.

There are several reasons why Air Force intelligence professionals choose AMU and NIU over other institutions. First, AMU provides intelligence studies programs fully online at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral level. In addition, James P. Etter founded AMU in 1991 and envisioned that AMU would provide career-relevant distance education for military learners with unique needs (American Public University System, 2020). Etter's vision remains a priority for AMU, and military members continue to seek the desired flexible online format. One of the core social driving forces for pursuing a degree at AMU is reputation. Campbell (2011) studied the U.S. market for intelligence education and found that 85 percent of AMU's students are military personnel. Reputation comes from the social attributions of peer recommendations, recruitment at military bases, and networking. Therefore, AMU has been an established source for Air Force intelligence professionals and is geared towards military career advancement.

NIU provides a different social perspective to the intelligence studies higher education market. While AMU attracts a reputation for military members, NIU attracts civilian and military

intelligence professionals who wish to secure intelligence prestige. The difference between securing intelligence prestige and reputation means that the students want to display academic excellence and credibility. NIU's student population represents most of the intelligence community and provides an environment of a substantial number of experienced experts in the field. Campbell (2011) characterized NIU as a front office for the full spectrum of education and training programs that are standardized across many organizations. One of the most significant social, academic advantages for NIU graduates is carrying the name of a highly credible institution that is recognized by the intelligence community. A benefit of pursuing education at NIU is to have a strong résumé for a military or civilian career.

Providing the social context for AMU and NIU has offered insight into the students' desire for reputation and credibility. As part of studying air force intelligence professionals' educational pursuits, it is important to be familiar with AMU and NIU. Later in the study, the discussion on the air force intelligence professionals' interviews will describe their intentions for completing higher education in intelligence studies and the perceived effects of benefits for completing a higher education program in intelligence studies alongside their career. Along with the social contextual data provided, it is necessary to note an expected 31% job growth for positions in the intelligence field from 2019 to 2029 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Given the future high demand for intelligence professionals, connecting the social aspirations of educational attainment with job security are central to the current study. Wolfberg (2016) stresses that the widely recognized purpose for intelligence is to ensure that uncertainty is reduced for decision-makers. If the nation's senior leaders acknowledge the significant regular threats against the country, the top decision-makers will require great assistance from intelligence agencies.

Theoretical Context

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the primary theoretical framework for my study. Van Manen (2014) concludes that hermeneutic phenomenology is the reflection on the basic structures of the lived experiences of human existence. In general, all methods of phenomenology are focused on lived experiences of a shared phenomenon. The difference is hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on interpretation and description of the phenomenon to make it intelligible (Van Manen, 2014). The current study will apply hermeneutic phenomenology to inquire about the lived experiences of current active-duty Air Force intelligence professionals who have completed an intelligence studies (or related field) program. The 10 intelligence professionals interviewed for my study will focus on describing their experiences after graduating an intelligence studies degree. In chapter four, the collected data will be interpreted to explain the shared experiences.

Several key theories have been formed within the intelligence studies discipline beyond the context of intelligence studies' applicability to the job market and higher education. A common foundational theory in intelligence studies is the just war theory (JWT). Within the scope of the military and intelligence, JWT includes two categories which are jus ad bellum (justice in resort to war) or jus in bello (justice in the conduct of war), and intelligence plays a central role for both categories (Calcutt, 2011). The JWT predates the 21st century but is still applicable to the current Global War on Terror (GWOT). Within the field of intelligence studies, students regularly examine the JWT to familiarize themselves with the topic of ethics and war.

Apart from the theoretical approach to how intelligence is conducted in wartime, another critical theory studied in intelligence studies is the Clausewitzian theory of intelligence (TOI). An important reason to study the Clausewitzian TOI is that the theory focuses on reducing,

managing, and using uncertainty, core ideas for the intelligence discipline (Lillbacka, 2019). Not only does the Clausewitzian Theory of Intelligence offer foundational guidance, but the theory is one of a handful of theories that are being developed for the military intelligence field. Even so, JWT has been the prominent theoretical framework for intelligence studies. However, Diderichsen and Ronn (2017) argue that the JWT is no longer a substantial theory and must be replaced. While the JWT is essential to understanding the ethical principles of warfare, Air Force intelligence professionals need a focused theory that observes warfare from the lens of intelligence analysis and application (Gill & Phythian, 2018).

Situation to Self

The assumptions important to my study include the axiological, ontological, and epistemological assumptions. I have completed a master's degree in intelligence studies from American Military University. My general assumption is that Air Force intelligence professionals pursue higher education because they would like to advance in their careers or secure strong credentials for post-military job security. I assume because I value higher education as a significant achievement and requirement for key roles in the intelligence workforce. During my study, using an axiological assumption will allow me to discuss values that shape the narrative by including my own interpretations along with the participants' interpretations (Creswell, 2018).

While each participant is interviewed, the goal is to gather a collective of the lived experiences of each Air Force intelligence professional that chose to complete an intelligence studies program. As themes develop in the findings of the research, my use of the ontological assumption will result in a reflection of the different identified perspectives (Creswell, 2018). It is important to present each perspective because each interviewee will describe a different reality

and interpret their experience with higher education. To collect critical information, I will spend time with the participants and use the epistemological assumption to organize quotes of their experience and present the quotes as evidence (Creswell, 2018).

Since I will be inquiring about the world an Air Force intelligence professional lives in and why they pursue higher education to supplement their intelligence career, the chosen paradigm for my study is social constructivism. As the social constructivist researcher, I am researching to understand the meanings and experiences that other Air Force intelligence professionals have and learn about their chosen education programs and experiences (Creswell, 2018). Through my study, I am trying to gain lessons learned that can be applied to my career and expertise in advising on intelligence studies (or related field) programs.

Motivation to conduct my study originated from my personal experiences as an Air Force intelligence officer. Higher education programs are encouraged for Air Force professionals across all career fields. Within the intelligence career field, two of the most common universities that others recommended I attend were American Military University (AMU) and National Intelligence University (NIU). While speaking with Air Force intelligence professional peers, I was told different reasons for pursuing an intelligence studies program: career development, personal fulfillment, career advancement, or strengthening a résumé for intelligence careers after the military. In my case, I pursued my master's program in intelligence studies at AMU because of personal fulfillment and career advancement.

During my first year in the Air Force, I had the chance to serve as a faculty member and recruiter for Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) admissions at the University of Maryland (UMD). Serving as a recruiter and part of the university staff was critical to developing my interest in higher education administration. My passion has become centered on

advising, mentoring, and developing Air Force intelligence professionals in their careers and higher education. Not only am I an Air Force intelligence professional, but I am also an Air Force officer entrusted to serve and assist the airmen that I lead. My study's primary motivation is to understand why Air Force intelligence professionals pursue intelligence studies programs and how graduating from the programs has impacted their careers. Ideally, the knowledge acquired from my study can better prepare me to advise intelligence professionals on their educational development effectively.

Problem Statement

The problem is that the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals' pursuit for higher education is unknown. There is an identifiable gap in literature through exploring current research on adult education programs in intelligence studies and Air Force intelligence professionals' career development. Reviewing the most current literature from intelligence studies related journals, I found no study to address intelligence programs and Air Force intelligence professionals' careers (Rietjens, 2020). There is substantial research for intelligence studies programs and military intelligence career development as separate topics. However, current research does not discuss an Air Force intelligence professional's lived experiences that connect their education to their career. For example, 30 out of 211 papers studied intelligence programs, and 17 centered on career development (Rietjens, 2020). By reflecting on the cumulative data, research highlights that a quarter of all intelligence studies publications have been written about intelligence studies programs and career development as the focus area. There have been 211 published papers related to the field of intelligence. However, not one published work focused on studying the perceived effects of completing an intelligence studies program while continuing in an Air Force intelligence professionals' career (Rietjens, 2020). Recognizing

the problem gives precedence for pursuing information about the lived experiences that Air Force intelligence professionals have encountered with higher educational development.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of a sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals from the XYZ operations group who chose to complete an intelligence studies program while actively serving in the Air Force intelligence profession. At this stage of my research, it is known that the lived experiences of graduating from an intelligence studies program may include career progression, fulfilling career requirements, personal achievement, and enhancing job knowledge. To determine a more exact answer, the theory guiding my study will be hermeneutic phenomenology, which is the method of reflection that structures the lived experiences of human existence. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires interpretation and description of lived experiences to make the phenomenon intelligible (Van Manen, 2014). To support the philosophical foundational framework of hermeneutic phenomenology, the expectancy-value theory will guide the study in predicting and explaining the Air Force intelligence professionals' task choices, learning persistence, and academic performance (Galla et al., 2018; Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Significance of the Study

To research intelligence studies education and the Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences, the theory of hermeneutic phenomenology was applied to explore perspectives of current intelligence studies programs concerning Air Force intelligence professionals' careers. Current research on intelligence studies education focuses on intelligence studies curriculum, institutional standards, accreditation, and different types of programs available. Within the literature review in chapter two, the intelligence studies' main topics will be provided in-depth.

Later in the study, the lived experience indicators of the participants may include career development, personal accomplishment, job applicability, and career advancement. Learning the lived experience indicators will help fill the gap in understanding how the current programs in intelligence studies support Air Force intelligence professionals.

Current research explores various intelligence studies programs but does not identify the connection between intelligence studies education and Air Force intelligence professionals' careers. Campbell (2011) surveyed all U.S. institutions that offer intelligence studies programs and evaluated the demand for a degree in intelligence education. Through Campbell's research, he found that there continues to be a rise in demand for intelligence studies graduates. While the demand is rising, the current study will help evaluate the return on investment for graduating an intelligence studies program. A key example and indicator of a successful program is waging the student's preparation for multiple intelligence agencies (Imler, 2018). Explaining the lived experiences of the Air Force intelligence professionals who graduated from an intelligence studies program offers insight into programs' quality of education and level of preparedness.

Institutions that offer intelligence studies degrees can use the results from this study to improve their fields and programs of study while also improving the student experience. Air Force intelligence professional will discuss their lived experiences after graduating from an intelligence studies program and reveal the educational benefits that have influenced their careers. Looking forward, intelligence professionals can project a 31% job growth between 2019 to 2029 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Therefore, intelligence professionals and intelligence organizations continue to encourage interest in intelligence studies education. Research assures that U.S. intelligence agencies are growing interested in hiring those with an intelligence studies education (Michael & Kornbluth, 2019; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,

2020). Institutions have an opportunity to evaluate their intelligence studies programs and help intelligence agencies and intelligence professionals bridge the gap between student's interests and career readiness.

Research Questions

To focus the scope of exploration into the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals' completion of intelligence studies programs while continuing their Air Force intelligence careers, three significant research questions should be answered. Each research question stems from hermeneutic phenomenology and the expectancy-value theory and will inquire what Air Force intelligence professionals have experienced from a post-secondary education perspective. Research questions one and three are phenomenologically based and research question three focuses on expectancy-value.

RQ1: How do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their experience of selecting a higher education degree that focuses on intelligence studies? The first research question focuses on studying the aspirations that Air Force intelligence professionals have when pursuing an intelligence studies program. Immediately after the devastation of 9/11, many sought an intelligence studies education to learn and increase their knowledge about national security (Spracher, 2017). Since 9/11, the goals of individuals to pursue an intelligence career may have changed. Researching incentives and factors of return on investment related to an intelligence studies degree will provide a perspective for why Air Force intelligence professionals pursue the intelligence studies degree. The Director of National Intelligence has directed the National Intelligence University to develop a dramatic increase in both the number and quality of civilian intelligence studies education and training programs for intelligence professionals (Kreuzer, 2016). From the highest office of the U.S. intelligence community, education for intelligence

professionals is being advertised and encouraged. Air Force intelligence professionals understand that major consumers of intelligence education include intelligence organizations, the span of the military, civilian national security, law enforcement, homeland security, and business communities (Campbell, 2011).

RQ2: Given the ideal career progression scenario, how do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their career experience before and after their graduation of an intelligence studies program? Core to the study, the second question is trying to determine why Air Force intelligence professionals consider intelligence studies education a positive indicator for successful career progression. Reasons to pursue intelligence studies education may vary. Enlisted Air Force intelligence professionals will look to The Career Field Education and Training Plan that advises the enlisted Air Force professionals to graduate with an associates level degree at a minimum to ensure career progression beyond the rank of Master Sergeant (Official United States Air Force Website, 2020). On the other hand, The Talent Management Framework (TMF) is a guide for officer Air Force intelligence professionals, and the TMF directs officers to receive a master's degree to advance to the rank of Colonel (Jamieson & Sovada, 2019). Air Force intelligence professionals who wish to advance to the highest ranks of the military must understand core competencies outlined for the entire U.S. intelligence community. Core competencies that guide the community include engagement and collaboration, critical thinking, personal leadership and integrity, accountability for results, technical expertise, and communication (Coulthart and Crosston, 2015)

RQ3: In terms of increased job knowledge, how do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their learning experience after graduating from an intelligence studies program? The third research question is essential because it focuses on the potential benefit that intelligence

studies programs may have for advancing an Air Force intelligence professional's job knowledge. Intelligence studies education can include procedural knowledge that supports on-the-job competencies (Coulthart and Crosston, 2015). Well-known leader and intelligence studies scholar Mark Lowenthal (2017) recommends that intelligence studies courses should offer a valuable education that incorporates professional training. Spracher (2017) suggests five critical intelligence areas: Weapons of Mass Destruction, Information Operations and Cyber Intelligence, Emerging and Disruptive Technologies, Geostrategic Resources and the Environment, and Denial and Deception. In general, applying the three research questions will narrow the study and focus on perceived effects that can be observed for the Air Force intelligence professionals that complete intelligence studies programs.

Definitions

1. *Hermeneutic Phenomenology* = A study that is intended to make sense of the phenomenon in question and requires the interpretation and description of lived experiences to make the phenomenon intelligible (Van Manen, 2014).
2. *Intelligence* = The ability to learn from experience and to adapt to, shape, and select environments (Sternberg, 2012).
3. *Intelligence Cycle* = The process of identifying requirements, collection, processing and exploitation, analysis, assessment, production, and then dissemination to the rest of the intelligence community (Marrin, 2018).
4. *Intelligence Studies* = An academic discipline that complements the practice of national security intelligence (Marrin, 2016).

5. *Just war theory* = Distinguishes conditions for conducting intelligence by all intelligence agencies and used in intelligence studies curriculum as the ethical framework to inform students and professionals (Marrin, 2018; Omand & Phythian, 2013).

Summary

Currently, a gap exists in understanding Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences with intelligence studies (or related field) programs. This chapter presented the historical, societal, and theoretical contexts behind intelligence studies. Moreover, chapter one included my related experiences and provided my personal perspectives and assumptions. Anyone who has gone or will go through an intelligence studies program can relate to and negotiate meaning with their experiences based on the research uncovered in this study. In framing the current study, four research questions will guide the present inquiry, helping to capture the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who decided to pursue intelligence studies programs while actively serving in the Air Force intelligence profession. This chapter also highlighted the significance of studying Air Force intelligence professionals' higher education lived experiences through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology. Finally, this chapter described why such a study is crucial for U.S. intelligence employers and intelligence studies programs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review will provide a theoretical understanding of the theory of phenomenology in the context of Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences in relation to the pursuit of higher education. This body of knowledge, while helpful to qualitative researchers studying phenomenology, highlights the literature gap that exists concerning Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences within the sphere of higher education. Specifically, the literature review will address a critical research gap because there is no current publication inquiring about the Air Force intelligence professionals' educational development (Rietjens, 2020). The theory framing this inquiry is Heidegger's theory of phenomenology and is centered on the process of understanding how individuals think by reflecting on participants' lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). This literature review demonstrates how the theory of phenomenology can be applied to understanding Air Force intelligence professionals' experiences in their pursuit of higher education while serving in the Air Force (Peoples, 2021). Before discussing all relevant and related literature, this chapter will first focus on discussing the philosophical foundational framework, Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology, and provide context for how the theory will be applied to my study (Peoples, 2021). Next, I will discuss the supportive content-based theoretical framework, expectancy-value based theory, which will guide the study in predicting and explaining the Air Force intelligence professionals' task choices, learning persistence, and academic performance (Galla et al., 2018; Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). After the theories are discussed, the rest of the chapter will present literature related to intelligence studies education, proposed intelligence studies theories, Air Force enlisted and officer intelligence professionals' development, and support services for Air

Force intelligence professionals' educational aspirations. By the end of chapter two, core attributes of Heidegger's theory of phenomenology and related literature will be provided.

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology is the primary qualitative theory to be applied for my study. In general, the phenomenological theoretical framework observes that the essence of something is described in terms of the individual's lived experience and the lived experiences' present consciousness as an object of reflection (Peoples, 2021). Individuals' lived experiences of pursuing higher education may include a myriad of reasons. Air Force intelligence professionals have different experiences concerning their pursuit of higher education. The structure of the qualitative phenomenological theory guides the current study to inquire about Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences and reasons to complete an intelligence studies education (or related field) program (Peoples, 2021).

There are two main philosophical variations of phenomenology: Husserl and Heidegger and both have distinct perspectives on applying the theory of phenomenology (Peoples, 2021). Since Husserl is considered the father of phenomenology, the background to Husserl's approach and philosophy will be discussed, but it is important to note that I have chosen to apply Heidegger's phenomenological philosophy instead of Husserl's approach (Peoples, 2021). Discussing Husserl is important for foundational insight into the theory of phenomenology. However, the current study will focus will on Heidegger as the main theorist, and Heidegger's theoretical application is the only framework that will be applied to understanding Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences (Peoples, 2021). Additionally, the expectancy-value theory will support this study in guiding the study to predict and explain the Air Force

intelligence professionals' task choices, learning persistence, and academic performance (Galla et al., 2018; Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

Background

The founder and primary theorist for phenomenology is Edmund Husserl (Peoples, 2021). Husserl's philosophy on the theory of phenomenology was that nothing should be taken for granted or assumed when attempting to understand the phenomenon in question (Peoples, 2021). There are six core terms incorporated in Husserl's approach to a phenomenological study. First, intentionality is a term and the principal theme of phenomenology that refers to the fundamental property of consciousness when one is aware of the phenomenon. Second, reduction is the intentional consciousness process of using the bracketing concept. Third, the bracketing concept is the active decision to suspend judgments and focus on the analysis of an experience. Fourth, noesis is the process of thinking about or interpreting the phenomenon. Fifth, noema describes the thoughts regarding the phenomenon. Lastly, horizon is the present experience that cannot be bracketed because nothing in the present can be seen in its entirety (Peoples, 2021).

Husserl's core concepts are foundational to the theory of phenomenological research. For a phenomenological qualitative study, Husserl believed that it is fundamental to have intentionality to minimize subjective thought and welcome the objective existence of something as we know it (Peoples, 2021). Husserl insisted that the more people come to understand their own thinking process, the more they will understand the world and phenomena around them (Peoples, 2021). For example, a researcher or observer can position themselves in an objective posture like a stranger in an area they have never been (Peoples, 2021). When researchers remove themselves, they remove their biases and inputs and objectively observe the phenomenon

(Peoples, 2021). A step beyond the objectivity position is to apply the bracketing process, which would require the researcher to suspend all other understanding and frameworks (Peoples, 2021).

Heidegger's Theory of Phenomenology

While Husserl is the father of phenomenological research, Heidegger decided to take a different route and has a distinct philosophy favorable for the present study (Peoples, 2021). Heidegger decided to branch off from Husserl to create hermeneutic phenomenology, which stems from the belief that people could not bracket their lived experiences because we live in a world that includes others' circumstances of existence (Peoples, 2021). Unlike Husserl's method of bracketing, Heidegger suggested that there is no way to separate ourselves from the state of the world, and Heidegger referred to this idea as Dasein (Peoples, 2021). *Dasein* is Heidegger's term that refers to the idea of being somewhere and not being removed from surroundings (Peoples, 2021). Other important framework terms to identify are fore-sight and fore-conception. Fore-sight and fore-conception refer to our preconceived knowledge about a phenomenon, and the preconceived knowledge can result in assumptions or biases (Peoples, 2021). As someone encounters a different experience, they modify their understanding and interpretation by looking through the lens of one's own biases and understandings (Peoples, 2021). In consequence, one will not suspend biases or assumptions under Heidegger's framework. Instead, it is essential that one continuously changes their lens and develops a thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

Heidegger described that phenomenological research aims to search for already known knowledge to reach a basis in the matter from which the justifiability of all-knowing and cultural being can become genuine (Heidegger and Dahlstrom, 2005). To get to the genuine explanation of a phenomenon, Heidegger recommends that analysis should not be linear but, in fact, spiral

because circular analysis requires that interpretation be revisited and explored (Peoples, 2021). For hermeneutic phenomenology, constant revision of the phenomenon's meaning is central to the hermeneutic process (Peoples, 2021). Constant revision of the phenomenon's meaning is critical because a phenomenon is not clearly self-evident or publicly understood (Heidegger, 2008). As the understanding of a phenomenon is revisited, the meaning develops with each discovery (Heidegger, 2008).

While Heidegger's dismissal of Husserl's bracketing was questioned, Heidegger proposed the hermeneutic circle as a revisionary process to understand the essence of a phenomenon by recognizing and revising discovered information (Peoples, 2021). An important characteristic of this hermeneutic phenomenological dissertation is to reveal my relevant assumptions and biases (Peoples, 2021). Hermeneutic phenomenology requires the understanding that assumptions and biases cannot be bracketed (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, I must describe related assumptions and biases about the current study. I have one assumption to reveal. As an Air Force officer who has graduated from a master's intelligence studies program, I hold the assumption that enlisted and officer intelligence professionals pursue higher education for career advancement or post-military job security. I do not have other assumptions or biases for my study. Now that Heidegger's phenomenological framework and guiding principles have situated the present study, the secondary theoretical frameworks will provide a content-based frame for the current scholarship. Following a discussion on the secondary theoretical frameworks, the related literature of intelligence professionals' education and career development will be explored.

Secondary Theoretical Framework

To support the study's main objective of understanding the Air Force intelligence

professionals' motivation and desire to pursue intelligence studies (or related field) programs, the expectancy-value theory will be applied. I chose the expectancy-value theory because it is a major approach to study academic motivation. The theoretical framework helps guide a study to predict and explain students' task choices, learning persistence, and academic performance (Galla et al., 2018; Loh, 2019; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). While the Air Force enlisted and officer intelligence professionals' educational experiences remain a research gap, the expectancy-value theory will support my inquiry on intelligence professionals' motivation to pursue a higher education degree in intelligence studies.

Expectancy-value Theory

Within the expectancy-value theory (EVT), four main concepts help categorize individuals' different values with academic pursuits. The four concepts include attainment or achievement value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Loh, 2019; Wigfield, 1994). First, Loh (2019) concludes that attainment or achievement value positively correlates with performance goals. When it comes to students accomplishing their performance goals, academic self-efficacy plays a significant role (Eccles and Wigfield, 2020; Komarraju and Nadler, 2013; Wan, 2019; Zee and Koomen, 2016). Specifically, students who maintain high effort regulation and persist in difficult courses are likely to be more motivated than students who do not take more challenging courses (Dever, 2016; Doménech-Betoret, Abellán-Roselló, & Gómez-Artiga, 2017; Komarraju and Nadler, 2013). Next, intrinsic value measures one's subjective interest in the academic area (Loh, 2019). Using a holistic psychological approach to assess educational values, Bhardwaj recommends that education makes better prepared, more well-rounded citizens, increases confidence, ensures a bright future, and builds character (Bhardwaj, 2016).

In addition to intrinsic values, Loh (2019) adds that utility values are the students' current and future goals. Maintaining goals as a student is critical to their success. To ensure positive momentum towards educational attainment, goal setting is recommended as the key process of establishing goals that produce results by making them specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-sensitive (Conley, 2012; Dobronyi et al., 2019; Dotson, 2016; Meyer et al., 2019; Putwain et al., 2019). To expect value in return, students must detail and prepare specific and measurable goals to stay on course and achieve educational milestones (Dobronyi et al., 2019).

The final core concept for expectancy-value theory is cost (Loh, 2019). Perhaps one of the most debated topics is the cost of education and the overall return on investment. Research has shown that students, on average, will earn 19% more in initial annual earnings after graduating college (Walcott et al., 2018; Wu & Fan, 2016). In another study, additional analysis on post-college earnings found that the average annual income of individuals with a bachelor's degree earned $50,000 or more versus high school graduates who earned over $30,000 or more (Flake et al., 2015; Kim & Tamborini, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (2021) calculated that the average annual cost for a public institution is $18,383 and the average annual cost for a private nonprofit institution is $47,419. Therefore, the average 4-year degree could cost between 73,532 to 189,676 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). So, if the annual return on investment for a college graduate is $20,000, the average college graduate would pay off the cost of education in 3.5 to 9.5 years. Depending on the occupation, graduates can see a quicker and more substantial return on investment from a college degree.

Now that the primary theory of phenomenology and the supporting theory of expectancy-value have been discussed, the next section will review the literature related to intelligence studies education and the educational development of Air Force officer and enlisted intelligence

professionals. The literature will focus on key educational topics that are centered in intelligence studies education programs. Air Force officer and enlisted intelligence professionals observed in this study will be participants who have pursued an intelligence studies (or related) program. Additionally, literature is presented that relates to intelligence professionals' educational and career goals and requirements. By the end of the chapter, the collective literature will capture Air Force intelligence professionals' academic and career expectations.

Related Literature

The collection of literature relates to intelligence studies education, proposed intelligence studies theories, Air Force enlisted and officer intelligence professionals' development, and support services for Air Force intelligence professionals' educational aspirations. Beyond Heidegger's hermeneutic theory of phenomenology, there are several sources to discuss that relate to my study's focus on the phenomenon of why Air Force intelligence professionals pursue higher education. Primary topics for the related literature include intelligence studies curriculum, development of an intelligence theory, intelligence career practices, key objectives for intelligence studies education, Air Force career and educational development, and support services for military students. Given my assumption that Air Force intelligence professionals seek higher education degrees for career advancement and post-military job security, I will discuss the field of intelligence studies as the primary higher education discipline. Intelligence studies (and related fields) education stems from the core theoretical concept of the Just War Theory (JWT), which serves as baseline knowledge required of all intelligence professionals (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015; Gendron, 2007).

Just War Theory in Intelligence Studies

Grounded in military doctrine, policy, and strategy, is the just war theory (JWT), and

JWT serves as a foundational component to intelligence studies curriculum (Marrin, 2017; Omand & Phythian, 2013). Leaders at the highest echelons of the military regularly face critical strategic decisions. From the newly trained enlisted operator to the most experienced general, many decisive actions will involve key intelligence information. Before providing a suggestion or determining the most effective military intelligence decision, understanding JWT is foundational (Gendron, 2007). Generally, JWT is centered on the process of evaluating morality and ethics through eight principles: a punitive competition of war, assessment of the evil of war against the moral attitudes and desires, a search for authorization for violence, spiritual goods, inner attitudes, passive attitude to social change, biblical explanation for participation in war, and the concept of peace (Langan, 1984). Combining the eight principles can serve as a checklist for deliberating the need for war, prosecution of war plans, and assessing ethics and morality. While the JWT provides a framework for Air Force intelligence professionals, current research has tested the moral guide of the JWT.

Within the past five years, the JWT has been questioned, and alternative viewpoints have been provided. Diderichsen and Ronn (2017) claim that the former argument of self-defense justifying all intelligence activities is inadequate. Self-defense has been a frequent factor used to justify war behind the JWT. Diderichsen and Ronn (2017) argue against the long withstanding JWT not to replace the theory but to reassess the applicability of moral codes to intelligence activities. Clarifying the ethical standards is essential for the intelligence studies curriculum (Gendron, 2007; Omand & Phythian, 2013). Students are taught the proper and justifiable reasons to engage in warfare and how to engage in warfare. One of the most referenced military leaders, Carl von Clausewitz, provides the nineteenth-century perspective that theory conflicts with practice (Davies & Gustafson, 2019). Theory can conflict with practice when the

framework of theory is misapplied. In response to the questioned JWT, definitive criteria and acceptable standards must be identified.

Determining a justifiable cause for war and the cause to continue in war are essential to JWT (Langan, 1984). Gendron (2007) argues that JWT doctrine is the legal, constitutional authority, and moral framework that justifies war through moral criteria: political sovereignty and territorial integrity. While Air Force intelligence professionals may not actively realize that JWT guides conducting intelligence operations, national security and war strategies' guidance are familiar to the intelligence community. Security and war strategies are doctrinal and procedural documentation that reflect the JWT principles (Omand & Phythian, 2013). Insisting on the study of JWT will prepare intelligence studies scholars for various curriculum.

From a modern perspective, the war on terrorism has been central to U.S. conflicts. Using the JWT, Gendron (2007) recommends that the intelligence activities executed by various U.S. intelligence agencies are justified through the moral obligation to protect one country's citizens. While a country may be justified in protecting its citizens, not all actions are acceptable. Intelligence studies curriculum begins with the ethical JWT framework and then proceeds to inform students and professionals on the intelligence cycle process (Marrin, 2018). Learning about the intelligence cycle is key to understanding how to complete intelligence activities ethically and efficiently (Marrin, 2018). Every Air Force intelligence professional will understand and practice the intelligence cycle. The intelligence cycle guides the process of informational requirements, collection, processing, and exploitation, analysis, assessment, production, and then dissemination to the rest of the intelligence community (Marrin, 2018). At each stage of the cycle, ethics are evaluated so that the U.S. does not engage in illegal, immoral, or unacceptable behavior. In addition to the intelligence cycle, intelligence studies programs will

instruct the primary disciplines that categorize all forms of intelligence activity (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015; Marrin, 2018). The core courses will follow five main disciplines: geographic, human, measurement and signatures, open source, and signals intelligence (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). Geographic intelligence focuses on analyzing and evaluating geographical information that may be used for a strategic ground and naval forces advantage. Human intelligence pertains to acquiring information from human interaction. Measurement and signatures intelligence assess technical aspects of adversary systems. Signals intelligence is the collection or interception of communication (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). Understanding all the disciplines is essential because every professional has a responsibility related to one or more disciplines. The individual must remember to use JWT's ethical guidance and the intelligence cycle to perform the intelligence activity ethically and effectively (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015).

Structured Analytic Techniques

Beyond understanding theory, processes, and disciplines, Air Force intelligence professionals learn how to apply analysis. Specifically, Structured Analytic Techniques (SAT) were developed to help improve critical thinking (Coulthart, 2016). The Office of the Director of National Intelligence wanted to raise the rigor of analysis conducted by Air Force intelligence professionals and set the precedent that the SATs were to be understood and practiced (Coulthart, 2016). Increasing the rigor of analysis is especially essential in a time of evolving warfare (Wolfberg, 2016). As adversary tactics, techniques, and procedures have shifted from conventional to unconventional, the intelligence community should respond and adapt expediently. As an example, there are 12 different SATs, and one of them is Red Team Analysis, which is when the analyst thinks from the adversary's perspective (Coulthart, 2016). Red Team Analysis is especially effective when determining future actions to be conducted by the

adversary (Coulthart, 2016). Each technique can be leveraged for specific desired effects of the intelligence analyst.

Intelligence Analysis

At any level of intelligence studies, analysis is taught to prepare Air Force intelligence professionals for the essential nature of intelligence career work. Pilots fly planes, ground forces employ weapons, and Air Force intelligence professionals conduct analysis. As discussed, there are several perspectives on how to conduct a proper analysis. The SATs are a modern construct for analysts to use, but the concept of intelligence analysis was developed through the influence of disciplines outside of intelligence studies (Coulthart, 2016). Specifically, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence attributes that intelligence analysis was mostly influenced by the medical world because medical practice has proven analytic techniques that overcome cognitive barriers, improve decision-making, and create positive outcomes (Marrin, 2017). Top military and intelligence officials have learned from medical journals because doctors have effectively described decision-making step-by-step when having to make several considerations while analyzing a patient's need (Marrin, 2017). For Air Force intelligence professionals, the needs of a customer are analyzed as well. Various stakeholders who require strategic information will request the intelligence community to determine a comprehensive answer to a problem set involving an adversary (Swenson & Hirane, 2015).

As warfare evolves, the needs of the intelligence community's customers are increased. Exponential amounts of data that Air Force intelligence professionals need to process has increased and have led to concern (Landan-Murray, 2016; Mehta & Rao, 2017). Big data analytics is an area of study introduced to intelligence studies that teaches students to analyze data that is so large or complex that traditional methods are not suitable (Mehta & Rao, 2017).

Given the current environment of advancing technologies and computer processing, human input can be difficult to apply without leveraging technology. With the input of computerization, data can be processed at a significantly efficient rate of completion (Mehta & Rao, 2017). A prime example is when the British mathematician, Alan Turing, designed the first computer to decode encrypted messages from the German Enigma Machine in World War Two (Robinson, 2014). While intelligence studies curriculum accounts for the JWT, SATs, and the concept of intelligence analysis, the concept of intelligence theory remains under development.

Developing the Intelligence Studies Field

Reviewing literature that describes the JWT theoretical frameworks offers guidance for developing the undeveloped intelligence theory (Gill & Phythian, 2018). Research addresses common practices in intelligence theory and analysis explains how education and career applicability are connected. Learning about intelligence theory and analysis prepares an intelligence professional for success in their career (Marrin, 2017). From the collection of literature, education and career practices are known, but how education affects an Air Force intelligence professional's career development is unknown (Coulhart and Crosston, 2015; Rietjens, 2020). Exploring the key intelligence theoretical concepts provides necessary context for why intelligence studies education is pursued, details intelligence studies programs' design, and how education potentially impacts an Air Force intelligence professionals' career development (Michael & Kornbluth, 2019).

Intelligence Studies Programs

Using the understanding of intelligence studies' intent to prepare Air Force intelligence professionals for their career, intelligence studies programs will be discussed to offer perspective on how programs prioritize topics in curriculum. For intelligence studies, the current trend for

programs is to transition to theoretically oriented courses that also embed analysis techniques (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). Institutions and faculty have appreciated the need for theoretical structure in intelligence studies programs (Maranto & Wai, 2020). Academic disciplines can typically have a theory that is established as a foundational framework for the respective field. Air Force intelligence professionals may encounter different curriculum and different theoretical frameworks. Historically, the intelligence theory has been under continuous development (Gill & Phythian, 2018; Marrin, 2017). The reason for continuous developmental need of the theory is because there is no clearly established intelligence theory but rather fragments of a theory (Gill & Phythian, 2018). While there may be no agreed-upon intelligence theory, core concepts will inevitably lead back to teaching analysis. To assess a way forward for an intelligence theory that can progress beyond the JWT, previous propositions for a comprehensive intelligence theory will be discussed.

Past Lessons Learned

In the past, the development of an intelligence theory was centered on the proposition to establish a common idea. After considering the historical background of intelligence theory development, Vogel and Tyler (2019) determined that the solution is to have a theory that incorporates a common vision for concepts, policy, and career expectations that would affect the entire intelligence community. A starting point for establishing common theoretical principles is to deliberate with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which has overall authority over the entire intelligence community (Johnson, 2015). Not only is a concurrence across the intelligence agencies recommended, but the JWT is critical to authoring an intelligence theory (Gill & Phythian, 2018).

As discussed, the JWT is found at the center of military doctrine and strategy that offers ethical direction for intelligence career expectations. Based on known best past practices, Imler (2018) discussed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has proven success through incorporating representatives from across different intelligence career fields of the general intelligence community to participate in joint operations, leverage resources from agency to agency, and share information. In one CIA study, 32 of 60 intelligence studies students favored intelligence officer teachers because of officers' rich understanding of international security issues (Moran, 2016). By investing in exchanges between intelligence organizations, Air Force intelligence professionals can gain insight into many different roles and missions (Omand & Phythian, 2013; Imler, 2018). Without integrating across the intelligence community, an agreeable intelligence theory would be difficult to develop. Therefore, a brief overview of some of the intelligence community workplace priorities will illustrate the similarities that different agencies may have.

Intelligence Community Workplaces

Just war theory (JWT) has been at the forefront of theoretical visions of intelligence work centers. A former Director of the CIA described that successful efforts by the intelligence agencies to develop the field of intelligence studies is primarily due to adapting JWT when distinguishing the necessary conditions for conducting intelligence by all career intelligence professionals (Omand & Phythian, 2013). There are different intelligence disciplines that each agency works towards. From signals, geographic, human, open-source, and measurement and signature intelligence, each agency offers a unique service (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). Having ethical direction for organizations is imperative for the U.S. and allied countries to be protected from any intelligence misconduct. Information must be kept secret for strategic advantage, but

allied nations and the U.S. public must be reassured that undisclosed information is not used against them (Landon-Murray, 2017).

The relationship between the public sphere and state secrecy is a vital balance allowed by the faith in the intelligence community's obedience to the JWT. Kearns (2016) defends that articulating the state's efforts to remain ethical while maintaining secrecy is instrumental. While the intelligence community recognizes the importance of ethics, there is a significant lack of research pertaining to intelligence ethics. In the past, the least-studied topics in intelligence studies journals were oversight and ethics (Rietjens, 2020). Scholars in intelligence studies have instead focused on operations and practical applications. Oversight and ethics are too important to dismiss, and modern conflict is proof of that.

Post 9/11 Environment

On September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks provided a transformational change in perspective for how to conduct oversight of intelligence. Shultz (2018) revealed that the intelligence community failed to conduct a comprehensive review of information about Al-Qaeda networks already in possession of several agencies. Remembering the intelligence failures of 9/11 are a reminder to conduct proper oversight. Ethics and oversight intertwine because JWT seeks to justify war by providing sufficient cause to prosecute warfare efforts (Langan, 1984). Providing evidence of valuable intelligence information serves as probable cause to maintain war efforts. Without proper oversight, crucial intelligence information can be neglected, and the information advantage could be gone.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization Allies and Partnerships

History and the current state of affairs have presented the need to focus on developing effective practices, improve the field of intelligence studies, and strengthen strategic intelligence

partnerships. Since World War One, the U.S.' most vital intelligence partners have been the U.K. and France, and a tripartite agreement of information exchange established the Three Eyes (Smoot, 2017). Using the Three Eyes model, the U.S. later joined Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.K. to create Five Eyes (Walsh & Miller, 2016). Sharing information between agencies within the U.S. intelligence community is instrumental and having the ability to share the same information to allied nations provides an incredible strategic advantage against adversary states (Walsh & Miller, 2016). The access can answer gaps in knowledge about an enemy to a substantial amount of intelligence. Not only is an abundance of information important, but U.S. intelligence has learned from international intelligence exchanges. International collaboration continues to be a growing trend in intelligence education (Smith, 2017). In addition to the Five Eyes alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization can leverage support from 30 countries from North America to Europe. The level of transparency between countries may vary for intelligence sharing but nevertheless, the U.S. continues to gain a superior advantage through alliances (Walsh & Miller, 2016).

Key Objectives for Intelligence Studies Education

Through the study of JWT, SATs, and intelligence analysis, two identified key objectives for intelligence studies education are identified. First, intelligence students must be able to apply effective analysis (Marrin, 2017). Second, intelligence studies students are critical to contributing to the intelligence theory development (Gill & Phythian, 2018). Lacking analytic ability can be detrimental to the Air Force intelligence professional's career. After interviewing 21 military generals, Wolfberg (2016) found that the widely recognized purpose for intelligence is to ensure that uncertainty is reduced for decision-makers. Effective analysis of information influences the amount success of an Air Force intelligence professional's career.

Given the importance placed on developing the intelligence theory, there is a need for the intelligence community's leaders and intelligence studies scholars to collaborate on a unified theory. Davies and Gustafson (2018) used the United Kingdom's comprehensive revision of the most current joint military intelligence doctrine and found that it is important to solidify doctrine, theory, history, experimentation, and practice. Undoubtedly, the JWT is essential to understanding the ethical principles of warfare, but Air Force intelligence professionals need a focused theory that observes warfare from the lens of intelligence analysis (Gill & Phythian, 2018; Marrin, 2017; Omand & Phythian, 2013). Educating Air Force intelligence professionals to be effective analysts and developing an intelligence theory satisfies critical learning within the field of intelligence studies.

Current Curriculum Development and Future for an Intelligence Theory

Before presenting the necessary elements of education for an Air Force intelligence professional, the vision of the intelligence community's leadership will be provided. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence holds the responsibility for the U.S. intelligence community (Johnson, 2015). In 2019, the Director of National Intelligence, Daniel R. Coats, published the National Intelligence Strategy for the U.S. which outlines the major mission objectives for the intelligence community (Coats, 2019). As the present study focuses on Air Force intelligence professionals' education and career development, reviewing the Air Force Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) 2023 strategy narrows the desired learning objectives for intelligence studies curriculum (Air University, 2013). After considering the National Intelligence Strategy and Air Force ISR 2023, the National Intelligence University's relationship to the Air Force will present an example of how the intelligence studies curriculum can better align with the desired objectives of the intelligence community leaders.

National Intelligence Strategy and U.S. Intelligence Curriculum

At the highest level of intelligence guidance, the National Intelligence Strategy of the United States of America outlines that the top seven objectives are strategic intelligence, anticipatory intelligence, current operations intelligence, cyber threat intelligence, counterterrorism, counterproliferation, and counterintelligence and security (Coats, 2019). Identifying the main objectives for the intelligence community can be used as a guide to develop desired learning objectives for intelligence studies education. The current U.S. intelligence curriculum does not align with National Intelligence Strategy and is designed to develop students in procedural knowledge, core knowledge, and domain knowledge (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). For procedural knowledge, students are exposed to data management, analysis, communication, and operational skills (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015). Core knowledge includes intelligence organizations and functions, history of intelligence, and ethical and legal issues, where the JWT would be taught (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015; Marrin, 2017; Omand & Phythian, 2013). Lastly, domain knowledge involves national security and criminal topics (Coulthart & Crosston, 2015).

Given the pitfall between the objectives for the National Intelligence Strategy and the design of current intelligence studies curriculum, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the intelligence community have not responded to the decline in analytic expertise (Gentry, 2015). To provide a proper course of action for improved curriculum, intelligence studies education must shift towards a design that categorizes learning in overt, covert, and covert-overt type of environments (Gearon, 2015). In addition to National Intelligence Strategy and learning environments, Air Force intelligence professionals can benefit from understanding Air Force’s senior leaders’ vision for ISR.

Air Force ISR 2023

As one of the Air Force's core enduring missions, the mission of ISR is to maintain global reach and global power to provide freedom of action to joint and coalition partners (Air University, 2013). Air Force intelligence professionals serve in various capacities to fulfill the vision of Air Force ISR 2023. General Robert Otto, Deputy Chief of Staff for ISR, stressed that airmen must be trained adequately and educated to conduct missions in all domains of warfare (Air University, 2013). Following the National Intelligence Strategy framework, the Air Force arm of the intelligence community satisfies the ISR mission for U.S. national security and interests (Air University, 2013; Coats, 2019). While the Air Force carries out the mission of ISR, Air Force ISR 2023 stresses the importance of Air Force intelligence professionals' education and continued effort to improve training for the intelligence professionals (Air University, 2013). Director of National Intelligence, Daniel R. Coats (2019), said, "We have to become more agile, more innovative, more creative."

National Intelligence University and the Air Force

In an agile, innovative, and creative response, the National Intelligence University (NIU) has developed curricula that has incorporated the National Intelligence Strategy's vision and Air Force-specific intelligence education needs (Kreuzer, 2016). The Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 3305.01 has instructed that under the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the president of NIU collaborates with the intelligence community and DOD educational and training entities to secure training, education, and professional development (Aftergood, 2020). The DOD instruction provides executive oversight and identifies the NIU as the primary institution for intelligence studies education, and the NIU is charged to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the intelligence community (Aftergood, 2020).

From an Air Force perspective, the Air Education Training Command (AETC) has the overall authority over all training and education (Kwast, 2018). General Kwast outlined the 2018 Strategic Plan for AETC that extends to 2020 (Kwast, 2018). Within the 2018 AETC Strategic Plan, a primary objective is to have an agile and flexible construct that monitors and adjusts Airmen's knowledge and skills, which mirrors the Director of National Intelligence's vision to be more agile, creative, and innovative (Aftergood, 2020; Coats, 2019). Even though the AETC commander and the Director of National Intelligence have a similar vision, the matter of importance ensures that Air Force intelligence professionals are equipped with proper intelligence studies education (Kreuzer, 2016). Instruction that guides intelligence professionals towards better analytic and critical thinking skills can build the skills necessary to be a competent intelligence analyst.

Understanding intelligence analysis is an important factor for successfully developing a suitable curriculum for intelligence studies (Kreuzer, 2016). Kreuzer (2016) explains that the U.S. Air Force pursues a revolution in intelligence analysis to refocus away from traditional objectives and move towards the professionalization of intelligence studies. Specifically, Air Force intelligence professionals must turn from the industrial age model that trains Air Force intelligence professionals in the intelligence cycle incorporating planning and direction, collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination (Hamilton & Kreuzer, 2018). By contrast, the information age would recommend intelligence analysts to follow the ISR task force model, which reconstructs the analysis process to meet the demands of military operations in near real-time (Hamilton & Kreuzer, 2018). Designing intelligence studies curricula to be agile and adaptive to ongoing intelligence efforts is a correlation between the National Intelligence Strategy, Air Force ISR 2023, DOD Instruction 3305.01, and 2018 AETC Strategic Plan

(Aftergood, 2020; Air University, 2013; Coats, 2019; Hamilton & Kreuzer, 2018; Kreuzer, 2016).

Air Force Career and Educational Development

Given the Air Force intelligence career's organizational and educational background, this subsection will apply the background research and lay out the expectations for Air Force enlisted and officer intelligence professionals. Primary sources consulted for enlisted and officer development include multiple Air Force Instructions (AFI), key Air Force leadership guidance, enlisted and officer respective career guidance documents, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and scholarly articles with supplemental information. Enlisted and officer career development will be described, benefits of education will be assessed, and the gains versus losses of a higher education degree will discussed.

Air Force Enlisted Career Development

Enlisted Air Force intelligence professionals' career development is guided by the Career Field Training Education Training Plan (CFETP). There are 135 enlisted career fields in the Air Force and seven career fields are intelligence-based. For this study, I will interview enlisted intelligence professionals who are Airborne Cryptologic Language Analysts and hold the 1A8X1 Air Force Specialty Code (U.S. Air Force, 2015). Reviewing the CFETP is important because it outlines the career fields development process, including specific educational requirements (Department of the Air Force, 2014). Depending on the enlisted intelligence professionals' rank, different educational standards will apply.

For the 1A8X1 career field, the CFETP sets recommendations for education and training throughout each phase of enlisted Air Force intelligence professionals' skill level (Department of the Air Force, 2014). There are a few educational programs that are specifically recommended to

1A8X1 members. According to the CFETP, the primary recommendations are Community College of the Air Force (CCAF), National Intelligence University (NIU), and Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) (Department of the Air Force, 2014). If enlisted intelligence professionals decide to pursue their associated degree through the CCAF, there are several requirements to accomplish. The CCAF degree requires 24 credits of technical education, 6 credits of leadership, management, and military studies, 15 credits of general education, and 15 credits of program electives (Community College of the Air Force, 2019; Department of the Air Force, 2014). Not only does the enlisted member need to acquire 64 total credits, but they must also attain the journeyman (5) level, which typically occurs when the individual achieves the rank of Airman First Class or Senior Airman (Department of the Air Force, 2014). Therefore, enlisted personnel can only graduate from the CCAF upon reaching the rank of Airman First Class or Senior Airman.

Beyond the associate's degree, enlisted intelligence professionals are recommended to apply to the National Intelligence University (NIU) for intelligence degree programs at the bachelor's and master's degree levels (Department of the Air Force, 2014). The three programs offered include the Bachelor of Science in Intelligence, Master of Science in Strategic Intelligence, and Master of Science and Technology Intelligence. All three degrees are an 11-month long program (Department of the Air Force, 2014). Headquarters' Air Staff call for annual enlisted nominations to be submitted between April and 31 August (Department of the Air Force, 2014). In addition to NIU, the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) is an Air Force-accredited institution that offers enlisted intelligence professionals the opportunity to pursue other degree programs that include science, engineering, and management graduate degree opportunities (Department of the Air Force, 2014). Therefore, there are multiple educational

programs that enlisted members can pursue in conjunction with their career and at no cost to the member. While there are multiple educational opportunities, enlisted members' education can also influence career progression.

Education's Influence on Enlisted Career Progression

Under section 1.13 of Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2502, any enlisted member who wishes to promote to Senior Master Sergeant or Chief Master Sergeant must obtain a minimum of the conferred two-year Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) degree in any discipline (Department of the Air Force, 2020). Aside from the minimum educational requirement for the Senior Master Sergeant or Chief Master Sergeant ranks, enlisted professionals have several career enhancement opportunities. The CFETP recommends that the 1A8X1 enlisted intelligence professionals pursue National Security Agency (NSA) programs to include the Middle Enlisted Cryptologic Career Advancement Program (MECCAP) and the Military Language Analyst Program (MLAP) (Department of the Air Force, 2014). Completing the career enhancement programs offers intelligence professionals an opportunity to showcase significant achievements. Admittance into the MECCEP or MLAP proves the enlisted intelligence professionals' distinction among peers and highlights significant potential (Department of the Air Force, 2014).

Air Force Officer Career Development

Like enlisted intelligence professionals' career development, Air Force intelligence officers have requirements and milestones that must be achieved to successfully advance in rank. The Air Force Specialty Code for an intelligence officer is 14N. The two governing guidance documents are the Line of the Air Force Officer Career Development Brief and the 14N Talent Management Framework. In terms of educational requirements, officers will need to complete an advanced academic degree (masters or Ph.D. level) by the rank of Colonel (Jamieson and

Sovada, 2019). Until the rank of Colonel, an advanced academic degree is not required. However, Lieutenant Colonels who are considered for promotion to Colonel will have their educational history disclosed to the board members for consideration (*Air Force Times*, 2014). Intelligence officers need to consider the educational program's relatability to the intelligence career field. If an officer obtains an advanced academic degree, the degree will be assessed for how it contributes to the and mission and effectiveness to the Air Force (*Air Force Times*, 2014).

Education's Influence on Officer Career Progression

Intelligence officer's career progression is guided by AFI 36-2501 and requires several professional education milestones. First, officers must complete Professional Military Education, which is completed at the ranks of Captain, Major, and Lieutenant Colonel (Department of the Air Force, 2020). At Captain, intelligence officers are required to complete Squadron Officer School, Majors are required to complete Air Command and Staff College, which offers a master's degree option, and Lieutenant Colonels complete Air War College or equivalent, which also has the option of completing a master's degree in conjunction with Professional Military Education requirements (Department of the Air Force, 2020). Even though intelligence officers have multiple opportunities to complete a masters-level degree through Professional Military Education, they must still complete an advanced academic degree that is earned outside of mandatory Professional Military Education (Department of the Air Force, 2020). The reason intelligence officers are advised to complete a master's degree or higher is that their educational history will be considered for promotion to Colonel (Department of the Air Force, 2020).

As stated, the officer's educational history will be evaluated based on how the degree contributes to the and mission and effectiveness to the Air Force (*Air Force Times*, 2014). Completing a degree prior to the Colonel board has certain advantages. An additional benefit of

completing a graduate degree as an officer is that the degree contributes to winning an Air Force quarterly and annual awards (AFI 36-2801, 2018). Part of the awards process is to submit achievements in the Whole Airman Concept category, which can entail personal, educational achievement (AFI 36-2801, 2018). While education may not have an immediate and direct influence on a career, there are second and third-order effects that could result from completing personal, educational aspirations. As officers are awarded quarterly and annual awards, those accomplishments contribute to an officer's stratification, and stratifications are used for promotion potential and assessment (Nolan and Overstreet, 2018). Stratification is important because it is used to rank officers and communicate their potential to serve in the next rank (Nolan and Overstreet, 2018). Given the connection between education, awards, and stratifications, there is potential for education to improve officers' opportunities to stand out and earn a stratification that identifies them as high potential officers (AFI 36-2801, 2018; Nolan and Overstreet, 2018).

Enlisted Career and Education Assessment

As part of enlisted professionals' Enlisted Performance Report (EPR), the Significant Self Improvement section outlines that any off-duty education can be reflected in the EPR, and the course, degree type, and GPA can be referenced (AFI 36-2502, 2019). It is vital to reference the enlisted intelligence professional's educational history in the EPR because the educational history will otherwise not reflect the necessary information to the promotion board (AFI 36-2502, 2019). The promotion board will assess the individual's education and how their education contributed to improving the member's unit and the Air Force as a whole (*Air Force Times*, 2014). Outside of education's influence on an enlisted member's promotion, there are several mandatory educational requirements, known as Enlisted Professional Military Education

(EPME), and the courses include Airman Leadership School (ALS), Non-commissioned Officer Academy (NCOA), and Senior Non-commissioned Officer Academy (SNCOA) (AFI 36-2502, 2019). Senior Airmen attend Airman Leadership School to promote to Staff Sergeant, Technical Sergeants attend NCOA to promote to Master Sergeant, and Master Sergeants will attend SNCOA to promote to Senior Master Sergeant (AFI 36-2502, 2019).

To maximize benefits and accomplish each EPME requirement, there is a way to leverage credits transfers across the EPME courses and apply the credits to the enlisted member's CCAF degree. Once an airman completes ALS, they can transfer six semester hours, which accounts for 10% of the CCAF degree (CCAF Student Handbook, 2017). Additionally, obtaining the CCAF accomplishes the educational requirement required to promote up to and beyond Senior Master Sergeant (AFI 36-2502, 2019). Airmen who obtain the CCAF degree consider that promotions are the number one value for graduating from CCAF (Newcomer et al., 2018).

Not only is the CCAF degree a valuable achievement for promotion, but enlisted intelligence professionals who complete the CCAF can transfer their credits towards a bachelor's degree at the National Intelligence University (NIU), and if the enlisted intelligence professional has three years of undergraduate credits, they can complete a Bachelor of Science in Intelligence from NIU (Department of the Air Force, 2014). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) projects that in the next 10 years, there will be a 31% increase in demand for Information Security Analysts (the civilian-equivalent career field for military intelligence professionals), and the typical required entry-level education is a bachelor's degree. On average, Information Security Analysts receive an annual median salary of $99,730 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Beyond promotions and satisfying educational requirements, secondary and tertiary positive outcomes benefit enlisted intelligence professionals.

Officer Career and Education Assessment

There are different Air Force leadership opinions on the impact that education has on an Air Force officer's promotion potential. Former Air Force Chief of Staff, General Mark A. Welsh III, directed the officer promotion process to change, which removed the requirement for Majors to have a master's degree prior to promotion to Lieutenant Colonel (*Air Force Times*, 2014). Instead, General Welsh clarified that a graduate degree would no longer affect promotion until the officer wishes to compete for Colonel (*Air Force Times*, 2014). In doing so, the confusion on evaluating members' education was demystified. Given the reorganization of Air Force officers' educational promotion requirements, Air Force officers could plan their academic goals and priorities accordingly (*Air Force Times*, 2014; Jamieson and Sovada, 2019).

Like enlisted intelligence professionals, intelligence officers who obtain an advanced academic degree can use their degree towards annual and quarterly awards, Officer Performance Reports (OPR), and officers increase their post-career marketability for the civilian sector (AFI 36-2801, 2018; AFI 36-2406, 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The primary Air Force intelligence officer career incentives for pursuing an advanced academic degree include amplifying an OPR, submitting educational achievements towards annual and quarterly awards, and a master's degree will satisfy the educational requirement for promotion to Colonel (AFI 36-2801, 2018; AFI 36-2406, 2021; *Air Force Times*, 2014). Not only are there requirements and achievements that can be attained from advanced academic degrees, but also officers who complete a civilian higher education degree have higher self-efficacy than those who do not. Specifically, 86% of U.S. Air Force officers who completed civilian courses have strongly agreed that the courses built their confidence to lead (Reed and Bureau, 2016).

Support Services for Military Students

Given the variety of options for Air Force intelligence professionals, service members are provided multiple support services by the Air Force. The support services include Air Force Education Centers, the Air Force Virtual Education Center (AFVEC), tuition assistance, and GI Bill benefits (AFI 36-2649, 2018; Community College of the Air Force, 2019; Jolly, 2013; Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2020; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). Each Air Force educational support service and corresponding primary source information will be provided in this section.

Air Force Base Education Centers

In general, Air Force bases have an education center to assist members with transfer credits, academic advising, tuition assistance, education entitlement, testing, and any other educational requirement. As an example, the 55th Force Support Squadron (2021) at Offutt Air Force Base is entrusted with managing the base education center. The base education center is available for members to consult with education advisers to understand tuition assistance that can be applied for the CCAF associate degree to up to a graduate degree (55th Force Support Squadron, 2021). Air Force base education services not only process tuition assistance and assist with enrollment and testing, but the education services across Air Force bases are comprised of educational administrators, counselors, academic advisors, educational specialists, and test examiners (Community College of the Air Force, 2019).

Air Force Virtual Education Center

Every Air Force member with a Common Access Card (CAC) has access to the Air Force Virtual Education Center (AFVEC), which provides members updates on tuition, course transfer credits, and academic plans (55th Force Support Squadron, 2021; AFI 36-2649, 2018; Secretary

of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2020). AFVEC is the platform for Air Force personnel to submit academic plans, track transcript submissions, and request funding through the tuition assistance program (AFI 36-2649, 2018). To maintain access and benefits of AFVEC, Air Force members are responsible for ensuring their records and contact information are accurately reflected (AFI 36-2649, 2018). The Air Force's top priority is to strengthen voluntary education of service members through robust capabilities, partnerships, and continuous innovation, which includes the maximization of utilizing AFVEC (AFI 36-2649, 2018). It is highly recommended to leverage AFVEC for increased efficiency and effectiveness of educational support to offset limited manpower resources (AFI 36-2649, 2018).

Tuition Assistance

A primary use of AFVEC is to submit requests for tuition assistance. Supervisors will receive the request and can approve up to $3,750 towards annual tuition costs (Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, 2020). While tuition assistance can be granted, there are a few requirements that members must adhere to. The requirements include official degree plan, satisfactory/passing grades, members must be serving on active duty (guard and reserve members are eligible on Title 10 or 32 orders), and requests must be made no earlier than 45 days and no later than seven days prior to the course start date (AFI 36-2649, 2018). In addition to the eligibility requirements for tuition assistance requests, members will incur a two-year active duty service commitment that will start at the end of the last course taken (AFI 36-2649, 2018). Tuition assistance of $3,750 will be provided annually until the member graduates and completes their academic plan (AFI 36-2649, 2018). Once one program is completed, tuition assistance will not be provided for a second degree (AFI 36-2649, 2018).

G.I. Bill Benefits

While tuition assistance is valuable for Air Force servicemembers' personal education, the benefits are limited, but the GI Bill is another benefit and educational entitlement to members of the armed forces (Jolly, 2013). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was signed by President Roosevelt on June 22, 1944 and is now commonly referred to as the GI Bill (Jolly, 2013). Each service member is entitled to GI Bill benefits under DoDI 1341.13 (2013), and the DoDI 1341.13 outlines that the Veterans Affairs (VA) office is responsible for determining servicemembers eligibility and entitlements. There are two types of the GI Bill that active-duty members are eligible for, and each type offers different benefits. One is the Montgomery GI Bill (Chapter 30), which provides up to 36 months of full-time payments directly to the servicemember (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). For the Montgomery GI Bill, the member will receive a flat rate of $2,122 a month (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). Depending on the institution, the cost will either offset fees, or over or under fund the cost of tuition. Another key component of the Montgomery GI Bill is that the service member will have $100 withdrawn every month for 12 months (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021).

The other GI Bill option is the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33), which will cover full tuition rates for up to 36 months, and payments will be paid directly to the institution (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). Unlike the Montgomery GI Bill requirement, service members do not contribute any amount from their personal salary to be eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). For the Post 9/11 GI Bill, tuition and fee payments vary for public and private institutions. Specifically, the cap for private school allotments is $26,042.81 per academic year, and all tuition and fees are paid for public schools (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). Additionally, every member will receive an annual

$1,000 book stipend (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). Given the benefits and requirements for each GI Bill option, servicemembers can compare cost and entitlements using the VA's GI Bill Comparison Tool, which searches for institutions, GI Bill options, years of service, and military status to provide comprehensive financial advice (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2021). Ultimately the member has multiple options and considerations and is advised to work with the VA office.

Summary

Heidegger's provided a different approach to applying the theory of phenomenology (Peoples, 2021) than did Husserl (the father of phenological theory). As such, Heidegger's approach was chosen because of his convincing philosophical assertion that the researcher cannot bracket his or her own assumptions, biases, and experiences from the phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). Since I am an Air Force intelligence professional, I naturally have a link to the lived experiences of other Air Force intelligence professionals. Using Heidegger's theory of hermeneutic phenomenology requires key components to be applied, including Dasein, foresight and fore-conception, and the hermeneutic circle (Peoples, 2021). Dasein is the idea of being somewhere and not being removed from surroundings (Peoples, 2021). Fore-sight and fore-conception refer to our preconceived knowledge about a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021). Lastly, Heidegger rejected bracketing and proposed the hermeneutic circle as a revisionary process to understand the essence of a phenomenon by recognizing and revising discovered information (Peoples, 2021).

Apart from Heidegger's theory on phenomenology, the expectancy-value theory was discussed and will help predict and explain the Air Force intelligence professionals' task choices, learning persistence, and academic performance (Galla et al., 2018; Loh, 2019; Wigfield &

Eccles, 2000). In the discussion of this study's theoretical frameworks, I applied the Heideggerian framework and fore sight to reveal my assumption that Air Force intelligence professionals pursue higher education for career advancement and to satisfy post-military career requirements. (Peoples, 2021). Using Heideggerian theory of phenomenology and my own assumption, the rest of the review of literature inquired about related literature to Air Force intelligence professionals' career and educational development.

Higher education provides Air Force intelligence professionals opportunities to satisfy promotion requirements, enhance promotion potential through evaluation reports, and prepare Air Force intelligence professionals for post-military career entrance requirements. Major components reviewed in this chapter included intelligence studies education, proposed intelligence studies theories, Air Force enlisted and officer intelligence professionals' development, and support services for Air Force intelligence professionals' educational aspirations. The consolidation of literature formed a response to the literature gap that exists concerning Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences within the sphere of higher education. Given that no publication has observed the shared lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals' higher education pursuits, the contextual source documents for educational development were included to highlight Air Force intelligence professionals' educational expectations and opportunities. Moving forward, the Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological theoretical framework will be supported by the review of literature that corresponded to lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals and their educational ambitions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Given the support of the literature review, the methods of the study are discussed from a hermeneutic phenomenological design perspective. The hermeneutic phenomenological design is a study that intends to make sense of lived experiences related to the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For my study, the phenomenon concerns the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals' who chose to complete an intelligence studies program. The experiences of the Air Force intelligence professionals were studied through triangulated data collection methods: interviews, document analysis, and researcher field notes. A sample of five enlisted members and five officers assigned to the XYZ Operations Group were interviewed with questions designed from the hermeneutic model. Additionally, document analysis supplemented the interviews with relevant primary sources and focus groups to discover the different perspectives between enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals. By the end of this section, the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, the researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations will be discussed.

Design

For my study, a qualitative approach and hermeneutic phenomenological design were applied. Hermeneutic phenomenology is used to focus on interpretation and the description of the phenomenon to then make it intelligible (Van Manen, 2014). In general, a qualitative type of research is used to address the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem through the application of an interpretive or theoretical framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The hermeneutic method reflects on the basic structures of the lived experiences of human existence (Van Manen, 2014). Within the field of qualitative research, a design narrows

the focus of the study. As for the chosen research design, the hermeneutic phenomenological design is used to illuminate details within our lives with the goal of creating meaning or a sense of understanding (Laverty, 2003).

In phenomenology, it is important to present the human subjects' experiences with a phenomenon. The study must capture the experiences in a way that would allow researchers to understand the phenomenon as an object of the experiences (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Therefore, the hermeneutic phenomenological design appropriately fits the purpose of learning the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who pursued intelligence studies education. Often, enlisted and officers alike will pursue a degree in intelligence studies for a variety of reasons. An important distinction for phenomenological research is to not make suppositions of the topic, but instead to guide the study (Moustakas, 1994). To make sense of the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who chose to complete a higher education degree in intelligence studies, the hermeneutic phenomenological design guided my study towards answering what compelled Air Force intelligence professionals to complete their program.

Research Questions

As indicated in chapter one, there are three primary research questions. The following are the three research questions:

RQ1

How do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their motivation to complete a higher education degree that focuses on intelligence studies?

RQ2

How do Air Force intelligence professionals describe the ideal career progression?

RQ3

How do Air Force intelligence professionals describe the advantages of completing an intelligence studies education to increase job knowledge?

Setting

For the study's setting, one of the largest Air Force operations groups were leveraged for participants, and the pseudonym XYZ Operations Group will be used. The XYZ Operations Group comprises four bases, one base in Arizona, Nebraska, England, and one in Japan. In context, a wing is the unit of measure for an entire military base, then there are multiple groups within one wing, there are several squadrons within a group, and a few flights within a squadron. The total number of personnel for the wing is about 30,000, and about 3,000 are assigned to the group. Within the 3,000 personnel in the XYZ Operations Group, the personnel are evenly distributed across the squadrons and flights. As an organization, the XYZ Operations Group includes multiple squadrons and flights that have various Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC) related to intelligence. The AFSC is a career identifier that designates each airman into a career field. The organization of the XYZ Operations Group is divided by three levels of leadership. At the top is the group level leadership, middle management would be at the squadron level, and flight level leadership are at the bottom. Between the enlisted and officers, opportunities to attend intelligence studies programs are frequently offered through Alpha University and Delta University. The XYZ Operations Group is suited for the study because there is a substantial number of intelligence personnel from the XYZ Operations Group, and it is one of the largest groups in the Air Force. Choosing participants from the XYZ Operations Group is beneficial because the leadership and members of the organization have members who have likely

graduated from an intelligence studies program.

Participants

Within the setting, the sample included a total of five enlisted and five officer Air Force intelligence professionals. All 10 interviewed members are assigned to the XYZ Operations Group, which has a total of about 3,000 personnel. The 10 selected interviewees were prioritized based on level of education, years of experience as an Air Force intelligence professional, and level of responsibility. The type of sample conducted for my study is a purposeful sample. A purposeful sample is used to sample a group of people that will best inform me about the research problem under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While some of the members in the sample are enlisted and some are officer, all have graduated a higher education degree or certificate in intelligence studies. Therefore, all interviewees have experienced the phenomenon and are able to discuss perceived effects that intelligence studies education had on their careers. Due to proximity and access to the members, a convenience sampling procedure was applied. According to Lavrakas (2008), convenience sampling is a sample used when data sources are conveniently available for researchers. Having familiarity with the organization and established relationships allowed for direct access to the Air Force intelligence professionals who experienced the phenomenon. In addition to the convenience sample, the purposeful sampling procedure was also chosen for this study. The purposeful sampling procedure is used when individuals are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon (Palinkas, 2013). The current sample comprises Air Force professionals who are individuals knowledgeable about the phenomenon. having graduated from intelligence studies programs and continued in their careers.

Procedures

To ensure that the processes of the study are fulfilled accordingly, several key steps were accomplished. First, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was required before starting the interview process. According to Liberty University's IRB handbook, conducting interviews is an interaction with a human subject. An IRB application is necessary to ensure there is minimal risk to the study participants (Liberty University, 2020). Securing IRB approval required a submission that detailed the nature of the interviews and provided an opportunity to ask the participants for their consent. All recruitment material, consent material, and instrument information were reviewed and approved by the IRB.

After receiving approval from the XYZ Operations Group, full IRB approval was received, and data collection was accomplished. Email addresses were obtained from the XYZ Operations Group distribution list that was available on XYZ Operations Group's SharePoint site. An email was sent to the XYZ Operations Group, and I solicited participation from 10 Air Force intelligence professionals. After five enlisted and five officer respondents were selected, informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to scheduling the interview. All interviews took place over the phone or in person. Each interviewee will be told of the recording prior to the beginning of the recording. Through the recording of the video conference, the data will be saved. As a backup, notes were written to secure the data if recording ever failed. Researcher field notes are a data collection method that provides insight from the participant’s perspective. As a qualitative data collection method, field notes are used to present contextual information (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2017). Sutton and Austin (2015) recommend that phenomenological research data analysis procedures should include an audio recording of interviews with participants, verbatim transcription of the recording, and organization of the data

through codes and themes. The procedures for the enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals' focus groups entailed the same procedures and considerations.

The Researcher's Role

As the researcher, my role in the study is to objectively collect data from a sample of Air Force intelligence professionals who have completed an intelligence studies program and answer the perceived effects to their careers post-graduation. By interviewing members from the XYZ Operations Group, I have a relationship with the participants in the sense that we are all assigned to the same operations group. While I hold a Master of Arts degree in Intelligence Studies and have experienced the same phenomenon as the participants, my relation to the phenomenon did not influence the study as my role was to guide the study with no presuppositions. While I assume that education has a positive and effective impact on career advancement, my assumption will has not interfered with my study of the Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences. As the researcher, I used the hermeneutic phenomenological design to collect data and make sense of the phenomenon experienced by all the members in the sample. The implication of my role is that my findings have given Air Force intelligence professionals perspective on pursuing an intelligence studies education for career advancement and post-military job security.

Data Collection

For ensuring the collection of data the three methods used for my study were interviews, document analysis, and focus groups. Peoples (2021) describes that phenomenological researchers may choose to conduct structured, unstructured, or semi-structured interviews. For my study, I conducted a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is the recommended interview style because the researcher organizes a set of desired questions while

also allowing for deviation from the set of questions so that the participants can add more context to the dialogue (Peoples, 2021). The interviews involved a sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals. To supplement the interviews, the reviewed literature of current career developmental documentation was provided for additional support. The discussion of my field notes offered context to the interviews by describing external factors outside the audio recording that are important to understanding the shared experiences of the phenomenon. Full details for the interviews, document analysis, and my field notes will be discussed in this section.

Interviews

To directly understand the intelligence studies the educational experience of Air Force intelligence professionals, interviews with targeted questions were conducted to develop a sense of meaning for the members' experiences with the phenomenon. The interview questions were provided to each participant at the start of the interview. Due to the unpredictable nature of the members of the XYZ Operations Group, they can be deployed or stationed at many different locations around the world. So, a phone or in person interview with a scheduled time and date were emailed to each selected participant. If the member was not available in person, a simple phone interview was conducted. For recording, there was an option to record on my laptop as well as my phone. Both were tested and proven to work.

For phenomenological questions, it is recommended that the researcher uses open-ended questions that remain objective and aimed at discovering the true experience of each participant (Creswell, 2018). Vandermause and Fleming (2011) suggest that the researcher must remain open to unexpected or unfamiliar responses so that there is space for an interactive exchange to manifest. Responses should be accepted and will not be manipulated or influenced. While the researcher may hope for certain responses, my role to simply record what has been expressed by

each member so that the characterization of the experience is pure. Before beginning the interview, I reminded the interviewees that I am interested in gaining insight into the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who have chosen to pursue intelligence studies education programs. Vandermause and Fleming (2011) suggest that setting the tone of the interview is essential so that the individuals understand the design of the questions. The following are the open-ended questions that were used for the hermeneutic phenomenological interview:

1. What drove your desire to complete a higher education program in intelligence studies?
2. Why did you choose your institution's intelligence studies program? Additionally, what discipline did you choose?
3. How was your educational experience related to your career?
4. After graduation, how did your educational program impact your career progression?
5. How did your job knowledge advance after completing your program?
6. By completing an intelligence studies program, what other effects or perceived effects has the education had on your intelligence career?
7. How did you determine your time management plan knowing the additional time commitment required for a higher education program?
8. How did you manage to complete your education alongside your career?
9. What career challenges did you expectedly or unexpectedly experience while completing the intelligence studies program?
10. Having completed your program, how do you perceive the return on investment going forward in your intelligence career?

The first two questions are directed towards understanding the intent of pursuing an intelligence studies education. Agee (2009) describes initial questions as generative and that they create a focus to move forward with the data collection. Asking primer questions about a member's desire to complete an intelligence studies degree provides context for a member's initial expectations. Comparing those initial expectations to the perceived effects gave perspective on the entire experience of the phenomenon. The third question focused on the educational program's relatability to the individual's job. For example, the National Intelligence University has prioritized job relatability for various intelligence professionals by focusing on developing curriculum that teaches students to contribute to the greater body of knowledge of the intelligence community (Spracher, 2017). Being able to contribute effectively to an intelligence organization's body of knowledge provides value to employers and the Air Force intelligence community.

Questions four through six directed the interviewees to share the experiences of completing the program while continuing the intelligence career. Questions four through six helped direct the participant to share their experience with the study's phenomenon, which is required for a phenomenological interview (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). Specifically, questions four through six targeted the perceived effects of the program post-graduation and elicited the desired responses for the intent of the study. Lastly, questions seven through ten are questions that focused on understanding the participants' experience with valuing education against the potential career benefits. Value of the education was evaluated differently by each individual, but Spracher (2017) suggests that for an intelligence studies program to be beneficial the intelligence professional must learn about multiple intelligence community agencies and

international intelligence partnerships. In addition to the interview, several key documents are important to review.

Document Analysis

There are several documents of career and educational importance for enlisted and officers who work within the XYZ Operations Group. In terms of career development, the enlisted Air Force intelligence professionals are guided by their Career Field Education Training Plan (CFETP), which provides training managers, supervisors, and trainers the information needed to help members efficiently advance in their careers (Official United States Air Force Website, 2020). The CFETP is the primary document the members are bound to for career development. Understanding the career progression and educational benefits from the CFETP provides support from formal guidance for an Air Force intelligence professional's objective.

Similarly, the officers also have career guidance, but the intelligence officers' career guidance document is the Talent Management Framework. In 2019, the Talent Management Framework (TMF) was introduced as Air Force intelligence officers' current and future career development plan (Jamieson & Sovada, 2019). The TMF was the evaluative guiding document that clarifies the intelligence officers' career and educational objectives. For enlisted and officers, the CFETP and TMF will be compared against the actual phenomenon experience.

Focus Groups

Since there are two categories of Air Force intelligence professionals, focus groups were used to organize deeper level questioning directed at specific types of Air Force intelligence professionals. Enlisted personnel and officers have distinctly different career and education expectations. By organizing the enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals in separate groups, the study benefitted from understanding the shared experiences of one Air Force

intelligence pathway versus the other. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that focus groups provide the opportunity to discover views missing from the study. The focus groups were conducted through a phone or in person interview. The following are the open-ended questions that were used for both focus groups:

1. How did you determine to pursue an intelligence studies program (e.g. Career Field Education Training Plan, Talent Management Framework, commander/supervisor, peers, or personal ambition)?
2. Whether civilian or military, what are your goals after graduating?
3. How was your educational experience related to your enlisted Air Force intelligence career?
4. Based on your specific Air Force Specialty Code, how did your job knowledge improve after completing your program?
5. After graduation, how did your educational program impact your intelligence career progression?

Questions one through five for both focus groups are targeted questions that steered the interview towards the experiences of the phenomenon. Like the interviews, the focus group questions were designed to focus the participants on sharing direct experiences with the phenomenon of the study (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). Results from each focus group provided the enlisted and officer viewpoints on Air Force intelligence career progression after graduating from an intelligence studies program.

Data Analysis

Along with the data collected methods, this hermeneutic phenomenological study offered various types of data analysis. For my study, the type of data analysis that was conducted was the

Van Kaam method. Van Kaam method of analysis has been modified by Moustakas (1994) to organize the transcription of interviews into four main steps: listing, reduction and elimination, clustering, and final identification. First, the listing step requires a list to be compiled of all the expressions related to perceived effects of intelligence studies education in relation to a military intelligence career. Second, reduction and elimination are used to identify the irrelevant and extraneous terms to be removed as they do not relate to the intent of the study. Third, the clustering step will organize terms of the data and organically be formed based on the sets of terms that are repeated in the interviews. Lastly, final identification is successful when an overall theme is determined.

Determining the theme was produced by using the Saldana's Coding Manual. Saldana (2016) describes that a code is a qualitative inquiry that assigns summative meaning. Identifying recurring codes throughout the study will present summative points that characterize the primary findings. Collected codes helped confirm the descriptions of participants' experiences by applying the codes of routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships, which helped discern trends that solidify observations into concrete instances of meaning (Saldana, 2018). The theme of the responses depended on the codes which have been most reported throughout the study. The themes are outlined in chapter four of the study and the data was organized to complete the data analysis.

Trustworthiness

Engaging with human subjects required trust between the researcher and the participants. For the hermeneutic phenomenological interview with Air Force intelligence professionals, trust was established through the transparency of the proposed questions. From Vandermause and Fleming's (2011) hermeneutic interview discussion, the suggestion for trustworthy acquisition

occurs when the interview is systematic and primary data is used. The primary sources included documents that the Air Force intelligence professionals are familiar with. Since I am a peer in the Air Force intelligence field, I am familiar with the current and official documentation for enlisted and officer career development in their intelligence Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC). Supplementally, an external audit by two senior intelligence members was conducted to verify accuracy and provide accountability. Each participant was assured that the role of the researcher is to purely record and report and not to modify the responses. As stated earlier, the IRB-approved questions were provided to all participants. To ensure trustworthiness, the following factors were included: credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility is the measure of the finding's accuracy for describing reality and depends on the quality of information gathered (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Using peer-reviewed articles from scholarly intelligence studies journals and currently published Air Force policy for career developmental documentation assured that the information for my study was credible. To solidify credibility, data triangulation was used to gather multiple and different data sources in time, space, and person (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The combination of variation in sources of data and the high quantity of data strengthened credibility by triangulation. In addition to source gathering, the participants who were interviewed in my study must have graduated from an accredited intelligence studies program (or related field). The members' experiences are a sample of active Air Force intelligence professionals who have lived the phenomenon in question. While the members provided a small sample of Air Force intelligence professionals, cataloging the experiences of the active-duty members and graduates of accredited programs ensured credibility and offered insight for other Air Force intelligence professionals.

Dependability and Confirmability

In a qualitative study, dependability and confirmability describes consistency based on the context of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Since the XYZ Operations Group is one of the largest groups in the Air Force, sampling Air Force intelligence professionals from one of the largest units in the Air Force offered a dependable setting for the study. Examining the most current intelligence studies programs along with currently active members offered reliable content. Air Force intelligence professionals interested in the study will be exposed to the most recent information regarding enlisted and officers' experiences of career development within the intelligence field.

Transferability

Transferability means that the study has information that can be used in one context and then in another context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For my study, the focus is on one specific sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals in one operations group in the air force, but there is significant transferability across many operations groups, squadrons, and flights across the Air Force. The Career Field Education Training Plan (CFETP) for my study focused on the 1A8X1 career field. However, every enlisted intelligence career field has a respective CFETP that can be reviewed and informed by my study as well. As for the Talent Management Framework (TMF) that is used for intelligence officers in my study, the same TMF can apply to any other Air Force intelligence officer. This study achieved transferability through the applicable use for any Air Force intelligence professional in the Air Force, given the current, extensive, and specific descriptions of findings. Given the rich and extensive descriptions, this study served as valuable insight for potentially thousands of Air Force intelligence professionals.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study could be publicly available and members of the intelligence community may be interested in reviewing the study, all participants' identities have been protected using pseudonyms. Prior to each participant's interview, informed consent was acquired to schedule and carry out each interview and the WebEx online interview method was always available if needed but was never used. According to the official WebEx website, the hourly data storage for a video telephone conference is approximately 0.138 GB (Cisco, 2019). No interview should go beyond a maximum of two hours, and the total data storage capacity for my laptop is 500 GB, so there was no concern for data storage. Except for three-year required storage of the interviews' recordings, the video along with the data will be deleted upon the successful transcription of every interview. Each participant will be notified of the interview deletion as well. To protect the setting and members involved in the study, pseudonyms have been replaced for all parties. Recordings have been stored only on my personal laptop device and will not be available to anyone except for the committee chair and members who must review the data collected. All participants' responses have been anonymous. Inquiring on the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals presented data that is testimonial and offered insight into the Air Force intelligence professionals' personal experiences with higher education whilst continuing in their military careers.

Summary

After considering the methods for the study, the hermeneutic phenomenological design has been discussed and the elements of the designs' application within the study have been presented. The key takeaway for the hermeneutic phenomenological design is that the study is intended to make sense of the phenomenon in question. In the present study, the shared

phenomenon among the participants presented the formerly unknown lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who decided to pursue intelligence studies education. To capture the experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals, a sample of five enlisted members and five officers assigned to the XYZ Operations Group were interviewed with questions designed from the hermeneutic model. Additional data collection methods to the interview were document analysis and focus groups. The collected data is presented in chapter four and supports the discovered shared experiences of the Air Force intelligence professionals.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

In exploring the educational experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals, enlisted and officer intelligence professionals in the Air Force were interviewed for their personal experiences in completing a post-secondary program while serving as intelligence professionals. All data have been gathered through the conducted interviews. The collection of findings will answer the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study which is to understand the lived experiences of a sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals from the XYZ operations group who chose to complete an intelligence studies program while actively serving in the Air Force intelligence profession. Throughout this chapter, the Air Force intelligence professional participants will be presented, results of the study will be discussed, and responses to the study's research questions will be revealed.

Participants

For this study, I solicited participation from the XYZ operations group. Participants included enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals. Each Air Force intelligence professional answered 10 designated interview questions and 5 focus group questions as discussed in chapter 3. Participants' responses will be discussed later in the results section of this chapter. Demographics of the Air Force intelligence professionals are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Air Force Intelligence Professionals Demographics

Air Force Intelligence Professional Participants	Rank	Highest Degree	Content Area	Focus Group (Enlisted/Officer)

John	Senior Airman	Associates	Intelligence Studies	Enlisted
Joseph	Master Sergeant	Masters	Strategic Intelligence	Enlisted
Veronica	Staff Sergeant	Associates	Intelligence Studies	Enlisted
Henry	Senior Airman	Bachelors	Geography	Enlisted
Layla	Technical Sergeant	Bachelors	Organizational Psychology	Enlisted
Dean	Major	Masters	Strategic Intelligence	Officer
Ronald	Lieutenant Colonel	Masters	Public Administration	Officer
Shawn	Captain	Masters (Candidate)	Geographic Information Systems	Officer
Jean	Captain	Masters	Business Administration	Officer
Mark	Major	Masters	Intelligence Studies	Officer

Results

After collecting data on the sample of Air Force intelligence professionals from the XYZ operations group, several themes were apparent in the responses. The themes that were identified from the collection of interviews were Convenience and Transferability, Marketability, and Outlier Data and Findings. Within the theme of Convenience and Transferability, completing military training and transferring credits towards a college program was referenced numerous times. Apart from the convenience of completing education in the military through credit transferring, the other convenience was financial support. For the Marketing theme, participants discussed how their completed education afforded more marketability in the military and potentially beyond military service. Lastly, the Outlier Data and Findings theme will pinpoint

that the major outlier in data collection was that multiple participants decided not to pursue an intelligence studies (or related field) degree program.

Convenience and Transferability

The most prevalent theme that transpired from the collected data is that the participants consistently mentioned the convenience of completing a degree that the Air Force will compensate. John said, “Anyone in the intelligence career field can transfer credits to the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) and earn their associates degree.” Throughout the interview and the other interviews, each participant made a similar comment. Participants discussed that they were already completing or have completed their fundamental military training. By completing fundamental and basic military training and education, enlisted participants discussed how they were able to pursue their associate’s degree through the CCAF and transfer credits from their already accomplished training requirements. Additionally, they affirmed that there was no cost to them, and they did not have to use their educational benefits.

For the officer participants, intelligence officer training was referenced as a great source for transferring credits to an intelligence studies degree. Dean said, “My training gave me almost half the credits required for a master’s degree at AMU.” Not only are there opportunities for Air Force intelligence officers to maximize transfer credits but officer participants stressed the importance of completing a graduate degree earlier in the career. Officer Air Force intelligence professionals stressed completing a degree earlier in the officer’s career and the officer participants described that Air Force officers generally have less responsibility in the junior ranks and therefore have more opportunity to complete their degree.

Military Education and Convenience

There were several financial benefits that the intelligence professional participants

discussed. In reference to completing their master's degree, Joseph said, "It was my only job, it was paid for, and I got paid to do it." Joseph explained that he was afforded the opportunity to spend active duty time to complete a master's degree, which was paid for by the Air Force and he continued to receive his salary. Essentially, he already wanted to complete a master's degree, and conveniently the Air Force covered the finances that were required. Similarly, one of the reasons Layla pursued a bachelor's degree was because of the military financial benefits already available. Layla said, "One of the biggest factors for pursuing my bachelor's degree was because I wanted to take advantage of tuition assistance (TA)." Tuition assistance is an educational benefit provided to all military members who wish to pursue a degree. The maximum tuition assistance allowed for military members is $3,750 and the benefits are provided annually until the member graduates and completes their academic plan (AFI 36-2649, 2018).

Credit Transferring

Throughout the enlisted and officer intelligence professional careers, there are required military training courses that offered the participants opportunities to transfer multiple college credits towards their desired degree. Veronica said, "I already completed ALS so my leadership and management credits were complete, and I could get my CCAF associates degree in intelligence studies." Veronica referred to the credit transfer agreement established between Airman Leadership School and the CCAF. As mentioned in chapter 2, the CCAF degree requires 24 credits of technical education, 6 credits of leadership, management, and military studies, 15 credits of general education, and 15 credits of program electives (Community College of the Air Force, 2019; Department of the Air Force, 2014). This participant was able to transfer more than half of the credits required for the associate's degree by completing technical training and ALS, which are requirements that already had to be completed.

Similar to enlisted Air Force intelligence professionals, officers have required technical training that coincidentally provides officers the opportunity to transfer credits towards a master's degree. As mentioned, Dean discussed that his technical training provided almost half of the credits needed to complete a masters intelligence degree. Dean also mentioned that he completed his degree from American Military University (AMU). According to AMU's official website on transferring credit, if an Air Force intelligence officer completed intelligence officer training, they can transfer up to 15 of the 36 credits required for a masters in intelligence studies degree from AMU (Paulson, 2021).

Marketability

In addition to the theme of Convenience and Transferability, the theme of Marketability was identified through the participants' responses. Based on the findings, the Air Force intelligence professionals identified that completing a degree can contribute to their military career progression. At the same time and depending on the rank of the individual, there were differences of opinion on the extent to which education can contribute to an intelligence professional's career. Outside of education's marketability influence in the military, participants expressed the benefit of having a degree for civilian career marketability and résumé building.

Military Recognition

Interestingly, the participants of lower rank expect that education has helped and continue to help them be recognized as they progress in their military careers. On the other hand, the participants of higher rank did not agree that education could help them be recognized for career progression. Veronica said, "I do not think that education really impacts career progression." Veronica is a staff sergeant and the participants that were staff sergeant or higher did not agree that education will aid them in their career progression. However, the senior airman rank and

below agreed that education could be a significant factor in their career progression. John is a senior airman and said, “The intelligence studies degree was for progression in my career.”

The officer group provided a different perspective on career progression. As a consensus, the officer participants’ responses affirmed that completing a master’s program has the potential of helping officers stand out and be more competitive, but the primary career progression incentive is that Air Force officers must have their master’s degree to reach the rank of colonel. Jean said, “I completed the degree because a master’s degree would eventually be required to promote to Colonel.” Dean said, “I felt that completing a master’s degree helped me be more competitive for internships and opportunities throughout my career.”

Civilian Market

A common comment made by the enlisted participants was that they wanted to build their resumes and prepare for a career after the military. When Henry was asked what kind of return on investment he was expecting after completing his degree, Henry said, “I hope to work in a job that will provide for my family and meet my desire which is map making.” Henry admitted he wanted to separate from the Air Force and described that he chose an education that will prepare him to apply for his desired civilian career. On the other hand, the officers were all interested in staying in the military until retirement. After being asked about goals beyond the master’s program, Ronald said, “I plan on continuing until retirement.” While Ronald is a Lieutenant Colonel and closest to retirement, the rest of the officer participants’ experiences varied from 4 years to 15 years of experience, and all have consistently reported that they are pursuing retirement. While the officer intelligence professionals have a passion for the military, they also acknowledged that their education could help them be more competitive in the civilian career market as well.

Outlier Data and Findings

After completing data collection, the outlier finding in the data was that there were Air Force intelligence professionals who pursued academic disciplines that were not closely related to intelligence studies. Finding this outlier reveals that there are Air Force intelligence professionals who wish to pursue alternative academic disciplines in the interest of changing careers. Leading into the study, my assumption was that Air Force intelligence professionals would pursue a degree in intelligence studies or a related field because a relatable program could help individuals build their intelligence career resume. However, my outlier finding revealed that Air Force intelligence professionals would pursue education in other academic disciplines and leverage educational benefits in order to change their career. From the sample, there were three participants who fell under the outlier category and did not pursue educational programs that closely related to intelligence studies. As was presented in Table 1, Henry, Layla, and Jean had chosen degree programs that did not relate to intelligence studies. From the interviews, the three participants explained that their programs suited their interests in civilian employment after their military careers.

Research Question Responses

Air Force intelligence professionals' responses answer three research questions that stem from the purpose of this study, and the purpose is to understand the lived experiences of a sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals from the XYZ operations group who chose to complete an intelligence studies program while actively serving in the Air Force intelligence profession. As noted in the results section, there were several main themes that were identified from the collected data. The two major themes are convenience and transferability as well as marketability. Now that the themes have been addressed and identified in the previous section,

the answers from participants will evidently relate to completing higher education for convenience and transferability as well as marketability.

Research Question One

How do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their experience of selecting a higher education degree that focuses on intelligence studies? Air Force intelligence professionals selected a degree in intelligence studies for convenience and transferability, and marketability. Within an Air Force intelligence professional's career there are multiple training requirements that offer the opportunity to transfer credits and concurrently complete a majority of the college credit requirements for an intelligence studies degree. Veronica stated, "I wanted to build my resume, I was encouraged to complete my CCAF, and the intelligence studies degree was tied to my AFSC." For the intelligence professionals who pursued an intelligence studies degree, completing the program was a logical next step for them. Between the mandatory training requirements and professional military education requirements, there are several credit hours that transfer to an intelligence studies degree. Therefore, the interviewed sample of Air Force intelligence professionals agreed that they selected a higher education degree in intelligence studies because of the direct convenience and transferability as well as the marketing potential the degree provided for each individual.

Research Question Two

Given the ideal career progression scenario, how do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their career experience before and after their graduation from an intelligence studies program? Answers to this question varied based on focus group (enlisted or officer Air Force intelligence professional) as well as the individuals rank. The lowest ranking participant, a senior airman, expressed that pursuing a degree would be good for his career. John said, "As far as the

intelligence studies degree, it was for my career progression." The other enlisted participants of higher rank did not necessarily agree that graduating from a higher education program would affect career progression.

On the officer side, participants ultimately agreed that earning their master's degree was not going to impact career progression until it was required for promotion. Jean said, "I completed the degree because a master's degree would eventually be required to promote to colonel." Jean described that the degree did not have any immediate benefits for career progression, but he knew that eventually a master's degree would be required so he preferred to complete his program earlier in the career and have it done. Ronald, a lieutenant colonel, said, "Having a degree was not masked to developmental teams and they could see it." Ronald was referring to the developmental teams that assess officers for career development and vectoring. He determined that while the degree was not required until colonel, the degree could have set him apart for base or assignment preferences as well.

Research Question Three

In terms of increased job knowledge, how do Air Force intelligence professionals describe their learning experience after graduating from an intelligence studies program? In the case of the participants who completed their degree in conjunction with their technical training, they asserted that the courses for the degree and their technical training curriculum aligned closely. Veronica said, "After Goodfellow, I got a lot of my credits for my CCAF." She was referring to Goodfellow because the intelligence training Veronica received was at Goodfellow Air Force Base. Veronica also mentioned that most of the credits transferred from intelligence training would count for her Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) associates degree (AA).

Like enlisted participants, officer participants saw the unexpected benefit of increasing job knowledge within the Air Force intelligence professional career field. Dean said, “I knew that AMU would transfer almost half the credits of the intelligence studies masters.” If officer intelligence professionals pursued a masters in intelligence studies (or related field), the participants described that the educational experience from the master’s programs provided insight into the intelligence career field but on a higher level of competence. Since the officer participants completed their masters earlier in their careers, they discovered that the educational content was designed for leaders with significant experience in strategic intelligence organization and policy. Therefore, the participants found the learning experience to be useful in preparation for a senior rank and position in the Air Force intelligence community.

Summary

Through the collection of data on the sample of Air Force intelligence professionals from the XYZ operations group, a few primary themes were determined from the participants’ responses. The primary themes identified are Convenience and Transferability, Marketability, and Outlier Data and Findings. Convenience and Transferability involved intelligence professionals completing military training and then transferring the credits towards a college program. The other theme of findings identified was the Marketing theme. For the Marketing theme, participants discussed the potential marketability of their completed degree programs for military career progression or civilian career marketability. Lastly, the Outlier Data and Findings theme reviewed that the major outlier in the data collection was that multiple participants chose not to pursue an intelligence studies (or related field) degree program.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

Within this study, the Air Force intelligence professionals' educational experience alongside the context of the intelligence professional career were observed. The intent to inquire on the Air Force intelligence professional's educational experience concurrently with their service in the intelligence career field originates from the identified research gap and the connection to my own experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of a sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals (5 enlisted and 5 officers) from the XYZ operations group who chose to complete an intelligence studies program (or related field) while actively serving in the Air Force intelligence profession. By the end of the data collection process, the finding themes included Convenience and Transferability, Marketability, and Outlier Data and Findings. This chapter will present interpretation of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, my recommendation for future research, and concluding remarks for this study.

Discussion

Within this section, the following topics will be discussed: the interpretation of findings, implications for policy or practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The interpretation of the findings will provide my own interpretation of the thematic findings from chapter 4. All implications will be identified based on the source documents and application of the theoretical frameworks that were discussed in chapter 2. For limitations and delimitations, several have been identified and will be

presented later in this section. Lastly, my recommendation for future researchers to advance this study will be addressed.

Interpretation of Findings

After evaluating the findings from chapter 4, I have determined several key interpretations which include phenomenological perspective, setting changes for interviews, and expectancy-value. Before discussing the interpretation of the findings, I have summarized the primary themes identified within the findings of my study. Given the primary themes of Convenience and Transferability, Marketability, and Outlier Data and Findings, my interpretation involves the application of my primary and secondary theoretical frameworks as well as my observation on the focus groups' (enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals) differences.

Summary of Thematic Findings

As discussed in chapter 4, the themes identified within the findings of this study included Convenience and Transferability, Marketability, and Outlier Data and Findings. In review, the Convenience and Transferability theme presented the Air Force intelligence professionals appreciation for the convenience of completing a college degree while concurrently accomplishing mandatory military training. Through required military training, intelligence professionals can transfer a substantial amount of college credits towards their associates degree or higher-level program. For Marketability, enlisted participants of lower rank believed in the possibility that a post-secondary education could help them advance in their military careers. Senior ranking enlisted participants viewed that post-secondary education did not help them with military career progression, but they asserted that their degree added to their resume for better marketability within and outside of the military. In general, all officers viewed that a master's

degree was essential to obtain to promote to Colonel and remain in the military until retirement. The officer participants also agreed that the master's program serves as a great asset to their resume. Lastly, the major identified outlier of the data was that several participants chose to pursue academic disciplines outside of intelligence studies. Based on the themes identified in the findings, there were several interpretations that I have identified to include a phenomenological perspective, setting changes for interviews, and the perspective on the findings through the expectancy-value theory.

Phenomenological Perspective. As outlined in chapter 2, the primary theoretical framework for this study is Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological framework. Given that phenomenology is foundational for my study, I observed the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals and described the collection of experiences observed. Heidegger's hermeneutic theory of phenomenology focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and results in a complete understanding of the combined experiences (Heidegger, 2008). From a phenomenological perspective, I needed to understand each Air Force intelligence professional's educational experience alongside their careers as well as the cumulative experiences of the sample interviewed. Through my observation and assessment of the cumulation of interviews, it was apparent that Air Force intelligence professionals pursued education for the following reasons: career progression, personal ambition, career security, build a competitive record, and strengthen their resume for military or civilian career aspirations.

Expectancy-value. Related to the phenomenological observations of the total experiences, each participant was also questioned using the Expectancy-value theoretical application. The Expectancy-value theory is my secondary theoretical framework and involves four concepts to include attainment or achievement value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost

(Loh, 2019; Wigfield, 1994). Given the responses from the sample interviewed, it was apparent that the most dominant value was everyone's own utility value. Air Force intelligence professionals seem to value education in relation to their current and future career goals. Each participant maintained goals that relate to military progression and civilian career aspiration. As discussed in chapter 2, utility value includes the relationship between goal setting and attaining education.

Enlisted and Officer Differences. Upon completion of the interviews and collecting data on the two focus groups (enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals), there were several similarities and differences discovered between the two groups' experiences with education and the Air Force intelligence profession. From the responses of the enlisted group, the consistent reason for obtaining an associate's degree was because of the incredible convenience of recognized credits between mandatory intelligence training and the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF). For enlisted participants pursuing a degree that is higher than the associates, the desire is to establish a competitive edge within the military and/or solidify a resume for careers beyond the military. For the officers, every participant agreed that the master's degree had to be completed in order to advance to the rank of colonel. Essentially, the officer participants decided to complete their master's programs early in their career so that they are postured for the rest of their career until retirement.

Implications for Policy or Practice

Through the completion of this study, there are a few implications to consider. Within the literature review and data collected, information was gathered from sources in its present form and is subject to change. From a policy standpoint, the Air Force source documents used for the literature review may be updated and changed by the Air Force in the near future as manuals and

instructions adapt over time. From a practice standpoint, the sample of intelligence professionals provided an initial answer for the educational experience in the Air Force intelligence profession, but the results do not conclude a general assessment of Air Force intelligence professionals' experiences with education.

Implications for Policy

Given that I included Air Force Instructions (AFIs) and official Air Force manual documents, there is a possible implication for future researchers to consider. The official Air Force documents I used included the Career Field Education Training Plan (CFETP) for 1A8X1 and 1A8X2, Talent Management Framework (TMF), and various AFIs. Each document may be replaced with a more current version in the near future and must be compared against the documents used for this study.

Implications for Practice

With a relatively small sample size, the responses of the Air Force intelligence professionals interviewed do not indicate a consensus for the general Air Force intelligence population. The responses serve as initial insight into the educational experiences of the enlisted and officer Air Force intelligence professionals while they serve on active duty. In practice, leaders, advisors, and researchers should not limit conclusions on the Air Force intelligence professional's educational experience based on this study's sample alone.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

In chapter 2, I revealed that 30 out of 211 intelligence studies articles were focused on intelligence programs and 17 were centered on career development, but not one intelligence-centered article focused on Air Force intelligence professionals' educational experiences (Rietjens, 2020). This study offers the first sample of Air Force intelligence professionals'

perspectives on completing post-secondary education while also serving in active duty. In general, the Air Force Instructions (AFIs), career development guides (e.g. CFETP or TMF), and other common resources for Air Force personnel have been and continue to be readily available for Air Force intelligence professionals, but this study is unique in that the results offer testimonial evidence of Air Force intelligence professionals' lived experiences with higher education attainment.

Limitations and Delimitations

For this study in particular, the one limitation was minimal participant availability from the Air Force intelligence officers. While I reached my goal of a minimum of 5 enlisted and 5 officer participants, I was hoping to receive more interest than the minimum. After a month passed beyond the initial email solicitation, officers within the XYZ operations group approached me and stated that they wanted to participate in the study but did not meet the minimum qualifications of having masters level degree. I decided not to change my delimitation of requiring a master's degree for officer participants because my study focused on participants competing a post-secondary education while serving in the Air Force.

Delimitations for the study included specific parameters for recruiting participants and choosing the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The specific parameters established for the Air Force participant sample depended on the rank of the individual. If the Air Force intelligence professionals were enlisted, they had to have an associate's degree, hold the 1A8X1 or 1A8X2 career field code, and be assigned to the XYZ operations group. For the officer participants, the requirements were to have a master's degree, hold the 14N career code, and be assigned to the XYZ operations group. Apart from the parameters established for recruiting Air Force intelligence professionals, I chose to specifically apply the hermeneutic phenomenological

approach. In the literature review, I discussed that Heidegger branched off from Husserl (father of phenomenology) to create hermeneutic phenomenology, which stems from the belief that people could not bracket their lived experiences because we live in a world that includes others' circumstances of existence (Peoples, 2021). As an Air Force intelligence officer, I knew that my experiences and perspectives relate to the participants' experiences and therefore I could not bracket my lived experiences apart from the sample interviewed.

Recommendation for Future Research

For future research, I would recommend a few procedures that could help exponentially multiply insight on the Air Force intelligence professionals' educational experiences in the Air Force intelligence profession. The few procedures I would recommend include a survey of a larger Air Force intelligence organization. In my study, I interviewed a sample from one of the largest operations groups in the Air Force, but my participant pool was still rather limited and narrow in scope. Therefore, I recommend a survey with a similar questionnaire to be distributed to an entire base or even a major command. A survey is different than the interview approach because it may not offer the opportunity for thorough individual responses but a survey to a wider audience would offer greater insight into the overall Air Force intelligence professional community.

Conclusion

Given the completion of the study, there have been several first-ever findings on the inquiry of Air Force intelligence professionals' educational experiences. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who decided to pursue a college degree while serving on active duty. The study focused on the experiences of 10 current Air Force intelligence professionals who

have completed an intelligence studies (or related) program and are currently serving in one the Air Force's largest operations groups. The philosophical foundation for this study was Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology, secondarily the expectancy-value theory supplemented the phenomenological framework, which provided the underlying constructs and propositions for how Air Force intelligence professionals make sense of their careers. Lived experiences of the Air Force intelligence professionals were collected through interviews, document analysis, and focus groups. Through the collection of data, the study narrowed the gap regarding the unknown lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals' pursuit of higher education. This study has offered the first sample of Air Force intelligence professionals' perspectives on completing post-secondary education while also serving in active duty. Through my study, it was apparent that Air Force intelligence professionals pursued education for the one or more of the following reasons: career progression, personal ambition, career security, build a competitive record, and strengthen their resume for military or civilian career aspirations.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study under the IRB number: IRB-FY21-22-52. This study received IRB approval on August 13, 2021.

Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of the Project: Air Force Intelligence Professionals and Higher Education
Principal Investigator: Nicholai Ivaschenko, Doctoral Student, Liberty University

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years old, hold the 1A8X1 (enlisted), or 1A8X2 (enlisted), or 14N (officer) Air Force Specialty Code. For 1A8X1 or 1A8X2s, you must hold an associate's degree or higher. For 14Ns, you must hold the master's degree or higher. The participants' degree must be in Intelligence Studies or related field (i.e. International Relations, Homeland Security, National Security, or Cyber). Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

Study Purpose and Background
The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of Air Force intelligence professionals who have completed their post-secondary education in intelligence studies while serving on active duty. More specifically, the study is used to understand the motivation, goals, and desired return on investment by the Air Force intelligence professional when pursuing their degree.

Procedures
If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Arrange a time/date to conduct an audio-recorded interview. The interview should take 30-45 minutes.
    a. Have a laptop or computer readily available and have internet service since the interview will be conducted on WebEx. (Note: If you do not have access to the internet, please provide your phone number and we can conduct the interview over the phone).
2. Participate in an audio-recorded focus group. The focus group should take 45 minutes.
    a. (Note: The 5 focus group questions are tailored to the enlisted participants and the officer participants respectively. Focus groups have been created because the enlisted and officer development paths are different and provide a different perspective).

Benefits
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include raised awareness for Air Force intelligence professionals' experiences with career and educational development.

Risks
The risks involved in this study are minimal, and are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Please be aware that if you mention anything regarding child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I am a mandatory reporter and will have to report it.

Data Security
The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you will be removed, redacted, or replaced with a code.

- Participant responses will be confidential. Any names or personal information will be replaced with a code in the data and in any publications. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on my password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations or studies that need to reference my study. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. I am required to retain the data for three years but the data will remain confidential.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Compensation
Participants will be compensated for participating in this study by receiving a $10 Starbucks gift card as a token of appreciation. Gift cards will be sent upon completion of both the interview and focus group.

Voluntary Nature of Research
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Study Contact Information
The researcher conducting this study is Nicholai Ivaschenko. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at mobile number or personal email. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Jeffrey Savage, using the professor's email.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What drove your desire to complete a higher education program in intelligence studies?

2. Why did you choose your institution's intelligence studies program? Additionally, what discipline did you choose?

3. How was your educational experience related to your career?

4. After graduation, how did your educational program impact your career progression?

5. How did your job knowledge advance after completing your program?

6. By completing an intelligence studies program, what other effects or perceived effects has the education had on your intelligence career?

7. How did you determine your time management plan knowing the additional time commitment required for a higher education program?

8. How did you manage to complete your education alongside your career?

9. What career challenges did you expectedly or unexpectedly experience while completing the intelligence studies program?

10. Having completed your program, how do you perceive the return on investment going forward in your intelligence career?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. How did you determine to pursue an intelligence studies program (e.g. Career Field Education Training Plan, Talent Management Framework, commander/supervisor, peers, or personal ambition)?

2. Whether civilian or military, what are your goals after graduating?

3. How was your educational experience related to your enlisted Air Force intelligence career?

4. Based on your specific Air Force Specialty Code, how did your job knowledge improve after completing your program?

5. After graduation, how did your educational program impact your intelligence career progression?

Appendix E

Trustworthiness

Engaging with human subjects requires trust between the researcher and the participants. For the hermeneutic phenomenological interview with Air Force intelligence professionals, trust is established through the transparency of the proposed questions. From Vandermause and Fleming's (2011) hermeneutic interview discussion, the suggestion for trustworthy acquisition occurs when the interview is systematic and primary data is used. The primary sources include documents that the Air Force intelligence professionals are familiar with. Since I am a peer in the Air Force intelligence field, I am familiar with the current and official documentation for enlisted and officer career development in their intelligence Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC). Supplementally, an external audit by two senior intelligence members will be conducted to verify accuracy and provide accountability. Each participant will be assured that the role of the researcher is to purely record and report and not to modify the responses. As stated earlier, the IRB-approved questions will be provided to all participants. To ensure trustworthiness, the following factors will be included: credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility is the measure of the finding’s accuracy for describing reality and depends on the quality of information gathered (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Using peer-reviewed articles from scholarly intelligence studies journals and currently published Air Force policy for career developmental documentation assures that the information for my study is credible. To solidify credibility, data triangulation will be used to gather multiple and different data sources in time, space, and person (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The combination of variation in sources of data

and the high quantity of data will strengthen credibility by triangulation. In addition to source gathering, the participants who are interviewed in my study must have graduated from an accredited intelligence studies program. The members' experiences are a sample of active Air Force intelligence professionals who have lived the phenomenon in question. While the members provide a small sample of Air Force intelligence professionals, cataloging the experiences of the active-duty members and graduates of accredited programs ensures credibility and offers insight for other Air Force intelligence professionals.

Dependability and Confirmability

In a qualitative study, dependability and confirmability describe consistency based on the context of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Since the XYZ Operations Group is one of the largest groups in the Air Force, sampling Air Force intelligence professionals from one of the largest units in the Air Force offers a dependable setting for the study. Examining the most current intelligence studies programs along with currently active members offers reliable content. Air Force intelligence professionals interested in the study will be exposed to the most recent information regarding enlisted and officers' experiences of career development within the intelligence field.

Transferability

Transferability means that the study has information that can be used in one context and then in another context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For my study, the focus is on one specific sample of 10 Air Force intelligence professionals in one operations group in the air force, but there is significant transferability across many operations groups, squadrons, and flights across the Air Force. The Career Field Education Training Plan (CFETP) for my study focuses on the 1A8X1 career field. However, every enlisted intelligence career field has a respective CFETP

that can be reviewed and informed by my study as well. As for the Talent Management Framework (TMF) that is used for intelligence officers in my study, the same TMF can apply to any other Air Force intelligence officer. The study achieves transferability through the applicable use for any Air Force intelligence professional in the Air Force, given the current, extensive, and specific descriptions of findings. Given the rich and extensive descriptions, this study serves as valuable insight for potentially thousands of Air Force intelligence professionals.