NEGOTIATING GENDERED EXPECTATIONS: THE BASIC SOCIAL PROCESSES OF WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

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ABSTRACT

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This research identifies the basic social processes for women in the military. Using grounded theory and feminist standpoint theories, I interviewed 38 active-duty and veteran service women. Feminist standpoint theories argue that within an institution, people who are the minority, oppressed, or disenfranchised will have a greater understanding of the institution than those who are privileged by it. Based on this understanding of feminist standpoint theories, this research argues that female service members will have a more expansive and diverse understanding of gender and military culture than male service members. I encouraged women to tell the story of their military experience and used analysis of narrative to identify the core categories of joining, learning, progressing, enduring, and ending. For women service members, the core variable of negotiating gendered expectations occurred throughout the basic social processes and primarily involved life choices, abilities, and sexual agency. This research serves as a forum for the lived experience of women in the military; through these articulations a set of particular standpoints regarding gender, war, and military culture emerge. Additionally, these data offer useful approaches to operating within male-dominated institutions and provide productive strategies for avoiding and challenging discrimination, harassment, and assault.
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CHAPTER I.
INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND RATIONALE

There are currently over 200,000 women service members in the United States military (Department of Defense, 2009). Women make up nearly 15% of U.S. military forces. Although women are barred from holding a specific set of military occupational specialties\(^1\) (MOS), they are nonetheless deeply integrated into every aspect of military life. While women service members carry weapons, engage in combat, and are awarded military decorations for gallantry, their suitability for military life and combat is still routinely up for question within a public discourse that insists on ignoring the material reality of women in military service. Communication scholars direct attention and analysis to specific women soldiers like captured prisoner of war (POW) Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch and disgraced Abu Ghraib guard PFC Lynndie England (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Lobasz, 2008; O’Connell, 2005; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Tucker & Walton, 2006), but little communication scholarship focuses on the everyday experiences of women service members\(^2\).

Underserved Population

In general, women service members and women veterans are an underserved and poorly understood population. In addition to the negative impacts of high military

\(^1\) MOS is the job one is assigned when entering the military.
\(^2\) The use of the term service member (rather than soldier) is due to differences among branches of the military. Each branch of the military (Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard) uses a unique title for both officers and enlisted service members. For example, an enlisted woman in the Army would be a soldier, while an enlisted woman in the Air Force would be an airman. Unless referring to research that specifically uses the term soldier for analysis, specific individuals (i.e. PFC Lynch, a soldier) or groups (i.e. the WAACS and the WACS were both corps in the Army, and therefore soldiers), the terms woman service member or enlisted woman will be utilized for the purposes of this research.
operational tempo in a war-time environment, research shows that service members have a greater likelihood of coming from a socio-economically disadvantaged background with multiple experiences of violence and trauma (before, during and after military service) than their civilian counterparts (Glantz, 2002; Martin, Rosen, Durand, Knudson & Stretch, 2000). Women service members, in particular, are exposed to circumstances linked to higher levels of abuse, violence, and trauma than civilian women. Recent scholarship sheds light on the particular vulnerabilities of female service members and veterans, which include sexual harassment, sexual assault, and post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g., Forgey & Badger, 2010; Kang, Dalager, Mahan, & Ishii, 2005); lack of access to health care (e.g., Albright, Gehrich, Buller, & Davis, 2005; Nielsen et al., 2009; Clemons, 2009); barriers to promotion (e.g., Herbert, 1998; Wolfe et al., 1998), homelessness (e.g. Gamache, Rosenheck, & Tessler, 2003; Tessler, Rosenheck, Gamache, 2001), and substance abuse (e.g., Brent, 2006; Davis & Wood, 1999).

Because the images of soldier, sailor, airmen, guardsmen, and marine have been so inextricably tied to notions about gender and masculinity, women are often neglected in general military services. Campaigns to address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – a massive problem for current service members – are overwhelmingly targeted at males. Materials to increase awareness of PTSD typically frame barriers to seeking help in terms of male needs and male issues. Additionally, identification and treatment of PTSD often neglects conditions of sexual assault and trauma; two of the leading causes of PTSD for women service members (Kang, Dalager, Mahan, & Ishii, 2005; Wolfe et al., 1998). Fontana and Rosenheck (1998) report that stress from sexual harassment and assault is “almost four times as influential in the development of PTSD as duty-related
stress” (¶ 2) for female service members. Once they become veterans, women continue to experience a lack of services (and sensitivity) in regard to women’s health issues (e.g., Bender, 2009; Brent, 2006). Veteran’s services designed by men for men are not structured in a way to service women veterans or women veterans with children. Additionally, women veterans are significantly more likely to be homeless than women nonveterans (Gamache, Rosenheck, Tessler, 2003; Tessler, Rosenheck, & Gamache, 2001).

Because of the gendered construction of military service, women service members provide a unique perspective for examining the performance, experience, and communication of gender within an institution defined by masculinity. In a pilot study I conducted (Hicks, 2009), women service members reported that they had experienced multiple exchanges in the workplace where stereotypical gendered expectations and negative attitudes concerning the appropriateness or suitability of women in the military were expressed. Although organizational and cultural hostility toward women is not a problem unique to the military, the particular character of the hostility in the military is different because the military is defined as a hypermasculine institution (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Rosen, Knudson, & Flancher, 2003). One must understand, however, that regardless of any fantasies that people hold, the military is first and foremost a job. And while there are a number of organizations and vocations that feature an environment hostile to women, there are very few organizations in the United States where it part of the culture to explicitly tell its female members you don’t belong here (Burke, 2004; Enloe, 1983; 2000; Herbert, 1998; Meyer, 1996). I imagine there are even fewer widely considered noble American institutions that foster
environments in which the likelihood of rape and sexual assault increases for female members.

Women service members suffer these inadequacies and vulnerabilities precisely because they occupy space that is defined by masculinity and the male body. In their scholarship on women service members, both Meyer (1996) and Herbert (1998) identify the ways in which the woman service member is troubled by not being male. Meyer’s work on the history of the Women’s Army Corps identifies sexual agency as a primary concern that emerges from placing the female body in a military uniform, while Herbert discusses the reductive and regulating identities that are imposed upon women service members.

In her 1996 book *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and power in the Women’s Army Corp during World War II*, Meyer details the integration of women into the armed forces. The creation of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in 1942, and later the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in 1943, allowed women to serve as soldiers in World War II. Myer details the prevailing notions of femininity that had to be negotiated in order to integrate women into military service and the need to establish ‘sexual respectability’ as the defining property of female soldiers to counter the sexual agency associated with male soldiers. She argues that sexual agency and masculinity are key features in soldier identity, and the presence of a female body violates expectations regarding sexual agency. Meyer claims that in 1942 sexual agency was primarily defined in terms of male behavior, and that male heterosexuality in the military was strongly tied to military life. Therefore, placing women in the Army raised questions regarding which aspects of military life they would embrace. The “masculinizing effect” (Meyers, 1996, p.
of military life was extended to the sexual behavior of women, leading people to wonder about the promiscuity and/or mannishness of the female soldier.

Herbert’s sociological study of the experiences of women service members also details the ways in which the female subject is punished for not subscribing to the gendered expectations upon which the military is built. In her 1998 book *Camouflage isn’t Only for Combat: Gender, Sexuality, and Women in the Military*, Herbert argues that traditional conceptualizations of masculinity that exist in the military institution have a number of detrimental impacts on women soldiers. Herbert offers that women who enter conventionally male institutions or historically male career paths endure unique threats to their identity and gender; including limited career advancement, pressure to prove their heterosexuality, and constraints on emotional or social relationships with others. Herbert further identifies the effects of perceptions of ‘deviant’ gender performance, and demonstrates how these practices impede integration and reduce military readiness levels.

In this study, I use collaborative interviews and narrative to examine the complex personal experiences of women service members in the United States military. Through this research I seek to establish foundational research about women service member experiences and provide insight into military institutional culture through the use of feminist standpoint theory. Additionally, because the military institution and military culture are built upon gendered discourses, this research examines places where the articulation of lived experience contradicts those gendered discourses and material reality compromises their authority. This study of the intersection of female bodies and service member identity offers insight into the construction of gender and alerts us to the discourses necessary for the perpetuation and maintenance of gender roles.
This research project is of particular significance because the number of women service members continues to grow at a rapid rate. In the decade (2003-2013) following operations Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the women veteran population is expected to double (Gamache, Rosenheck, & Tessler, 2003). Military and veteran services scramble to keep up with the needs of women service members, and enlisted women have become more vocal about the problems they face within the military institution. An enhanced public profile and aggressive advocacy for women service members and veterans creates a unique moment; a moment when we can observe material reality fragmenting those narratives that depend upon notions of masculinity to explain the glory, necessity, and logic of war. The woman service member occupies a space where material reality contests the symbolic world – where the romantic narrative of war needing men meets the material reality of war needing bodies.

I am uniquely knowledgeable about the experiences of women service members because I was enlisted in the United States Army from 2000 – 2005. My position as a veteran bolsters this research in a number of ways, namely that I bring new questions to research on female service members, that I am able to present and account for my own observations of military experience, and that the women interviewed engaged more deeply in the research process than they would have with a non-veteran. The issues of experience, rapport and depth should not be taken lightly. In investigating a particular cultural experience, one must have (or attain) an understanding of that culture (Hall, 1989). My experience of military hierarchy makes me a better instrument for research than someone who has no previous experience of military culture. My status as a veteran opened doors that would otherwise have remained shut – numerous participants
commented that they would not have spoken to me had I not been a veteran. Participants who were initially unaware of my veteran status changed the tone and depth of their explanation upon finding out that I was a veteran. I am convinced that the reason that participants would speak uninterrupted for thirty minutes or forty minutes was because they believed I understood what they were talking about. I was also able to incorporate my experiences as a female soldier into the interview process, and worked collaboratively with participants to discuss and make sense of what had happened.

The Relationship Between Gender and War

An historical examination of women in the military demonstrates that the construction of the female service member requires drastic conceptual management of gender, sexuality, masculinity, femininity, and war. Such extreme symbolic work alerts us to a subject position in need of investigation. Add to this the fact that little scholarship provides a platform for articulating the unique experiences of women service members, and we can see the importance of creating foundational research. From their occupation of an oppositional and contrary subject position, women service members provide insight into the performance of gender and the process of making knowledge intelligible. In other words, women service members occupy a subject position that often contradicts or expands the public understanding of both gender and war. Through interviews with women service members, I seek to highlight articulations of lived experience and examine the ability of these narratives to challenge and/or expand current assumptions about gender and war.

This research is important because people with experiences that challenge a number of dominant discourses are struggling to make their selves real. Women with
combat experience are immediately relegated to a position of circumstance; one that can easily be explained away by policy or a limited public understanding of war. In other words, the dominant understanding of military service is so tied into gender that the idea of a woman in combat is nearly unfathomable. This is a disservice to real experiences, but it is also an indicator of mass homo-social practices to glorify men and denigrate women. The predominant public understanding is that women can’t be in combat because only heroes are in combat and only men are heroes. Our cultural understandings of soldier, marine, airman, or sailor are defined by masculinity. Our hyper-patriotic cultural climate is informed by a fantasy of video game-like Aryan brute warriors waving the flag over inferior foreign lands while destroying enemies of the American way. In truth, the military is an organization; it is filled with paper pushers, truck drivers, cooks, and office managers – the nebbish (often male, sometimes female) and the warrior (often male, sometimes female) working side by side.

Despite this reality, the military remains a contested place for women. As military operations have expanded and the need for service members has increased, women have found themselves in positions they allegedly cannot occupy, performing roles they supposedly are incapable of executing. These contradictions alert us to gendered processes in defining military culture and making sense of war. Specifically, they shed light on the necessity of war for male supremacy, the centrality of war in defining masculinity and femininity, and the manner in which women service members reveal the constructed and performative (Butler, 1991; 2004) nature of gender.

Currently, women service members and veterans make up an ever-growing and increasingly vocal population of advocates. Their organizational objectives and various
mission statements reflect a growing awareness of the significance of gender in the military. For example, the slogan of American Women Veterans (AWV) is “Not every GI is a Joe!” Several organizations like AWV seek to call attention to the dominant understanding of military service and alter the way the public understands military identity and gender. Other organizations serve to increase awareness of Military Sexual Trauma (MST), PTSD, child custody issues in the military and veteran benefits and resources.

Over the past few years, a number of books and films have been devoted to the military and combat experiences of female service members in Iraq and Afghanistan. Documentaries like Lioness (2008) and books such as The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving in Iraq (2010), Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq (2008), The Girls Come Marching Home: Stories of Women Warriors Returning from the War in Iraq (2009), and Love My Rifle More than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army (2006) all deal with the experience of being female in the military, with some of the texts specifically focused on women in combat. These texts serve as indicators of a new need for representation – a forum for experiences that have not been adequately acknowledged.

Existing research within the military institution on women service members concentrates primarily on physiological issues (Bathalon et al., 2006), violence (Forgey, & Badger, 2010), and parenthood (Kelley et al., 2001). The majority of the research is collected through surveys used to identify and craft intervention strategies to increase military readiness for women service members. Readiness (specifically, mission readiness) is a ubiquitous term in the military. It refers to the multiple levels of standards
that must be met for mission accomplishment and war-fighting. These standards include physical fitness, adequate training, equipment care, family care plans\(^3\), necessary gear, and sufficient equipment. For example, pregnancy negatively impacts the service member’s ability to perform all duties; therefore pregnancy is a readiness issue. Although useful, this type of research does not directly investigate military culture or the general experiences of women service members within that culture. Additionally, the research rarely gives voice to the participants in the study. Existing research on women service members touches on issues that should be expanded through an inductive approach. Data interpretation in future research will benefit from foundational scholarship regarding how women experience the military culture.

Other research on women service members examines the discursive construction of gender and identity in military culture (Burke, 2004; Bristow, 1998; Enloe, 1983; Enloe, 2000, Gronnvoll, 2007; Holland, 2006; Howard & Prvidera, 2004; Lobasz, 2008; Meyer, 1996; O’Connell, 2005; Prividera & Howard, 2006). This scholarship employs sociology, rhetorical criticism and critical/cultural studies to interrogate the manner in which gender, masculinity, femininity, and women’s lives are manipulated and constructed in service to the military industrial complex (MIC). The MIC refers to the defense industry’s substantial and inescapable impact on public life. Our participation in the MIC is hidden through complacency and omission (Cloud, 1994; Ivie, 2007; Ottosen, 2009; Solomon, 2007). Beneath it all, the MIC forwards a discourse that war is natural and necessary. Video games, media analysis, even elementary textbooks all advance an understanding of war as an inevitable event. The language we use to talk about war and

\(^3\) Family Care Plan refers to the arrangements single and dual military (spouses who are both in the military) must make for the care of their dependents (minor children) in the case of deployment or mobilization.
combat is constructed in a way as to mask the material reality of war. Much of this type of research provides a crucial lens for making sense of larger issues within military culture, and serves to inform this study. However, my study seeks to collect articulations of lived experience and provide a forum for the voices of the participants; thereby contributing to existing scholarship from a different level and position – the experiences of service members as they make sense of them.

My research brings together ideas regarding gender, militarism, discourse and American cultural identity. In all, research on female service members is important because their experiences are at odds with the dominant sense-making system and they occupy an intra-oppositional and contrary subject position. Female service members reveal things about the construction of gender and their location is a site of multiple competing discourses. Their narratives provide insight into gender and hostility in organizational issues and offer strategies for advocacy. Additionally, developments in sexual harassment prevention and intervention and the treatment of PTSD would benefit from increased scholarship on the unique experiences of female service members.

**The Objectives of the Study**

My study uses grounded theory and feminist standpoint theory to examine the experiences of women in the military. I use interviews, field observations and personal narratives to understand the experiences of women service members. The aim of this research is to discover and explicate basic social processes of female military service. Grounded theory is well-suited to the study of women service members because it can thoroughly and meaningfully explore and explain an event, including the “consequences, conditions, [and] strategies” of an act (Glaser, 1978, p. 16). This methodology produces a
theory that is closely related to the data, has a good fit to the phenomena in question, and functions at a conceptual level that can be applied to other events (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). The methods of grounded theory “consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2).

In addition to grounded theory, feminist standpoint theory provides a theoretical framework for examining the unique experiences and knowledge that emerge from particular contexts. Feminist standpoint theories, including Collins’ (1986) concept of the outsider/within, assert that minority, oppressed, and/or marginalized members of an institution or culture will have a different and more expansive understanding than someone who is privileged by the culture or institution. Feminist standpoint theories and Collins’ outsider/within also influence the structure of the interviews, encouraging the sharing of narrative and collaborative work between myself and individual women service members.

Women service members occupy a unique and poorly understood subject position. Their experiences are routinely assumed, challenged, or exploited, but very rarely expressed from the service members themselves. From a communication standpoint, these narratives offer a unique opportunity for women service members to explore the way gender and culture influence experience and meaning. Because of the cultural and institutional understanding of service members and veterans as male, female service members encounter unique circumstances in the military. The experiences of women service members provide insight into institutional gender issues. In addition to their value for implementing policy change, these insights reflect the military culture
from the position of an outsider/within – from the position of the marginalized. This perspective is useful for examining the discursive construction and maintenance of gender within a culture. This research seeks to gather, analyze and present articulations of lived experience to better understand the basic social processes of women service members.
CHAPTER II.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research argues for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences of women in the military. Using grounded theory and feminist standpoint theory, this research endeavors to identify fundamental aspects of shared experience. In order to establish and examine the basic social processes of women in the military, it is important to examine existing scholarship. The literature regarding women in the military divides along several different areas of interest. To begin, gender and militarism are an important aspect of understanding the experiences of women in the military. Therefore, this review of literature examines the historical relationship between masculinity, femininity, and war. Additionally, this chapter reviews the substantial body of scholarship addressing contemporary representations of women in the military. Finally, this review focuses on epidemiological research, examining data regarding women service member satisfaction, challenges, health, and trauma.

War and Gender

War does strange things; it takes people from one existence into another. It ruptures the everyday, creating an environment of desperation and danger, but also opportunity. In this rupture, fiercely held norms concerning race, gender and class are abandoned in order to sustain whatever other aspects of social life are possible. World wars have led to enhanced access to citizenship for American men of color and, through providing service member wages to the dependents of black men, changed the economic structure of the American south. Military service made homosexuality a real thing – creating gay culture and community in the ports of New York and California. War time
work turned previously unskilled - and widely considered incapable - women into factory
workers and autonomous wage earners. The demands of war create new challenges to
social norms; most significantly, to gender norms.

A historical examination of women service members reveals that the concept of
war relies on strict gender divisions (Goldstein, 2001; see also Bristow, 1998; Costigliola,
1997; Elshtain, 1987; Ehrenreich, 1997; Enloe, 2000; Hoganson, 1998; Meyer, 1996;
Wills, 2000). For example, Elshtain (1987) uses the concept of the Warrior and the
Beautiful Soul to illustrate the dominant sense-making system for gender and military
identity. She argues that militarization of gender is crucial to compel men into military
service and women into maintaining the home front. Enloe (2000) offers a similar
analysis of gender, demonstrating that the militarization of women’s lives divides them
among a number of different positions such as steadfast wives, understanding
sweethearts, and available sex workers who provide military support. Goldstein (2001)
forwards an even more radical argument, offering that war and conflict are the primary
sources of gender difference.

Conflict and war are often conceptualized and communicated in gendered ways,
and gender is used to communicate military strength and issues of foreign policy
(Costigliola, 1997; Hoganson, 1998). Because soldiers fight wars (and soldiers are
traditionally men), the ‘enemy’ has historically been feminized or sexualized (Costigliola,
1997; Goldstein, 2001; Hoganson, 1998). Therefore, the military culture has long served
as a training ground for institutionalizing notions regarding gender and for defining
proper masculinity and femininity (Burke, 2004; Bristow, 1998; Enloe, 1983; Enloe,
2000). For example, much of the early cold war rhetoric framed communism in terms of homosexuality, deviant males, and soft masculinity (Costigliola, 1997).

Men are trained to be masculine so that they may fight in wars; women are trained to be feminine so that they may support the men. Lobasz (2008) observes that through film and television “images and tropes that proliferate in American public discourse on war, from the draft dodger and the embittered veteran to Private Benjamin and G. I. Jane, are intrinsically gendered” (p. 308); these images influence the viewers’ notions about masculinity and femininity, within or outside of the military culture. Therefore, war and military culture play a large role in constructing and maintaining gender norms across social contexts. Women are typically represented as victims to justify military aggression or prizes to reward military victory (Del Zotto, 2002; Goldstein, 2001). In the past, women were expected to produce good soldiers by raising masculine male children (Zeiger, 1996). Although women have a long association with war, it is usually as support, rarely as soldier. Because masculinity is inextricably tied to military service and the event of war (Del Zotto, 2002; Goldstein; 2001; Hoganson, 1998; Stables, 2003), the act of placing a female in a soldier’s uniform has troubling consequences (Meyer, 1996; Wills, 2000).

Research points to a paradox involved in naming a subject both female and soldier (Howard & Prividera, 2004; O’Connell, 2005; Lobasz, 2008; Meyer, 1996; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Tucker & Walton, 2006). This condition exists based on historical constructions of gender and war, and the various ways the feminine and the soldier have been drawn together and apart throughout the years. Wills (2000) examines the use of uniform and military costume for women in 1930s musical comedies and
explains that in the late nineteenth century, military costume was an acceptable manner in which to put women in “revealing outfits” and was “commonly understood as both erotic . . . and humorous” due to the allegedly outrageous and “ridiculous juxtaposition of women in masculine attire and military roles” (p. 318). Although women in uniform were fine for entertainment purposes, military-influenced women’s fashions were discouraged in day-to-day life. Researchers (Judson, 2003; Wills, 2000) note that women’s increased participation in the public sphere in the 1930s had a threatening effect on gender, and clothing that evoked any gender confusion (particularly military fashions) was “too close to men, and therefore threatening” (Wills, 2000, p. 320). Through this body of research we see a connection between war-time environments, increased female independence, and efforts to police gender norms.

In her discussion of the creation of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in 1942, and later the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in 1943, Meyer (1996) addresses the problem of women in uniform. Featuring syndicated cartoons from the 1940s to illustrate the public reaction to the new female soldier, Meyers introduces the two most common characterizations of military women: feather-brained or mannish. The threatening effect of compromised male gender norms reflected in the syndicated comics have men asking wives for money, performing women’s work, and being overshadowed by large, brutish women. The publications suggest that a unique and troubling circumstance is created by placing a female in a soldier’s uniform: she’s not man enough to do the job, or, even worse, she becomes the man.
Research on Contemporary Women Service Members

Scholarship that focuses on modern women service members tends to either come from within the military institution (as they are part of an easily surveyed population) or emerges from unique situations typically framed as stories of scandal or heroism. Research on women service members appears across a range of disciplines, and includes studies on health and organizational issues, pregnancy and parenting, sexual trauma, and media representations. Specifically, literature which focuses on female soldiers examines epidemiological or organizational matters (e.g., physical and medical health; job satisfaction and cohesion), readiness issues (e.g., the ability to accomplish mission objectives), the experience of hostility or violence (e.g., sexual harassment and assault), and the occasion of exceptional media events (e.g., PFCs Lynch and England).

Epidemiological and organizational data gathered within the military institution relate to military readiness and veteran issues, and typically do not offer a representative sample of women service members. Many institutional studies feature no distinction between male and female service members in their research focus. In other words, much of the existing research features an examination of both males and females with no focus on issues unique to gender. In these studies, females are invariably underrepresented. Because females make up around 15% of U.S. military forces, they have a weak presence in institutional research. In most cases oversampling of women (and often minorities) is necessary to make up a statistically significant amount of the study population. Otherwise, women tend to make up less than 15% of the sample populations. Therefore, within this type of research the data offer very little on women.
Research that does focus on issues unique to gender offers insight into how females count as ‘different’ in the military. For example, Nielsen et al. (2009) found pre-deployment medical evaluations and deployment gynecological health resources lacking for female service members. Wallace, Sheehan, and Yinong (2009) found a decrease in alcohol abuse among female veterans in comparison to veterans in the past. In their study of the frequency of painful urination (dysuria) in female service members, Albright, Gehrich, Buller, & Davis, (2005) found that female soldiers tend to avoid voiding during field exercises and irregular duties, perhaps because of their minority status or due to a lack of facilities. Evidence from interviews in this study also suggests that women avoid some latrine facilities out of fear of sexual assault. Soldier readiness (not to mention personal health) is therefore reduced for females who experience dysuria. In their examination of service member weight standards, Bathalon et al. (2006) conclude that weight for height allowances used to screen female soldiers are overly stringent, and are based on body measurements that are better suited to men. All of these articles highlighted existing standards and resources that are based on the male body, and offered strategies for altering the standards to provide resources and compliance for women.

Gender norms, marriage and parenting. Another substantial body of research which includes women service members focuses on issues of parenthood and marital status. Often this type of research is sponsored by a military branch or is conducted within the military institution – much like epidemiological and organizational studies. The interest in parenthood reflects the importance of readiness – the military needs to count on healthy, dependent-free bodies; pregnancies and the resulting children interfere with readiness. Issues of parent-child separation in military families (Applewhite &
Mays, 1996; Kelley et al., 2001), pregnancy and single parenthood (Thomas & Mottern, 2002; Uriell, 2004), and effects of pregnancy on careers (Thomas & Mottern, 2002) are an important dimension of research on female service members.

Much of the research on parenting and pregnancy reveals assumptions regarding gender norms and the differences between male and female parenting. Most hypotheses include a perception that separation or absence of the mother is a more distressing experience for a child than the separation or absence of the father. For example, while Applewhite and Mays found that “children do not appear more adversely affected by maternal separation than by paternal separation” (1996, p. 37), their hypothesis anticipated otherwise. Kelley et al. (2001) found no significant difference in behavioral indicators of Navy children with deployed mothers and Navy children of non-deployed mothers or civilian children, but their research was driven by the expectation that maternal absence has an extraordinary impact and that it differs substantially from paternal absence. Regardless of actual findings, research forwards an assumption that mothers are more important than fathers and assumes that the absence of a mother is much more potentially harmful than the absence of a father. This particular perspective is built upon assumptions regarding the proper place and social/family role of males and females and supports the belief that a natural order dictates that men are made for war and women are not.

Assumptions about gender norms are represented in the concept of sex-role egalitarianism in Forgey and Badger’s 2010 study of intimate partner violence (IPV) and married enlisted female service members. Sex-role egalitarianism is defined as “an attitude that enables one to respond to another individual independent of that other
individual’s gender” (p. 48). Forgey and Badger reason that sex-role egalitarianism is especially relevant in marriages between enlisted women and civilian males because the husband “is often in the role of following the wife’s employment and having more responsibility for the children” (p. 49); they also note that this situation occurs in a male-dominated culture and may impact the “amount of support available to both spouses who find themselves in reversed gender roles” (p. 49). Although the researchers found no relationship between scores on the sex-role egalitarianism (SRE) scale and IPV, it is interesting to note the assumptions about gender and military service in the study.

**Military sexual trauma.** Within research on the military, sexual harassment and sexual assault are often identified as Military Sexual Trauma. Military Sexual Trauma (MST) refers to the experience of sexual harassment or sexual assault in the military (Bell & Reardon, 2011). Despite the problematic choice of re-defining and obscuring details of specific forms of sexual harassment and assault, the term is necessary to identify a category of ailment or disability within the Veteran’s Administration benefit system. The VA defines MST as “sexual harassment that is threatening in character or physical assault of a sexual nature that occurred while the victim was in the military, regardless of geographic location of the trauma, gender of victim, or the relationship to the perpetrator” (as quoted in Suris & Lind, 2008, p. 250). MST is a strong risk factor for PTSD (Kang, Dalager, Mahan, & Ishii, 2005), particularly for women service members (Wolfe et al., 1998). One study suggests that women manage the trauma of combat more productively than the trauma of MST (Wolfe et al., 1998). While the term MST can be criticized for obscuring the complexity of different types of assault and harassment, it nevertheless is an important part of scholarship on women service members.
Sexual assault. Sexual assault continues to be a significant problem in the military. Murdoch and Nichol (1995) state that a history of sexual assault and sexual harassment while in the military is common among women veterans, noting that 25% of respondents (N=333) under 50 reported rape or attempted rape by a male co-worker or supervisor. The 2010 Department of Defense annual report showed an 11 percent increase in reports of sexual assault from 2009, with over 3,200 reports filed (Bumiller, 2010). Seeking an authoritative percentage for sexual assault is difficult, due to the fact that most research features sample populations that are not representative of the military as a whole. For instance, research will focus on sexual assault in specific war time environments or particular combat operations (Bell & Reardon, 2011: Street, Stafford, Mahan, & Hendricks, 2008) or on the experiences of those of a certain branch or duty status (Frayne et al., 1999; Sadler, Booth, Cook, & Doebbeling, 2003). Despite variation in sample populations, the high incidence of sexual assault is demonstrably clear.

A number of factors are associated with women’s risk of sexual assault in the military. Sadler et al. (2003) found that permissive leadership attitudes, unwanted sexual attention on duty, and accessibility of sleeping quarters were all associated with an increased likelihood of rape. Wolfe et al. (1998) found that rates of verbal sexual harassment, physical sexual harassment, and sexual assault are higher in wartime military populations than civilian populations and peacetime military populations. Bell and Reardon (2011) note that deployment environments, particularly between high-ranking and low-ranking individuals, are conducive to coercion.

Sexual harassment. Women service members experience high rates of sexual harassment (Firestone & Harris, 2003). Murdoch and Nichol (1995) note that 90% of
those surveyed (n = 333) under the age of 50 reported sexual harassment in the military. Like sexual assault, sexual harassment is linked to features of military culture which include hyper-masculinity and hostility toward women (Rosen, Knudson, & Flancher, 2003; Wolf et al., 1998). Wolf et al. (1998) suggest that “military settings may be prone to increased sexual aggression toward women” (p. 51) and that military culture typically is defined by factors strongly associated with increased likelihood of sexual harassment. Although sexual harassment in the civilian world and the military world are similar, the stakes can be considerably higher within the military culture. Bell and Reardon (2011) note that:

- not only may performance evaluations or promotions be at stake, but there may also be the possibility of receiving less hazardous duty assignments or ensuring that someone “has your back” during combat encounters. One other point to consider is that even more than in the civilian work world, the strict hierarchy and chain of command in the military can create ample opportunities for coercion, particularly in deployment situations where service members may be far from outside sources of help. (p. 37)

Primarily male leadership, isolation, strict hierarchy, women performing traditionally male-identified work (Nye, Brummel, & Drasgow, 2009), and a war time climate (Wolfe et al., 1998) are all factors that are associated with sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment frequently goes unreported or undisciplined in the military. In her study of midshipmen at an elite naval academy, Pershing (2003) found that sexual harassment is frequent and problematic and that it goes unreported because women believe that no action will be taken and that they will be the targets for isolation and
retaliation. Vijayasiri (2008) notes that trust “impacts victim decisions to file complaints” and poor handling perpetuates a climate of distrust (p. 43). Because of the military chain of command policy in handling sexual harassment, women are discouraged from reporting inappropriate or abusive behavior for fear it will be poorly handled. When dealing with sexual harassment, the military insists on an emphasis on the individual over the institution (Pershing, 2003; Vijayasiri, 2008) creating a negative situation for the person reporting harassment.

In the Murdoch and Nichol (1995) study, women veterans over the age of 50 reported lower rates of harassment (37%) than those under 50 (90%). Increase in reports of sexual harassment may be due to increased awareness, but also might be a reflection of the status of women in the military. From a historical perspective, the invention, introduction, and maintenance of the female service member was highly monitored; in the past, women were segregated from men, rarely reported to male superiors, and were assigned to “gender appropriate” occupations. Therefore, there were significantly fewer females working in gender integrated environments. Fewer women in the military (and fewer women around men) may have, in the past, had a pedestal effect that reduced the likelihood of experiencing a hostile environment.
Social Science and Rhetorical Perspective

Apart from epidemiological data and experiences of trauma, research on female service members tends to focus on sociological issues within the military institution or rhetorical matters in military representation. For example, enlistment motivations for women are strongly related to professional and personal aspirations. In his study of service members in Honduras, Moskos (1985) notes that women “seemed to have more independent and adventurous personalities than the men” (p. 29), and that women joined the military to do something different or escape boring or dead-end careers. For most men, Moskos notes, joining the military is seen as inevitability. Meyer (1996) also notes adventure and independence as two of the primary motivators for females joining military service during World War II. Meyer argues that at the time military service was one of the few opportunities for women to engage in the public sphere without familial supervision.

Both Herbert (1998) and Meyer (1996) develop the ideas of sexual respectability and pressure to perform heterosexuality and femininity. Herbert argues that traditional conceptualizations of masculinity that exist in the military institution have a number of detrimental impacts on female soldiers. Herbert offers that women who enter conventionally male institutions or career paths endure unique threats to their identity and gender including limited career advancement, pressure to prove their heterosexuality, and constraints on emotional or social relationships with others. Meyer’s research on the creation of the Women’s Army Corp also focuses on the prevailing notions of femininity that must be negotiated to integrate women into military service and the need to establish ‘sexual respectability’ as the defining property of female soldiers.
Rhetorical criticism is helpful in assessing gendered processes because it identifies and explores the particular constructions used to represent gender. In doing so, rhetoric makes visible assumptions and contradictions regarding gender portrayals. A significant amount of research on female service members examines the construction of gender, the rhetoric of war and the influence of the military industrial complex. The issue of language choices and specialized language is extremely important to the rhetorical criticism of militarization and gender.

Discourse is the manner in which we conceptualize and communicate a phenomenon or issue or action. Many studies on women service members focus on the concept that discourse is often gendered (Clark, 2004; Cohn, 1987; Wildermuth, 2007). In her analysis of the discourse of defense intellectuals, Cohn (1987) identifies the ways in which ideology regarding gender is used in nuclear weapons discourse. This type of rhetoric includes sexual imagery, references to male birth, conceptualization of domestic relationships, and religious imagery. In a militarized culture, bad and/or undesirable things tend to be feminized. Wildermuth (2007) demonstrates this feminization of the undesirable in his analysis of the misogynist trope found in The Manchurian Candidate which associated technology and manipulation with femininity. Sadler (1999) explores the interaction between technology, gender, language and organizational culture in her investigation of the death of a female Navy pilot.

Recent rhetorical and critical/cultural analysis of media representation has focused on events which emerged from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). PFC Jessica Lynch, Specialist (SPC) Shoshanna Johnson, PFC Lori Piestewa, and PFC Lynndie England are important figures to consider when
discussing media representations of women in the military, and a brief review of their history is necessary. In late March of 2003, only three days after the invasion of Iraq, a convoy of soldiers from the 507th Maintenance Company made a series of wrong turns and was ambushed by Iraqi forces near Nasiriyah. The event was remarkable for a number of reasons: it made apparent the vulnerability of American military forces, it included a number of soldiers who were not supposed to occupy combat zones, and it resulted in the capture of a large number of service members. Those who had been reassured that American forces would be welcomed as liberators did not anticipate a POW situation, and they certainly didn’t expect one that involved a blonde teenager from West Virginia.

Extensive media coverage was dedicated to the missing soldiers of the 507th in the week that followed the ambush, but one soldier in particular received the vast majority of attention. PFC Jessica Lynch, the ‘teenager’ in question, was featured prominently in media reports on the 507th. Today, the saga of PFC Lynch is well-known; her capture, her rescue, and the controversy that followed, along with the reasons explaining why she served as the focus of media (and Pentagon) attention. Young, feminine, and blonde, Lynch stood out as a figure around which a compelling story could be built. She served as the easy protagonist for a classic tale of American spirit and Middle Eastern barbarianism. However, several other soldiers were missing along with PFC Lynch, including SPC Shoshanna Jackson (an African-American woman) and PFC Lori Piestewa, a Hopi-Navajo woman who would become the first female service member to die in combat in the Iraq war. While SPC Jackson and PFCs Jessica Lynch and Lori Piestewa were involved in the 2003 convoy ambush, PFC Lynndie England is associated
with torture and abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison. Through PFC England we have another example of how women are highlighted; she was the female guard featured in several photos that depicted prisoners being abused at Abu Ghraib.

The capture and rescue of PFC Jessica Lynch and the outrage that followed PFC Lynndie England led to scholarship that examines how femininity is represented within the context of military culture. Researchers argue that coverage of PFC Lynch relied on hero and captive archetypes (Howard & Prividera, 2004; O’Connell, 2005; Tucker & Walton, 2006) and consistently emphasized her status as civilian rather than soldier. Lobasz (2008) discusses archetypes and sexuality and argues that media coverage of PFCs Jessica Lynch and Lynndie England followed two predominant gendered images: that of the woman in peril and that of the ruined woman. Recall that both PFCs Lynch and England came from the same economically depressed place (the Appalachia region). Both PFCs enlisted in the military to secure stability and a better life. However, in the media telling of their stories the two females were divorced from their similarities and sorted into the available archetypes. Lynch’s whiteness and femininity, along with Lynndie England’s alleged promiscuity and poverty (Lobasz, 2008; Tucker & Walton, 2006), were used to represent ideas about war and America (Howard & Prividera, 2004; O’Connell, 2005).

Race also plays a role in media representations of female service members. The intersection of the uniform and gender is complicated by race. While the uniform offers a type of masculine power to the female body, it also threatens the femininity of the female body (Meyer, 1996; Wills, 2000). Race has a similar effect, erasing femininity from a female body of color. While PFC Lynch’s story found a suitable way to be told, the
stories of SPC Shoshana Johnson and PFC Lori Piestewa did not. SPC Johnson, an
African American woman and PFC Piestewa, a Native American woman, received
relatively little coverage in comparison to PFC Lynch.

Providera and Howard (2006) claim that the media representations observe
“traditional gendered and raced ideologies” (p. 37) in portrayals of military culture and
identity and note that the differences between media coverage of Jessica Lynch and that
of Lori Piestewa or Shoshana Johnson was in service to a “white patriarchal ideology that
hierarchically organizes and marginalizes women of color and white women” (p. 33). The
authors explain that in media stories of the three females, their attributes of femininity
(good and bad) were emphasized and their identities as soldiers were erased. These
themes of femininity also include traditional notions of (and deviations from) female
citizenship, most notably Piestewa and Johnson’s position as ‘single mothers’. Piestewa
was also marginalized according to her relationship with the White Lynch. All three
females are explained by the media in terms of their relationships to others, a practice that
erases the soldier identities of the women.

An aspect of Lynch that was never emphasized, but always present, was her
whiteness. This is evident in the coverage of Johnson and Piestewa that constructed their
identities according to race. Piestewa was especially marked by her race and gender in
media coverage. Often described as the first Native American woman killed in combat,
Piestewa’s identity is raced, then gendered, but never soldiered. She becomes, in most
media coverage, a civilian. SPC Shoshana Johnson also provided a better fit to the
warrior archetype than PFC Lynch. Johnson, wounded in combat (that she engaged in),
spent twice as long in captivity than did Lynch, yet received a margin of the media
attention. Prividera and Howard (2006) argue that she received less media attention because she is African American and did not fit easily into archetypal hero narratives. Additionally, media coverage consistently referred to Johnson and the other soldiers in the unit as *found* rather than *rescued*. Prividera and Howard assert that the “racial identities” of Johnson and Piestewa “were not congruent with the American image” (p. 35) of women, and therefore had low visibility in the media.

Prividera and Howard (2006) argue that media portrayals of PFC Lynch following the attack on the 507th Ordinance Maintenance Company during OIF marginalized femininity and ethnicity while promoting and privileging masculinity and Whiteness. The authors claim that the media representations observe “traditional gendered and raced ideologies” (p. 37) in portrayals of military culture and identity. Researchers note that social expectations and assumptions compromise the potential legitimacy of the female soldier, and that the American media tells stories about the military using archetypal models of gender and race. Scholars found that coverage of the 507th could be organized according to themes of femininity and traditional female citizenship, whiteness and stories that supported nationalism (Del Zotto, 2002; Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Lobasz, 2008; O’Connell, 2005; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Tucker & Walton, 2006). Through rhetorical analysis, Howard and Prividera (2004) suggest that Lynch is labeled a hero not for valor, but for providing *opportunity* for valor to men. These themes of citizenship, Whiteness and nationalism serve as important entry points for analysis of representations of military identity and culture.

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4 It should be noted in her book “I’m Still Standing” Johnson distances herself from this particular kind of assessment.
Summary of Literature

In all, the literature on female service members and the militaristic use of gender demonstrates that military culture is disrupted by a female body that does not fulfill a “proper” subject position. We can see this assessment in epidemiological data as well as in rhetorical analysis; in the lack of resources for female service members as well as in the unique rhetorical strategies found in their media representations. We see that gender norms guide the way that female service members are conceptualized in research, and that these norms support larger assumptions about the “proper” role of women in general. These gender norms occupy a significant space in the public discourse. Debate over whether females should be allowed to serve combat roles completely disregards the fact that they already do; arguments about whether or not women should be allowed to serve in the military at all are made by people who are not women in the military. Clearly, the presence of females in military service challenges a number of dearly-held narratives about military service and war-fighting. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate these experiences that bring about so much fracture in our dominant understandings of gender, the military and war.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The epistemological assumptions that guide my communication research interests include the understanding that meaning is constructed through our interactions with each other and the world. This condition of meaning-making results in multiple and diverse experiences which constitute multiple realities with different knowledge systems. Within this position is the idea that meaning and knowledge are built from experience, and that experience is “not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or
felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that
about which knowledge is produced” (Scott, 1992, p. 26). A social constructionist
epistemology is productive for the study of communication because it acknowledges
multiple lived realities and because it regards communication as a co-constructed activity.

**Social Constructionism**

Social constructionism is necessary for the study of communication because it
acknowledges multiple experiences of reality. At its core, “constructionism is the basis
for considering reality to be multiple, contingent, and subordinate rather than singular,
independent, and autonomous” (Anderson, 1996, p. 37). This position assumes that
knowledge is a “product of symbolic interaction within social groups . . . reality is
socially constructed and a product of group and cultural life” (Littlejohn, 1996. p. 34).
Because meaning is a product of interaction, multiple realities are constructed through
various conditions and contexts.

A premise of social constructionism is that meaning and reality are inextricably
tied, and that meaning is created through our relationships in the world. The symbol/sign
system we utilize to make sense of the world shifts according to context, culture, power,
and any other meaningful influence. The important matters people are marked by, the
things that create difference – create reality – are social constructions that influence how
people make sense of the world and organize the meanings they make. Hence, we find
multiple realities created through multiple contexts. With a social constructionist
perspective, “meaning is constructed, not passively given, and . . . creation happens in
and through interaction with others and the culture” (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007,
p.51). The consequence of this interaction and construction is the creation of multiple
knowledge systems; these systems develop according to the nature of our location within various social constructions. This perspective is necessary for examining the location of female service members within the military culture.

**Feminist Standpoint Theories**

At a fundamental level, feminist theories challenge both the application of a traditional scientific model to human experiences and the legitimacy of a singular, authoritative representation of reason. Feminist theories are not about a physical, observable, measurable, predictable, and above all, universally knowable world; instead, they are about an experience of the world. Sandra Harding offers that feminist knowledge is generated by “starting off thought from a contradictory social position” (2004b, p. 134) and Donna Haraway reminds us that as theorists, “we are not in charge of the world” (2010, p. 379); rather, we seek to explore how the world is understood. Different subject positions (like those of women service members) give us a unique perspective on how the world is understood.

Unlike a constructionist perspective, traditional procedures adopted from a positivist or post-positivist position using the hypothetico-deductive method are based on the assumption that we *are* in charge of the world, and that there is only one universal position with a singular vision of the world. According to Haraway, “feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject with (at least) double vision” (2010, p. 376). Feminist theories insist that there is no singular experience of the world – instead, one’s experience of the world is determined by socio-economic standing, culture, skin color, ethnicity, allegiance, reproductive choices (or the denial thereof), affiliation, biological sex, gender,
gender of object choice, resources, and the cruelty or decency (respectively) of those in power. One set of theories that exemplify this idea are feminist standpoint theories.

Feminist standpoint theories emerged from research in the 1970s and early 1980s. Generally traced to key ideas which emerged across several disciplines in work done by Dorothy E. Smith (2004a), Donna Haraway (2010), Nancy Hartsock (2004a) and Hilary Rose (2004), early standpoint theories found the too-easy fit between the desires of the dominant culture and the manner in which theory was conceptualized as fairly dubious. In the beginning stages, standpoint theory was the recognition that someone (and that particular someone’s view of the world) served as the center and authority of knowledge. A feminist standpoint theory argues that “people develop different perspectives based on their position in society” and that “women have a distinct standpoint because of the power differential between females and males in our society” (Krane, 2001, p. 403).

Overall, feminist standpoint theories emerged as “a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practice of power” (Harding, 2004a, p. 1) and provide theories designed to examine how power works (Naples, 2003).

The emphasis on ‘how power works’ is important. One of the primary controversies in feminist standpoint theories is the question of what is achieved through this framework. Heckman (2004) argues that feminist standpoint theory claims a place of privilege where the “truth of social reality” (p. 227) is revealed. According to Heckman, if we follow the theory to its logical conclusion, then we are required to assess the differences between standpoints to determine the most oppressed and therefore most knowledgeable position. In response to Heckman’s critique, several theorists (Harding, 2004c, Hartsock, 2004b; Collins, 2004, Smith, 2004b) respond that feminist standpoint
theories do not pursue a position of the *most* ‘truth’, but instead endeavor to understand the way power operates and in the process produces *more* ‘truth’. Through the narratives of female service members we can anticipate articulations of lived experience that (a) do not match the dominant discourses circulating within our culture and (b) will generate more knowledge.

As feminist standpoint theories have been developed and contested, several key epistemological features have emerged. First, a feminist standpoint theory understands that knowledge is situated (Haraway, 2010; Harding, 2008; Krane, 2001). As opposed to a positivist epistemology, which would argue that (a) there is one singular experience of the world and that (b) the resulting knowledge would reflect a universal truth, situated knowledge counters that we occupy subjectivities that produce a unique understanding of the world (Harding, 2008). Second, a feminist standpoint theory works upon the assumption that the world is socially constructed (Krane, 2001). Because our experience of the world is socially constructed and because we experience the world according to our subjectivity, we can then argue that there are in fact multiple standpoints. Third, a feminist standpoint insists that gender is important and must serve as a primary concept for analysis (Hartsock, 2004a; Krane, 2001). Although feminist standpoint theories also work to incorporate other subject positions into a standpoint perspective, the matter of gender is always a fundamental aspect of a feminist standpoint theory. Fourth, a feminist standpoint gives credence to lived experience (Krane, 2001; Naples, 2003; Rice, 2009). Because of the position of traditional science in terms of what counts as data, feminist standpoint theories emphasize the importance of embodied experience in generating new knowledge.
A superficial reading of feminist standpoint theories could fall victim to oversimplification or lead to charges of relativism or solipsism. However, feminist theorists agree that a feminist standpoint theory is an achievement, not a given (Hartsock, 2004a; Naples, 2003). In other words, merely occupying a place of marginalization or disempowerment does not automatically provide one with a standpoint. Harding (2004b) notes that beginning from the lives of marginalized people “will generate illuminating critical questions that do not arise in thought that begins from dominant group lives” (p. 128). It is through consciousness, investigation, and articulation that one achieves a standpoint. An achieved standpoint is one that is aware and reflexive; one that is able to identify the unique experiences that are engendered by occupying a particular subjectivity within a system of power. Additionally, this achieved standpoint is not merely a theory of the self (which would be a form of solipsism), nor is it an argument that relativizes knowledge. Instead, it is theorizing from a position of many (Collins, 2004) and it is the production of more knowledge rather than the destabilization of any and all knowledge.

The idea of more knowledge is a key aspect for defending and developing feminist standpoint theories. Beginning with Patricia Hill Collins’ observations that in the lives of Afro-American women, outsider/within status provides “a special standpoint on self, family, and society” (1986, p. S14), standpoint theories develop an enhanced understanding of marginalization. Collins argues that some members of a society are afforded a greater vantage point of others (and themselves) precisely because of extreme discrepancies in power and privilege. That which remains invisible and taken for granted by those in power becomes clear to those who witness all the effort that goes into naturalizing supremacy and oppression. Chela Sandoval builds this idea of more
knowledgeable vantage points in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000). Sandoval argues that those living marginalized lives within dominant culture have long understood the fractures and oppositions brought about by the postmodern condition\(^5\) because they have always lived according to those terms. Sandoval argues that those who have been forced to live under the influence of a dominant culture develop survival strategies and ways of making sense of the world that could be beneficial to everyone.

Feminist standpoint theories begin with the assumption that those marginalized or oppressed by a dominant culture have, in fact, a greater resource of knowledge than those in power. This is an important consideration for moving through assumptions of early work toward current feminist standpoint theories because of the way ‘the oppressed, marginalized, and disempowered’ are conceptualized. If we argue that to be oppressed produces a particular *standpoint*, then it is important to recognize how people and communities are organized around their alleged shared position. For example, to read Hartsock’s use of Marxian theory and class relations as an articulation of a feminist standpoint is to see the category of ‘woman’ unified into one position consistently exploited for labor and capital in a particular way. In this sense, woman becomes a position with no internal diversity of experience.

Early claims of ‘woman’ as a position from which to speak with authority were met with important critiques. In the development of feminist standpoint theories - similar to the defining features of second wave feminism - the importance of (and differences between) gender, race, sexuality, and class emerge. In her discussion of objectivity in standpoint epistemology, Harding (2004b) argues that anyone who struggles for

\(^5\) Although this study does not operate within a postmodern paradigm, I am concerned with the break down of dominant narratives. Sandoval’s work, although considered postmodernist, is still useful for examining the fracturing of dominant discourse.
liberation must learn to recognize how gender, race, sexuality and class are used to construct each other. This claim is a precursor to the importance of intersectionality, a concept that addresses the impact of race, class and sexuality on gender.

**Intersectionality and feminist standpoint theories.** Intersectionality is the term introduced by Kimberly Williams Crenshaw (1991) to conceptualize the fact that all types of oppression do not occur on “mutually exclusive terrains” (p. 1242). Because feminist standpoint theory includes the understanding that we begin from a point of marginalization and start to ask questions, intersectionality becomes an important concept in the development and practice of a feminist standpoint theory. Because feminist standpoint theory forwards the argument that as groups or communities, people are oppressed by their marginalized relationship to the dominant culture, it is then reasonable to claim that feminist standpoint theories claim that ‘women’ serves as an oppressed group – or at least a group with a different perspective from that of men. This brings us to what can be perceived as a fundamental obstacle between standpoint theory and intersectionality: the inability to account for differences within a marginalized group.

Although it may seem that standpoint theory and intersectionality could be at odds with each other, I believe that intersectionality functions as an extension of a standpoint framework. It takes good ideas to generate great ideas; feminist standpoint theory is necessary in order to arrive at the particular challenges inherent in intersectionality. As Sandra Harding (2004b) notes:

> standpoint theory itself is a historical emergent. There are good reasons why it has not emerged at other times in history; no doubt it will be replaced by more useful epistemologies in the future – the fate of all human products. (p. 131)
A number of theorists identified the need for addressing various intersections within early feminist standpoint theory (Collins, 1986; Collins, 2004; Harding, 2004b; Jaggar, 2004). Harding (2004b) notes that “feminist thought is forced to ‘speak as’ and on behalf of the very notion it criticizes and tries to dismantle – women. It is “the contradictory nature of this project” that Harding identifies as both a challenge and a source of creativity (p. 130).

Intersectionality addresses the fact that “oppression is not monocausal; rather, forms of oppression can intersect in unique and plural ways” (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 223). These unique and plural ways only identify new locations for multiple standpoints; a more complicated version than the one we might recognize from, for example, Harstock’s Marxian work that argues a universal standpoint for women. Harstock’s initial analysis contributed to making intersectionality possible by forwarding a theoretical framework that could be challenged and expanded. In creating a standpoint from different intersections, we also create enhanced opportunities for recognition and coalition. Several theorists argue that in identifying and achieving a standpoint, we identify similarities between other experiences and other marginalized subjectivities (Anzaldúa, 2010; Braidotti, 2006; Sandoval, 2007). These similarities create a resource not only for coalition, but also for a perspective that may highlight privileges of one subject position over another. This awareness creates an opportunity for a re-ordering and sharing of privilege.

The concept of intersectionality is employed in my dissertation study design and method, and an awareness of it informs my analysis. Approximately 15 % of U.S. military forces are made up of females; roughly half of them are women of color
(Department of Defense, 2009). Incorporation of intersectionality into my research begins with the clear understanding that the experiences of female service members are not united exclusively by gender. In other words, research on the experiences of female service members will not result in a monolithic female experience. This understanding affects both my study design and my method. Because the use of grounded theory means gathering and analyzing data simultaneously, intersectionality (and feminist standpoint theory) prevents me from any practices in interviewing and theoretical sampling that favor the perspective of one woman over another. Intersectionality also alerts me to the possibility that experiences of the military institution and culture are shaped just as much by dimensions of class, sexuality, culture, and race as they are by gender.

Historically, in feminist theory and social science, the experience of women has been based on a largely middle class and primarily White, Western perspective. Progress in feminist theory and developments in intersectionality have demonstrated the importance of avoiding generalizations about gender that construct female as white; this understanding influences the research I conduct. Intersectionality provides me with a resource to identify the impact that class, race, ethnicity, sexuality have on the experiences of women in the military.

Summary

Overall, social constructivism and feminist theory provide a useful perspective for examining the experiences of female service members. Feminist standpoint theory provides a theoretical framework for identifying and analyzing experiences that are not within the sense-making system of the dominant culture. Additionally, the methodological implications of feminist standpoint theory are well-suited for the
demands and objectives of this particular study. A feminist standpoint framework recognizes the importance of historical and social context, ethical research practices, collaborative and useful research, reflexivity, and transparency, and also encourages me to be sensitive and alert to issues of intersectionality.

The epistemological position that directs my research assumes that meaning is constructed and that this condition results in multiple realities made up of varying knowledge systems. Enhancing this position is my understanding that people who go where they don’t belong and occupy spaces that are not intended for them will have insight into the discursive and material efforts that go into upholding the naturalization of an institution. This is the understanding of feminist standpoint theory that I bring to my research project on the experiences of female service members.

The integration of feminist standpoint theory into my research project occurs on several different conceptual levels. Specifically, Harding’s idea of starting from other people’s lives and Collins’ concept of the outsider within guide the focus of my research. I offer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the experiences of women service members?
RQ2: How do women service members describe military institutional culture?
RQ3a: What are the standpoints of women service members?
RQ3b: How does intersectionality impact the standpoint of women service members?
RQ4: The military institution and military culture are built upon gendered discourses – what happens when the articulation of lived experience contradicts those discourses and material reality compromises their authority?
CHAPTER III.  
METHODOLOGY

I use feminist standpoint theory and grounded theory to create a more thorough and dynamic understanding of the experiences of women in the military. The feminist ethics that guide the methodological assumptions of my framework and my approach are well-suited to the study of an under-represented and vulnerable population. These assumptions include ethical research that is collaborative and reflexive. In this chapter, I discuss these assumptions and then share a reflection of my own experience – as a soldier and as an interviewer – to provide the reader with insight into my standpoint. Finally, I provide an in-depth explanation of grounded theory and the procedures used for this study.

The methodological implications of feminist standpoint theories that impact my research include accounting for historical and social context (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Harding, 2004b), committing to the practice of ethical research (Kirsch, 1999), creating a collaborative space with participants (Mahoney, 2007; Rice, 2009), producing research for the community I study (Fine et al., 2000; Kirsch, 1999), practicing reflexivity and transparency (Kirsch, 1999; Finley, 2002; Mahoney, 2007; Subedi & Rhee, 2008), and documenting the process and choices in my method use (Finley, 2002; Subedi & Rhee, 2008).

Accounting for historical and social context entails believing that knowledge is socially produced and cannot be divorced from the conditions under which it is constructed. For example, in their set of questions designed to help researchers reflect on both the process of research and the representation of data, Fine et al. (2000) prompt
scholars to ask if “set of historic, structural, and economic relations in which they are situated” (p. 126) are connected to the narratives used in research. This examination of historical and social context is necessary in the investigation of the introduction, construction and maintenance of the female service member subject. The ways in which women were integrated into military service have an impact on contemporary understandings of women in the military.

Committing to the practice of ethical research means vigilance in the collection, use, and representation of data from personal narratives (Kirsch, 1999). Fine et al. (2000) encourage us to consider how our data “could be used for progressive, conservative, [or] repressive social policies” and to ask “who is rendered vulnerable . . . or exposed by these analyses?” (p. 127). On a micro level, ethical research practices are about being sensitive to the position of the participant and anticipating and avoiding any interaction that would be potentially damaging or distressing (Kirsch, 1999). On a macro level, ethical research practices take into consideration the possible uses of the research and consider potential harms. Ethical research also includes an interview style that encourages power sharing and collaboration, and avoids leading questions or forced answers.

Transparency involves accounting for my position within the study and documenting my research and analysis experience. Subedi and Rhee (2008) state that “an ethical, collaborative approach to research recognizes that research methods are often learned in the field and that participants often influence how researchers practice their craft” (p. 1075). They go on to argue that “appropriate methods of research are un/learned in fieldwork” (p. 1087) and that we have an obligation as scholars to share them with a larger community.
Reflexivity

Reflexivity has become a central part of feminist and qualitative research, as well as grounded theory practices (Finlay, 2003; Kirsch, 1999; Naples, 2003). Reflexivity refers to the practice of reflecting upon and articulating the way one’s position may influence their data collection and analysis. Finlay (2002) defines reflexivity as “the project of examining how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research” (p. 210). Reflexivity is important because it reveals areas of significant influence in the research that might not otherwise have been brought to light. Reflexivity follows two of the primary assumptions of feminist standpoint theory; that knowledge is constructed and that the position of the central authority should be transparent. Reflexivity provides a methodological tool for acknowledging construction and position. It provides a resource for what Harding calls “strong objectivity”; the process of locating research in historical and social conditions in an effort to make it fully accountable (2004b).

Reflexivity is important for qualitative work because it provides a resource for tracking and sharing important research moments. Reflexivity provides insight into the experience and process of research and may include: examination of the dynamics created through a particular interview style, documentation of choices that impact the research, explanation of the researcher’s perspective in the research process, and description of the unique features of one particular research moment. Reflexivity is important in grounded theory because of the emphasis on the researcher as instrument, and because of the centrality of memoing. The grounded theory method relies on extensive memoing to provide the researcher with a resource for reflection and concept
development outside the process of coding. Memoing in grounded theory is generally meant to capture insight into the data and emerging themes, but it can also be used to reflect upon the process of doing research.

Overall, reflexivity makes immensely positive contributions to scholarship. In general, reflexivity alerts researchers to practices that impact the collection and/or interpretation of data. Therefore, reflexivity is necessary for explaining conditions and perspectives in the generation of scientific knowledge. However, reflexivity can also be poorly incorporated into research, resulting in findings that are over-burdened with reflection. Kirsch (1999) points to the problem of “author-saturated texts”, claiming that research that incorporates too much of an author’s voice can be “shallow and perfunctory” or “self-indulgent and narcissistic” (p. 77). Kirsch’s remarks are targeted specifically at autoethnography, but they are applicable to any writing or analysis that relies heavily on the author’s voice outside of data collection and analysis. Reflexivity can also dissolve into self-analysis. Further, reflexivity that uses the idea of power as an analytic tool may further oppression through conceptualizations of authority and accountability (Naples, 2003).

To avoid the problems of superficiality, self-indulgence, and undue influence, my research incorporates my perspective, but not my authority. As a research, I understand that feminist standpoint theories privilege each experience, yet situate it in its own social context. To battle superficiality, I focus on the narratives of others rather than myself. I do not envision my own experience as a position of authority from where I judge the narratives of my participants. The methodological implications of feminist standpoint theory require me to document (a) my reflections on the experience of doing research and
(b) my insights on how my position influences the direction and design of my study. With that said, I believe the best strategy for employing reflexivity in my dissertation study design is to begin with my position as a veteran and as a researcher. The following is a reflexive exercise from my pilot study and serves to demonstrate my position, perspective, and sense-making in the research process:

I wanted to know, so I checked the speaker phone on my cellular and recorded with a borrowed device and called 5 women to ask.

Intro Paragraph (Here are my research questions)

Question #1. What is it like to be a female soldier?

Transformed into:
“What’s it like to be a female Airmen?” (Because that’s Air Force enlisted; regardless of gender, an enlisted person is an airmen. Dig?)

Or transformed into:
“Alright. What is it like to be a female soldier?” And she says “I guess, I mean really it depends on the person also I think and my assignments haven’t really been assignments that have kind of underscored the fact that I’m a female” and there’s more that she says that doesn’t answer the question and round and round she comes to
“But I don’t think that” PAUSE
“I don’t think that I’ve had” PAUSE
“What was the question again? It was challenges as a female soldier? Or what do I . . .?”

And I say
“No. Just, what’s it like to be a female soldier?”

“You’re outnumbered a lot.” Is her simple, beautiful response.

Or transformed into:
“Um, can you tell me what it is like to be a female soldier?”
And she follows suit with both my um and my symbolic semantic doubt (can you tell me? can you?) saying:
“ Um” PAUSE
“As opposed to uh male soldiers?”
(And my response is cheery and encouraging)
“Sure!”
(Whatever you want! However it sounds! Because I don’t want to lead you! I don’t want to imply that you maybe should have thought of this at one point in your life! Sure! However you interpret it! I’m friendly and you can do no wrong!)

“Um” PAUSE
“I guess I really don’t know how to answer that question, um I don’t know”.

Next fan-tastic, well-thought out question:

Question number 2. How do you see yourself represented in the media?

Sadly, question 2 was not a viable creature, able to crawl and feed on its own. It had to become the 3rd person.

2. “Ok ah I want you to think about, uh if you can, the way that you see female soldiers represented in the media.” (the damnable can returns).

Or

2. OK. Eh hh, how do you see female soldiers represented in the media?
2. OK, so my question is how do you see female soldiers represented in the media?
2. How do you see female soldiers represented in the media? (Consistency with no verbal clutter!)

Question the three:

Question number 3. Have you served with gay and or lesbian service members?

If you look at the transcriptions we seem to have . . .

Researcher as cheerleader (Imagine me with pom poms)
“Alright. OK. Have you served with gay or lesbian service members?”

All-business researcher (Imagine me very no-nonsense with a stylish pair of glasses. My hair is in a bun. But not a matronly bun . . .)
“OK let’s move on. Have you served with gay and or lesbian service members?”

“Have you served with gay and or lesbian service members?”
“Have you served with a gay or lesbian service member?”

“I have.”
“Yes.”
“Yes.”
“Ah yes.”
“I have.”
“Yes.”
“Yes.”
“Ah yes.”

“"I have.”
“Yes.”
“Yes.”
“Ah yes.”

It’s a sing-along! One thing that everyone can agree on, they’ve served with gays and lesbians.

Now what?
A peer, a colleague reminds me that this research project is for Narratives of the Self, and that makes me stop. Wondering out loud about positioning myself in the work, she reminds me that this is Narratives of the Self. And I have a self that I am projecting onto questions that I ask others. So I will answer these questions for my Self, and articulate my narrative.

So, what’s it like to be in the Army?

Being in the Army, a lot of times, is like being in a casual restaurant, around lunch time and there’s a group of obnoxious but harmless people sitting at the next table trying (loudly) to remember who else was in the movie 9 to 5. They’d be like, It was Dolly Parton and that fucking Jane Fonda and . . .

Because it’s always that fucking Jane Fonda in the military and if you don’t know why, if you’re young and dumb you will be informed; you will be indoctrinated.

So it was Dolly Parton and that fucking Jane Fonda and who was the other one?

Was it Jessica Lange? No, no. I don’t think it was her.
What about Cher? Yeah, I think that sounds right.
Maybe it was Liza Minnelli?

And I lean over and say “It was Lily Tomlin” and they look at me and say: No, it wasn’t.
That’s what being in the Army is like.
The Army is a long, boring, arduous, frustrating, conversation where no one listens to you and it doesn’t matter what you know.
Soldiers bored on guard duty or roving patrol will have detailed, involved, passionate discussions on topics like:
So, would you rather be too hot or too cold?
Seriously.
Spending time with people – people so very different from me – was good and awful. I remember the night Vasquez went on and on about his bathroom habits. Not to shock me or gross me out, but just to have his standard buddy talk with me. I worked and slept and ate and lived with people that each had their own unique Army narrative; including myself.

So, question #1

What is it like to be a female soldier?

Being a female soldier is being treated like an 18 year old boy by nostalgic elders. They see me in uniform and ask how my folks are doing and if I miss home or if I’ve got a sweetheart and I look down at my 27 year old educated, mature, female body, and look back up at them in disbelief.

Being a female soldier is always being trouble.
Being a female soldier is making sure not to cause trouble; to be the girl that ruins everything.

Being a female soldier is a built in assumption of many that you could not have done what a man has done and you could not possibly have given the same that a man gave.

Being a female soldier is reveling in a different world where merit matters and you can become a leader.

Being a female soldier is a lot like being a soldier, most of the time, but sometimes, it isn’t.

Being a female soldier is being called a cunt in basic training and a dumb slut after you are promoted to non-commissioned officer.

Being a female soldier is listening to the Colonel that works in the same room chortle about sexual harassment allegations involving Arnold Schwarzenegger, crowing “That ugly bitch is lucky he touched her!”

Being a female soldier is having the same Colonel notice your reaction, and say “Don’t you ever glare at me like that again, do you understand?”

Being a female soldier is having to tell that Colonel “Yes sir”.

Being a female soldier is learning that there is nothing you can’t do,  
only things you don’t want to do,  
and things that people won’t let you do.

Being a female soldier is being in charge of men.  
Being a female soldier is having people of color in charge of you.  
Being a female soldier is performing a type of drag. And liking it.  
Being a female soldier is competing and winning.  
Being a female soldier is handing flowers to the incoming commander’s spouse – regardless of the gender of either of you.  
Being a female soldier is the same as being a male soldier.

Question #2. How do you see yourself represented in the media?

I don’t. I never have. Difference always demands an explanation. Why is a female soldier on the news?  
Because she’s trash and she tortures Iraqis.  
Because she’s little and white and blonde and is a hero for being rescued.  
Because she’s Native American and dead and forgotten.  
Because she’s the spokesperson . . . . always the spokesperson.  
Because she’s a bad mother.  
Because women shouldn’t be in the military.  
That’s why they’re on the news.

Why is a female soldier on the screen? The big screen or the little screen. Why is a female soldier on the screen?  
Because she’s inept.  
Because she’s hot.  
Because she’s a bitch.

Question # 3. Have you served with gay and or lesbian service members?  
Well, yeah.  
No hostility.  
Nervous moments at the polygraph.  
Some shared secrets.  
No man in my room for two years straight.  
Friendships with flamboyant civilians.  
Travels guided by expat personal ads.

Overhearing a colonel telling a story about two gay sailors  
and how he wanted  
how they all wanted  
the both of them  
to hold hands  
and jump off the edge of the carrier into the ocean  
and die.
Asking another soldier why he wouldn’t want to serve with gay people and him responding that he was afraid that he would be raped.

Having to listen to the story at the Sergeant’s Academy about how this one time this other cadet, a male, had a girlfriend that was interested in getting with a chick and they went to this gay bar and picked up this lesbian and they went home and had a threesome and he looked at me, ever the gentlemen after this shocking story, concerned about my dainty female sensibilities, he noticed the look on my face and said: “I’m sorry I didn’t mean to offend you” and I said “I’m not offended, I just don’t believe you”.

Having my kind of butch AIT instructor recount how she had answered a security clearance question about having sex with another woman. Scrunching up her face she said “Ooooh, gross”. Yeah, I wasn’t buying it.

Living with a lesbian soldier who supported her civilian girlfriend and moved her to Europe with none of the financial and family assistance that would have been available to a married heterosexual soldier.

Spending a lot of time in Amsterdam and Berlin.

Being profoundly disappointed with the straight men that I admired and respected and cared for because they had such violent and ridiculous attitudes regarding gay men.

Having the high-ranking officers in the war-room where I made coffee and vacuumed while putting together top-secret intelligence reports and running the production of the European Command Center briefings, having these men ask me “So, what do you think about gays and lesbians in the military, SGT Hicks?” And me saying, “I think they’re doing a great job”.

This is my narrative of what it’s like to a female soldier in the Army.

I joined the military in November of 2000; shortly before George W. Bush became president and a year before the September 11th attacks. I was a 27 year old female body in basic training – a tremendously self-aware non-traditional soldier. The military I
entered was a place primarily untouched by the day-to-day material reality of combat operations and war. Stationed in Germany on the morning of September 11th, I dropped everything and ran along with everyone else back to my command center. I looked around a room filled with people that all understood – some with disbelief, others with glee – that our military experience was about to radically change. Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom began – and continued - during my enlistment in the Army. In reflecting upon my experiences in the military, it is not the wartime environment that contextualizes my narrative; instead, it is my experience of difference.

**Narratives of the Self**

Reflexivity requires a representation of the self, and non-traditional forms of representation are useful in examining the construction of self through narrative. Through this prose poem, I answered my own questions the way I wished others would respond; I wanted to create flashes of the kinds of military experiences that are marked by difference. The moments in my prose poem are vignettes through which my experiences are represented. Things that I didn’t laugh at; moments that felt degrading; transformative situations; they were all marked by – made real by – my difference. I wasn’t made aware/didn’t make myself aware of my difference during routine moments of military service – difference had no effect on firing a weapon or standing in line or buffing a floor (three frequent vocations in the military, by the way). Difference came into play when I and others were negotiating traditional soldier archetypes: The patriarchal pat on the head or punch to the shoulder; asking if I was homesick or missed my ma and pa; the assumptions about what my needs were in a strange land or in a lonely barracks room.
All of these things were guided by traditional notions of what a soldier is, and what a soldier typically is happens to be a young heterosexual man.

In their discussion of the narrative construction of selfhood, Sermijn, Devlieger & Loots (2008) claim that we can consider self narrative as “a multitude of stories that cannot get reduced to one whole by either the participant or the researcher” (p. 641). I attend to this multiplicity by presenting an assortment of moments; no single story is used to sum up my experiences as a female soldier. I narrate my experiences in the military as scenes where I was made markedly aware of the presence of gender, the influence of sexuality, and the identity of soldier. Sermijn et al. (2008) offer that selfhood can be understood through fragmentation of the narrative because the real time narrative is “neither completely coherent nor completely linearly structured” (p. 634) in the telling. Instead of providing a narrative with a beginning, middle and end that explains my experience, I shatter the experience and turn my attention to its fragments. These fragments are oppositional and contrary; pride, neutrality, punishment, accomplishment, and humiliation are all part of the experience. Markham notes that through “fragmentation of interpretation, we can more clearly see some of the incoherencies of meaning making” (2005, p. 832). Just as life cannot be limited to one experience, narrative cannot be limited to one story or one moral.

Unconventional Articulations

The construction of my reflexive narrative of self is a genuine representation. In the past, I have explained my military experience using the 9 to 5 example to those I deemed patient and hip enough to hear it; to those I felt worthy of receiving information that was deeply personal. This story always functioned as evidence of self-awareness; a
resistance to issuing a ‘defining moment’ to sum up my military experience. Instead, I take my feelings and agenda (my meaning) to a high level of subject abstraction using an artifact of popular culture that is beloved by one sort of audience (i.e. clever, mature women; kitschy folks). What is present in the 9 to 5 example? An assumption of value – I think cool people have a special place in their heart for 9 to 5. I think cool people would be aghast should Lily Tomlin be forgotten. I don’t explicitly address these assumptions in the telling of the 9 to 5 allegory, but in making my representation of my experience mine, I utilize a vast personal encyclopedia of feelings and referents and events to concoct a unique vision of my experience – an unconventional articulation. It is one way for me to maintain control over my narrative and my experiences.

This desire for control is tempered through a desire for collaboration. I want to maintain ownership of my experience, but I want to share it as well. The story is shaped by anticipating an understanding audience that possesses the necessary resources to co-construct a delightful, real, meaningful, and core understanding of my experience. The ‘work’ that must be done to achieve this might in fact count as theory. After all, a theory is a system of statements relating facts and principles to one another with the objective of explaining phenomena in the world. Doesn’t narrative accomplish that? Doesn’t my narrative explain phenomena in a way that resonates with my collaborators?

The value of unconventional articulations. This position suggests that articulations of experience – particularly articulations that do not observe rules and conventions of typical ‘question answering’ – do in fact generate knowledge; because of this, articulation can serve as theory building. Sandra Harding (2008) reminds us that a variety of things considered as mere vocations or technologies do in fact function as a
sort of science. She also points out that everyone possesses “plenty of knowledge-systems” (p. 216) that have yet to be ‘proven’ or legitimated through scientific research. In other words, knowledge is not solely (or even barely) the product of scientific inquiry. Knowledge is the product of making sense of the world; making sense of the world involves exchanges and constructions between our selves and others. In my prose poem, I invite others to view my sense-making. Because human sense-making “reveals idiosyncratic meanings, contingent truths, and felt-sensing perspectives that are born from materiality, power, and the complexity of presence” (Madison, 2005, p. 58), the subjective must be considered in any discussion of knowledge. This subjective perspective and insight into the activity of sense-making provide valuable sites for examining both narrative and articulation as sources of knowledge as well as resources for theory.

The perspective shows my reader my point of view, my resources for collaboration with others, and my orientation to my own experience. Through this, I have presented a reflexive moment that illustrates the perspective that informs, guides and makes sense of my data collection and analysis. In this reflexive moment, I lay bare some of my subjectivity, my orientation to the interview process, and my relationship with the women I interview. On a personal level, it is beyond delightful that so many women⁶, without any direct solicitation, echo the exact sentiments of my prose poem in their own interviews. In addition to being delightful, their echoes give incredible credence to the use of grounded theory for identifying basic social processes for women in the military.

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⁶ Interviewed after the pilot study and after the poem was written.
Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a form of qualitative methodology that allows concepts to emerge from data; it is the “discovery of theory from data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6). Grounded theory is literally grounded in data and is directly related to the “context of the [observed] phenomenon” allowing ideas to emerge from data collection (Creswell, 1998, p. 56). Rather than beginning inquiry with a hypothesis or particular theory in mind, in grounded theory there is a “close relationship” between data, analysis, and theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 12). In his discussion of the method, Gibbs (2007) claims that grounded theory is an approach that allows for core categories and central ideas to emerge from the data in order to build theory.

The epistemological history of grounded theory is unique because its early development was in deliberate reference to the methodological guidelines of quantitative inquiry; specifically, the hypothetic-deductive model. While qualitative research existed and was employed in the mid twentieth century, it did not necessarily benefit from the extensive and exacting methodological framework that guided early versions of grounded theory. Therefore, at a crucial point in time, grounded theory provided a way of doing qualitative research using a detailed and rigorous qualitative method. This history (and, specifically, the language of emergence used in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*) leads some contemporary researchers to consider early grounded theory as positivist.

However, as grounded theory has developed and been used in innovative ways, epistemological positions have shifted. For example, Kathy Charmaz (2006) conceptualizes grounded theory within a constructivist epistemology and Adele Clarke (2005) positions her application of grounded theory within the critical/postmodern turn.
However, the fundamental epistemological position shared by all who utilize grounded theory is the belief that theory should have a close relationship to data. This belief is reflected in the absence of a hypothesis in grounded theory and the rejection of highly specific pre-determined expectations for what the data will yield. This belief is also supported in the fact that grounded theory works to generate, rather than test, theory. Therefore, the positivist standards of replication and sampling do not apply. Instead, the grounded theory concepts of theoretical sampling, multiple levels of coding, memoing, constant comparison, and core categories guide the development of data collection and theory building.

Any one of the orientations to grounded theory – from the post-positivist to the constructivist to the post-structuralist - does not represent a radical departure from the initial (and continued) spirit of the work. Glaser (1978) insists that grounded theory, above all, explains how things work. As the world opens up through more and more research, we gain a more sophisticated understanding that there are multiple experiences of the world, and multiple ways to explain how they work. For example, in the third edition of Basics of Qualitative Inquiry (2008), Corbin traces her epistemology from what she characterizes as a limited view of scientific research to a more developed and fluid understanding of what counts as both theory and knowledge; this advancement she credits to feminist theory. In another work, Developing Grounded Theory: The Second Generation, Corbin asserts that it is not events that are given the focus in grounded theory, but “the meanings given to events and the actions/interactions/emotions expressed in response, along with the context in which those responses and the events occur” (2009, p. 38). In the same anthology, Morse (2009) echoes ideas similar to Corbin’s; that
grounded theory has developed into something that well-accommodates advances made in scholarship. We may consider these advances to include the contributions made through post-positivism, feminism, constructionism, post-structuralism, and the post-modern turn.

**Justification for the Use of Grounded Theory**

Research on the experiences of female service members has a number of implications for policy improvements, health matters, gender constructs, and organizational issues. When one wishes to collect articulations of a generally invisible experience, it is not advisable to expect a formal experimental research design or a highly structured questionnaire to adequately gather data. Before research of that sort is possible, it is necessary to identify and articulate basic social processes and develop concepts. Therefore, grounded theory was best-suited to collect foundational data.

I used grounded theory to examine the experiences of females in the military. Specifically, I conducted interviews, used field observations and employed personal narratives to understand the experiences of female service-members. The aim of this research was to discover and explicate basic social processes of female military service and articulate them through the narratives of the participants. Grounded theory was well-suited to the study of female service-members because it thoroughly and meaningfully explored and explained an event, including the “consequences, conditions, [and] strategies” of an act (Glaser, 1978, p. 16). Rubin and Rubin note that this method allows explanations to emerge in the “terms of those involved in a situation” (1995, p. 4). In other words, this methodology provided for the development of theory directly from participant experience – women service members contributing to research for themselves.
Many women commented throughout the interviews that they had regularly been surveyed in the past, but never asked their thoughts and observations on military experience and military culture. Some women intimated that through the interview they were motivated to share their positive experiences and effective strategies with other women in the military. This is a drastic change from other research, where the experiences of women in the military are routinely assumed, challenged, or exploited, but very rarely expressed from the service members’ own perspectives. From a communication standpoint, the narratives of female service members offer a unique opportunity to explore the way gender and culture influence meaning.

**Development of Grounded Theory**

The early development of the grounded theory method can be viewed as the rigorous construction of a form of qualitative inquiry. The contributions of symbolic interactionism in grounded theory acknowledge that reality and learning are created though interaction. In other words, humans interpret each other rather than react to each other. The influences of pragmatism in grounded theory focus on the role of thinking. According to this school of thought, how we think is part of how we live. Knowledge emerges from the interaction of thinking human beings. Because of this, process in social activity requires attention.

The foundational ideas of grounded theory include theoretical sampling, coding and memos, core categories, and constant comparison. The driving argument throughout the explanation and justification of traditional grounded theory is this: theory should emerge from the data. Set up against the rules and practices of the classic understanding of scientific research, Strauss and Glaser (1967) argue that research through hypothesis
confirmation lacks a close relationship to the data. Grounded theory provides a rigorous methodology for theory to emerge directly from data.

Grounded theory advances without a specific hypothesis; instead, researchers establish a general idea of the phenomenon they wish to study, make initial observations, and use open-ended flexible semi-structured interview protocols to help guide the direction of the research (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Glaser, 1992). A key feature of grounded theory is theoretical sampling, which “is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst joint collects, codes, and analyzes his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges” (Glaser, 1978, p. 36). Because theoretical sampling guides the inquiry, the development of the research focus is dependent upon the ideas that emerge from the data.

Emergence and construction are two other fundamental concepts within grounded theory; through closely working with the data and conducting initial open coding, core categories emerge or are constructed through analysis. These core categories are used in another elemental part of grounded theory, the practice/process of constant comparison. Constant comparisons of core categories that emerge through theoretical sampling provide the researcher with an understanding of all of the properties of a category. The constant comparison, guided through theoretical sampling, occurs throughout the process of data collection. The grounded theory method produces a theory that is closely related to the data, has a good fit to the phenomena in question, and functions at a conceptual level that can be applied to other events (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978).
Glaser and Strauss (1967) note four properties of grounded theory: close fit of the theory, accessibility of the theory, applicability of the theory, and influence of the theory. Glaser and Strauss argue that the grounding of the theory in the data thoroughly accounted for complex systems and relationships. This thoroughness and close relationship provide a theory that fits well over the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than a large generic theory that may account for general (to the point of inconsequentiality) ideas, grounded theory provides a thoughtful, suited, accountable explanation for a phenomenon. This is not to say that the theory is so customized that it cannot be applied to other concepts in other contexts – on the contrary, the applicability of the theory hinges on developing the core categories on a conceptual level, meaning that theory is sufficiently general that it can be applied to multiple other situations. Finally, the thoroughness of grounded theory recognizes influential variables and allows for partial control through this identification.

The primary argument that guides grounded theory is that there is a procedure for discovering. Glaser and Strauss critique traditional scientific research by explaining that data is used either to test a theory or to generate a theory. If data is used to test, it is always already over-determined and neither useful nor original. In other words, if there is an underlying organizing system, it is best discovered from the ground up – let it name itself. It is important to recognize The Discovery of Grounded Theory not just as an explanation of the method, but as a very deliberate defense and justification of it as well. The classic scientific method is always near, and always attended to in a way that demonstrates the legitimacy of grounded theory. In other words, the early work of Strauss and Glaser and the continuing work of Glaser are very much invested in a product that is
defensible against the hypothetic-deductive model. This is neither an indictment nor a boast; instead it calls our attention to a condition that comes under serious scrutiny as grounded theory develops and grows over the years; grounded theory’s relationship to positivism. In the work by Kathy Charmaz and Adele Clark, these early practices of Glaser and Strauss as well as the later work of Glaser will be referred to as a kind of positivist grounded theory.

In the third edition of *Basics of Qualitative Research* (2008), Corbin and Strauss list the unique ways that make qualitative methodology suitable for generating foundational data. They note that qualitative work allows for more fluidity and ambiguity than quantitative methods and allows us to think in terms of complex relationships. They also point out that qualitative research is also more accessible to nonacademic audiences, and therefore more useful for practical applications. Another feature of qualitative work is that it allows for the researcher to become absorbed in the phenomenon, rather than keeping a distance in order to honor notions of objectivity. Because qualitative analysis is not rigidly codified, scholars are allowed to feel their way through qualitative research, using tools instead of rules. Finally, qualitative research allows us to step inside the world of the participants with an emic view and examine how people experience events and how they make meaning out of those experiences. In addition to the explanation of experience and sense-making, qualitative researchers understand the importance of locating the experience in a larger context and describing the process as responses to different action/interaction.

For these reasons provided, grounded theory is well-suited to the study of complex personal experience. In my research, I examined the narratives and discussions
of female service members to gain an understanding of how they construct their experiences in the military. Grounded theory provided an open space for ideas to emerge from the data. Rather than imposing my expectations on the interviewees through hypotheses or rigid research questions, grounded theory allowed me to ask general questions, explore the process and content of responses, and identify the major ideas and themes that emerged from the data. Because of my own experiences in the military, I was able to follow and inquire at a much deeper level than someone who has never been a part of the institution. Grounded theory acknowledges that the world is a complex thing, there are no simple explanations, and in our examination of phenomena we need to capture as much complexity as possible (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory provided a way to maintain the character and the integrity of the individual experiences shared by the interviewees.

The grounded theory method simultaneously gathers and analyzes data. In grounded theory, there are four key stages that lead to theory-building: theoretical sampling, coding and memoing, constant comparison, and saturation. The process of developing ideas from the data as it is collected is a key aspect of theoretical sampling. The concept of theoretic sampling is important to all uses of grounded theory. Theoretical sampling refers to the idea that a primary concept (or even a set of ideas) will guide the initial field work as well as the analysis of data. In other words, theoretical sampling assumes that there are commonalities across experiences that share context. Once these concepts were identified, I was able to delve deeper into the phenomenon. For example, it became clear from the first initial interviews that isolation was an important concept. In subsequent interviews I would tell an anecdote about my own isolation and ask the
interviewee to speak to my experience from her own. Through this practice, I was able to identify different dimensions of isolation. Although isolation emerged as a concept that I directly pursued, I allowed other dimensions to come up naturally in discussions with the participants. For example, while I never once uttered the term “that girl”, the majority of participants used the phrase in their interviews. I would then ask what they meant by “that girl” to develop the concept. In essence, the concepts served to steer the research and prompted more intensive investigation. An excellent example of this is Julie Corbin’s discussion on her research on the experience of Vietnam veterans (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Corbin began her research with initial questions regarding the experiences (and tendencies to leave those experiences unexpressed) of Vietnam veterans. She then identified similar experiences among her initial group of participants, and pursued exploration and articulation of those experiences.

**Narrative Research**

A variety of analytic tools were necessary due to the semi-structured and collaborative nature of the interviews. Narrative is important because “stories provide coherence and continuity to one’s experience and have a central role in our communication with others” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Narrative research is “any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials” (Lieblich et al., p. 2). My study joins concepts from narrative research with grounded theory to analyze interviews with female service members. The interviews began with an invitation to tell a story and contained many more story-telling and discussion opportunities throughout; for these parts of the interview, concepts from narrative research were crucial for analysis.
Particular forms of narrative research follow guidelines similar to grounded theory. Narrative studies generally focus on a small number of participants, lack an a priori hypothesis, employ multiple levels of analyses, and rely on the integrity, discipline, and awareness of the researcher (Lieblich et al., 1998). Like grounded theory, narrative research is guided by a general interest and is shaped by the concepts that are found in the data. Also, narrative research is interpretive. Although the results of narrative research must be grounded in evidence and explanation, they are produced through the interpretive work of the researcher. This emphasis on interpretation follows the tenets of grounded theory.

Along with grounded theory, narrative research shares many key features with feminist research. According to Lieblich et al. (1998), analysis of narrative material takes into consideration the voice of the text, the theoretical framework, and “reflexive monitoring” (p. 10). Narrative research attends to multiple aspects of the data by giving authority to the voice of the interviewee, using the theoretical framework to make sense of the voice, and documenting the impact of the researcher through reflexivity. Narrative research also contributes to an ethic of service research, because it produces research on a population for a population. The collaborative nature and service spirit of narrative work ties very easily into feminist research ethics.

In my research, the use of narrative occurs on two levels: within the interview process and throughout the analysis of data. The interviews began with an invitation to “tell me the story of your enlistment.” In response to this invitation, the participant shared a story of her shaping. Within the interview process, I used this narrative to identify key moments to circle back to and examine further. The interview then moved into a more
fragmented narrative space – I continued to ask respondents to “give me an example” or “tell me more about that”, which they often used narrative to do – but I also asked more expository questions (“why do you think that is?”) and did more collaborative work (“this is what happened with me”). Narrative served as an important part of the interview, but the interviews were not dedicated solely to the collection of an extensive narrative or life history.

The collaborative nature and the use of narrative in the interview was a form of theoretical sampling. Grounded theory is guided by concepts that emerge in the collection and analysis of data. Investigation of these concepts makes up theoretical sampling. According to Charmaz (2006) “theoretical sampling means seeking pertinent data to develop . . . emerging theory . . . [and] to elaborate and refine the categories constituting . . . theory” (p. 96). As data were gathered through interviews, I began to see shared experiences emerge through the narratives. However, instead of focusing solely on the instances of shared experiences in new interviews, I continued to ask respondents to “tell me the story of your military enlistment.” After they had shared and elaborated their story, I then inquired about concepts that had emerged from other interviews7. My decision to continue this sequence was influenced by feminist ethics and the spirit of the research; foundational research should be expansive, and feminist research should provide women with a forum for their experiences and an opportunity to influence the direction of the interview. I also observed a radical difference in the responses from the pilot study (where respondents were not asked to share the story of their enlistment) and the responses from the formal study. I am confident that encouraging women to share

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7 Where appropriate. For example, although many respondents included experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment in their narratives, I did not ask each individual participant if she had similar experiences.
their perspective uninterrupted enhanced the depth and richness of their narratives and discussions.

The second level that narrative functions is within data analysis. In this research I was guided by content-categorical and holistic-form reading (Lieblich et al., 1998) of the narratives. Content-categorical reading focuses on content “as manifested in separate parts of the story, irrespective of the context of the complete story” (p. 12). This content-categorical approach compliments grounded theory, as it follows a sequence similar to the process of constant comparison and core categories. A content-categorical approach includes the selection of concepts, creation of categories, sorting to categories, and drawing of conclusions (Lieblich et al.). Holistic-form reading (Lieblich et al.) focuses on formal aspects of a narrative rather than the content and details of a narrative. Narratives “organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole” (Elliot, 2005, p. 3). Holistic-form reading is important for recognizing the structure one uses to build a narrative. Because all participants told ‘the story’ of their enlistment, it was important to employ a perspective that attended to the shape and structure of narrative. For example, women began their story by personalizing their relationship to the military and framed their story using the events that proved most fundamental to their experience. For instance, women who left the military after a relatively short period of time (less than four years) often focused on the conditions leading up to their departure, while women who were career military often gave the greatest amount of focus to their different jobs, positions, and promotions.
Procedure

The initial plan of data collection followed the sequence of simultaneous interviewing and theoretical sampling until saturation was reached. Using purposive sampling, participants included both current and former service members recruited through third party points of contact throughout the armed forces and various female service member organizations. American Women Veterans (AWV) was particularly useful for recruiting from within the points of contact on their executive board and also through their page on Facebook which has over 12,000 fans. I contacted the president of AWV in the fall of 2010, and through lengthy correspondence was able to satisfy the demands and concerns of the organization. I will say with certainty that I would not have been given an opportunity to reach their members had I not been a veteran. After thorough vetting, I was allowed to submit my research as an event invitation on their Facebook page (Appendix B). Once the invitation was made public on Facebook, a link was sent (by outside parties) to other social networks. At least one person posted a link to the event on Twitter, and several members of AWV who saw the event on Facebook sent a link to their friends. In addition to posting on Facebook, the president of AWV sent an email within her circle of friends, encouraging them to participate in my research. In all, from February 2011 to May 2011, over 200 active duty and veteran women expressed interest in participating in my research. See Table 1 for participant demographics.
Table 1

**Characteristics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Identity</th>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>Age</th>
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*Enlisted
**Commissioned

*Note. Although pseudonyms are used in the results chapter, I have declined including them in this table (which possesses multiple identifying features) to protect anonymity. Self-Identity indicates the wording used by the participant when asked how they identify in terms of culture, race and/or ethnicity. AR = Army Reserve; NG = National Guard; NR = Navy Reserve; USMC = Marine Corps. Age indicates how old the participant was when she joined the military. The categories of Enter and Left provide the years the participant joined and left the military, respectively. Years indicates the total number of years the participant was in the military.*
Table 1 cont.

*Characteristics of Participants*

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Table 1 cont.

*Characteristics of Participants*

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</table>

I did not use a selection process for interviews – anyone who requested an interview before I reached saturation was allowed to participate. As soon as a potential participant contacted me, I sent them an email asking that they provide a day and a time when they would be available for an approximately 90 minute interview. I advised that they select a comfortable and private location for the interview, and that a LAN line would be preferable. I also noted that the interview would focus on their experiences as women in the military. A number of women asked for more detail on the specific questions I would be asking, and I replied that the questions were few and open-ended, and that the interview would be devoted to them talking about their experiences. As interviews progressed and I would get new requests from participants, my replies to their specific questions would reflect where I was in the research process. For instance, after my first two interviews, it became clear that talking about how women could have
happier and more successful experiences in the military was an important part of the research. Therefore, when potential participants asked me about interview question details, I started incorporating material that had emerged as significant in subsequent interviews. I will note that no one who inquired about questions declined to interview after I explained the nature of the interview questions.

The interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded with a digital recorder. I would call the participant at the number she provided, introduce myself, exchange pleasantries, and then ask if she had any questions before we began. Very few of the participants had any questions, and the questions they did have were typically low stakes (“what is this for again, a paper you’re doing?” was fairly common). After their questions were answered, I would explain that I would read from the consent form, and if they had any questions they should stop me. If they had no questions regarding the consent form, I asked them to state their full name and give consent. Based on the requirements provided by HSRB, interviewees were recorded agreeing to the consent form that I read aloud. Following the tenets of grounded theory and theoretical sampling, the interview protocol was open-ended with opportunities to develop probing as well as follow-up questions. I used the invitation “please tell me the story of your enlistment” as the starting point of the interviews (see Appendix A for protocol).

Generally, participants would take around 30 minutes to tell the story of their enlistment. Many people took much longer, and some would only use a few minutes. For those who only spoke briefly about their enlistment, I used prompts that extended the initial question. For example, if someone only spoke briefly about the recruiting process, I would say “alright, tell me more about basic training” or “now tell me about your
experiences at your first duty station”. While the woman spoke, I took thorough notes highlighting issues of significance or reminding myself to ask questions about one thing or another – I avoided cutting the respondent short or interrupting her. Instead, once the interviewee came to the natural conclusion of her story, I would draw her back to noteworthy matters she had mentioned, and ask her to tell me more. As the number of interviews grew, I incorporated more material from other participants into newer interviews. For example, the concept of isolation emerged from some of the first five or six interviews, and I began asking participants for their observations on the issue.

The data are trustworthy because they were gathered and processed in an ethical, consistent and thorough manner. I conducted 38 interviews that totaled 40 hours and 59 minutes. The briefest interview lasted 19 minutes, and the longest interview lasted two hours and twenty-six minutes. The average interview lasted 64 minutes. All of the interviews followed the same protocol: Reviewing the consent form with the participant; asking the initial question which generated a 15 – 40 minute response, during which time I would take notes to keep track of the issues brought up; circling back to expand and develop the issues from the initial response; member-checking and collaboration between the issues brought up and the observations of others; and closing with a set of open-ended questions.

During the interview, I focused on providing a forum to the participant. First, it was important to me that the interviewee felt that this research was for her and about her, and that she had control over what parts of her experience were important and worthy of discussion. Second, I conducted the interview in a participatory and collaborative manner with the goal of creating data with the participant, not solely from the participant. I began
each interview with “The way I would like to begin is to have you tell the story of your enlistment. Where you were at in life when you joined, why you joined, the recruitment process, things like that.” None of the participants struggled or hesitated with this prompt, many went on for over thirty minutes in their response. I did not interrupt or introduce new questions – I just listened. Once they came to a natural conclusion, I would lead them back to things they had mentioned and ask them to elaborate.

After each interview, I would type up my notes and create a memo of the experience. I was aware throughout this process of the multiple levels of research and experience that I was documenting. During the interview process, I kept notes of key ideas and events to guide the interview. After the interview, I typed up the notes and engaged in constant comparison between the concepts and discussion that had emerged in the most recent interview and the concepts and discussion from prior interviews. In addition to this document, I created a memo about my experience of the interview and the ideas that had emerged. These three levels of documentation – notes, writing up, and memoing provide me with a variety of different relationships with the data.

As time permitted, I transcribed each interview using voice-recognition software. Listening to the digital audio file on my mp3 player, I spoke the words of the participant into a microphone while the software transcribed my words. This experience was time-consuming, but allowed me yet another relationship with the data. Speaking as the participant, I was brought back into the intimate experience of interviewing. Following transcription, I would create another memo documenting my experience with the data. Transcription typically took three times the length of the interview. For example, an interview that lasted 51 minutes would usually take just under 3 hours to transcribe. The
finished transcript was edited to remove identifying information such as names of people, units, rank, and locations.

The theoretical sampling and constant comparison that I performed found a unique platform in my own experiences and stories. It felt natural and unforced for me to say at one point (in some of the interviews) “this is what I felt, this is how I made sense of it, what do you think? Or, “something that has come up in other interviews is this – can you talk about this for a little while?” There were some interviews where this was not a productive practice; there were other interviews where the respondent attended so much to an established issue that it was unnecessary for me to ask further questions regarding it.

Following completion of each interview I wrote a memo which served to immediately document my feelings about the interview. Some of the memos are rather poetic (example in Appendix C), others are just an exercise in summarizing a two hour interview (example in Appendix D). I used the notes I had taken during the interview to guide my memoing, but gave my self the freedom to wander off and attend to more abstract matters. The notes and memos helped me identify core categories that emerged throughout the interviews and provided a resource for constant comparison of concepts from one interview to the next.

Theoretical sampling guided the progression of the research. As ideas revealed themselves to be consistently shared among the interviewees, I crafted the research to pursue greater understanding of those concepts. For example, in the pilot study, all the interviewees expressed that they had experienced interactions where negative messages regarding the suitability of females in the military were forwarded. In identifying this
similarity, it was possible to then pursue greater detail and explanation in future interviews. In post-pilot test interviews, the idea of isolation ran throughout several of the initial interviews. In this way, theoretical sampling first identifies a shared experience, and allows for an in-depth examination of the concept. The concept was then developed and accounted for until its dimensions were exhausted and I reached the point of saturation in the data.

In addition to interviews, coding, and sampling, researcher memoing was used extensively to document multiple levels of engagement within the data. Memoing was necessary during interviews, immediately following interviews, during transcription, throughout various levels of coding, and in times of reflection. Memos provide another level of documentation and are used in various ways in research. I created memos during and immediately after recorded interviews – documenting thoughts or ideas that occurred to me throughout the interview. Additionally, I had a memoing system that recorded my ideas as I reflected on the data. The purpose of memos is ultimately practical – to prevent the loss of relevant thoughts or ideas - but memos also serve to stimulate the researcher and offer a less structured and less formal forum to record ideas or consider relationships. Because of my experience as a female service member, I also devoted memos entirely to my reflections and assessments tied to my service.

Analysis

I used grounded theory to identify and analyze the process of describing and constructing experiences within the military institution. I started with open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), reviewing each line of the transcripts (Charmaz, 2006) and making notes in the margins regarding key ideas and
concepts that emerge. Some of these key ideas included: gender differences, the institution vs. the individual, cultural diversity, family, isolation, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and challenging strategies. I followed open coding with selective and then theoretical coding. When I identified consistent themes across the interview data, I compared them to each other to identify their precise similarities and differences. This is known as constant comparison, or “making theoretical comparisons” (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p. 67). In other words, identifying the themes that emerged from the data provided an opportunity to examine the conditions and circumstances that made the themes similar or unique. In identifying these conditions I was provided with a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Concepts at various levels of abstraction formed the basis of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I also kept memos during the analysis and used the themes and processes that emerged as points of development and reflection. In these memos, I used my experience as a female soldier to build upon themes in the data and to articulate why or how my experience was similar or different.

Grounded theory uses multiple levels of coding and memos to generate as much analysis, reflection, and connection as possible. Open coding refers to the systematic review that uses line by line analysis of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). As data became available for coding, I went through each line of the data and generated an explanation or identification of phenomena. I identified all of the possibilities within the data, and used codes to document there initial analysis.

The analyst codes for as many categories that might fit; he [sic] codes different incidences into as many categories as possible. New categories emerge and new incidences fit existing categories. He [sic] may even code for what is not
obviously stated. This maximizes allowing the best fits, the most workable ones and the core relevancies to emerge on their own. (Glaser, 1978, p. 56).

In other words, through open coding I was “coding the data in every way possible” (Glaser, 1978, p. 56).

Selective coding refers to the process of reviewing the results from open coding and reconsidering and reducing the ideas that emerge. For instance, through selective coding, the relationships that ideas have (and do not have) to each other become clearer. In selective coding, I identified the differences between concepts, the similarities between concepts, and the different dimensions of the same concept. Because open coding created a resource wherein everything has been coded, selective coding provided a thoughtful, thorough way to determine the concepts related to the core process (Glaser, 1978).

Selective coding, then, should be considered an important part of theoretical sampling. Selective coding allowed for the identification of key variables and core concepts that continued to guide the research project – which is the defining feature of theoretical sampling.

Theoretical coding is a way to conceptualize how the ideas from open and selective coding relate to each other. Theoretical coding “establishes the relationship among variables” (Glaser, 1978, p. 121) attending to the associations between social processes, core categories and their emergent properties. For grounded theory, theoretical coding represents an advanced stage in theory-building that quantitative work usually begins with: an abstraction of the relationships between variables in a particular phenomenon. This is brought up to show the points of similarity between the different approaches to scientific research – both qualitative and quantitative methodologies seek
to situate concepts on a level of abstraction, but grounded theory insures that level has
been achieved through a close relationship with the data. Through the process of
theoretical coding, I identified and traced the various relationships between concepts. For
example, I found multiple connections between isolation and sexual agency from
examining the relationships between different concepts in selective and open coding.

Constant comparison builds on (and around) the idea of core categories. Again,
grounded theory is unique because of the simultaneous nature of collection and analysis.
Instead of confirming or disconfirming hypotheses, grounded theory uses the constant
comparative method of analysis to establish core categories and identify the similarities
and differences between core categories. This means that both categories and data that fit
an existing category emerge from the analysis. In other words, core categories emerge
throughout the initial as well as the later data collection and analysis – there is no pre-
conceived stopping point that establishes a finite set of core categories that will be used
to build the theory. The constant comparative method identifies categories and examines
instances within those categories. Properties emerge within categories that help to limit
and develop the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Although saturation refers explicitly to a stage in theory building, the idea of
saturation can be applied to several moments in grounded theory. For example, open
coding is a sort of saturation in the sense that everything is saturated in code. Glaser
(1978) also notes smaller moments of saturation that should be documented through
memos. Saturation reflects that in achieving the specific purpose (theory building) of this
methodological approach, nothing should be left unaccounted. Overall, saturation refers
to the stage in gathering and analysis when the data thoroughly accounts for the various
dimensions and contexts of core categories. In other words, when continued theoretical sampling yields no new or additional understanding to the concept (Glaser, 1978), one has reached saturation. Once saturation was reached, I moved more deeply into analysis.

**Summary**

In this chapter I discussed the methodological assumptions of my research. I provided an overview of relevant methodological issues, including ethical and collaborative research and reflexivity. I explained the impact of feminist standpoint theory and feminist research ethics on my methodology. I introduced grounded theory and provided an in-depth examination of its history and its application. I defined narrative research, explained how it was useful to my study, and put it in concert with feminist standpoint theory and grounded theory. Finally, I detailed my method and procedure for gathering data.
CHAPTER IV.

RESULTS

In Chapters 1 and 2, I argued the need for additional research on female service members, reviewed existing scholarship, and introduced feminist standpoint theory frameworks. Through Chapter 3, I established the methodological assumptions of my study, the procedures used to collect data, and the varying processes of analysis. I detailed how the interviews encouraged narrative, discussion, and collaboration. I reviewed the significance of theoretical sampling in conducting this research, and reviewed the various levels of coding and memoing necessary for analysis. In this chapter, I identify the core concepts and core variable that emerged from the interviews.

Basic Social Processes

This research asks, what are the basic social processes of being a woman in the military? What is the experience of being a woman in the military? How do women explain military culture? What are the standpoints of women in the military and how are they impacted by intersectionality? What happens when the articulation of lived experience contradicts existing discourse? To answer these questions, it is first necessary to elevate the experiences of women in the military to a level of abstraction.

Because military life is both ever-changing and repetitive, it is difficult to provide a linear path from beginning to end of any experience. The experience an individual has at one duty station may be completely different than their experience at another duty station 3 years prior. Therefore, it’s best to conceptualize a model of military experience for women as a series of conditions that roll along each other, like gears of a watch, and stop at different outcomes. The following model demonstrates the basic social process of
women in the military through the core categories of joining, learning, progressing, enduring, and ending.

**Core Categories**

The following provides an overview of the model’s core categories, which include joining, learning, progressing, enduring, and ending. A detailed description of each category and its dimensions follow the overview. In the detailed presentation, categories and dimensions are established using representative excerpts from interviews. Despite using only one or two excerpts to illustrate each category and its respective dimensions, the identification of core categories and their dimensions indicate multiple instances throughout interviews.
**Joining.** The model begins with the category of joining. Women join the military for a number of reasons, and they frame their reasons in a variety of ways. Joining is the process of identifying a lack or need in one’s life, recognizing that the military can supply that lack or fulfill that need, and relating the military to one’s own life. These dimensions overlap each other, demonstrating that sense-making occurs before and after the fact. Put differently, in articulating a narrative, explanations are given in hindsight and tend to pile up. Instead of naming one reason for joining, women typically note multiple appeals for entering military service. The reason for joining can be conceptualized as seeking. Related to, but different from seeking is the dimension of relating. For many women, joining the military involved relating it to their own lives. Typically, this was done through family members. In detailing their experience of joining the military, many women noted immediate family members or a history of military service within their family.

Because everything is framed in the sharing of the narrative, joining is an important concept. Joining presents the reason(s) someone entered the military and its content provides a foundation for understanding their experience of the military. Understanding why someone joined the military is fundamental for understanding how they experienced it. Jobless farm girls from Iowa and globe-trotting Army brats go into the military seeking different things and relating to it in different ways. So, the experience of being a woman in the military begins with joining.

**Learning.** Learning is the next category in the experience of being a woman in the military. Learning encompasses three concepts: discovery, indoctrination, and distortion. Learning refers to information-gaining within the military system, and the
three concepts suggest the particular character of the information gained. In discovery, women don’t know what they don’t know; in indoctrination, women know what they don’t know; and in distortion women don’t know what they know. This category is constructed in such a way as to emphasize the importance of sense-making within a system. The military is highly ordered and to participate within it requires adaptation of its rules and policies – one must learn the system. It is a system that guides thought and behavior; therefore, great dissonance occurs when the system is perverted or abandoned.

Learning is the most prevalent category and reflects that, for most women, military life is a series of new experiences. These experiences are challenging, banal, rewarding, degrading, and sometimes repetitive. Narratives are guided by where women went and what they did; new positions and new responsibilities mark the timelines of their story of their military enlistment. This makes sense when one considers the transitory nature of the military: some permanent assignments are only 12 months, while the longest assignments are generally around 3 years. Relocating, re-assigning and re-integrating into a new aspect of the system every 2-3 years are represented through the prevalence of learning throughout the model.

Learning has two outcomes that may occur simultaneously: progressing and enduring. These two categories reflect the dynamism of learning and suggest that some learning must be endured, while other learning aids in progress. These categories provide a fair and even representation of military experience. In other words, the model acknowledges that some concepts of learning aid in the personal and professional growth of participants while others present barriers that are at times insurmountable.
**Progressing.** Progressing is made up of two concepts, advancing and overcoming, and is the outcome of learning and/or enduring. As a product of enduring, progressing marks a state of overcoming barriers and productively enduring difficult situations. Put differently, overcoming is the productive result of coping attempts. This sequence from enduring to progressing also suggests that once coping yields positive results, the initial barrier or difficulty will not be repeated. For example, women who report using humor and confidence to deal with inappropriate or unprofessional behavior tend to be less affected by that behavior throughout the tenure of their career. Instead, women move into the next experience or next phase of learning. Progressing frames the military experience for women as a series of challenges; the more one successfully negotiates challenges, the more satisfied they will be with their military experience.

As a product of learning, progressing accounts for the advancements made on personal or professional levels. Narratives often include a series of accomplishments such as successful graduation from training programs, new leadership positions, desired duty stations, and so forth. Narratives also include romantic relationships, strong friendships, and the development of family. Progression illustrates that the military is a system that typically moves its members forward, and that narratives move over and onward in positive matters, but tend to slow down and dwell over difficult situations.

**Enduring.** Enduring is made up of two concepts: coping and breaking down. The difficulty of enduring usually determines whether one stays or leaves the military. Women who have been sexually assaulted or sexually harassed often end their military service when the assault or harassment is not handled in an adequate, professional, or humane manner. These situations are often (but not always) marked by a process of
breaking down; drastic changes in personality, depression, loss of motivation, and a decrease in job performance are all features of breaking down. Coping is a concept that refers to the process of attempting to manage or deal with the difficulty of enduring. For example, women will often focus on the big picture or remind themselves of the transient and ever-changing nature of military life in order to endure their difficulty.

It is important to note that the model represents experience within the military. Women who leave the military have not failed to overcome – everyone goes through multiple instances of learning, enduring, and progressing before their military service ends.

You’ve come in and taken something away from the experience. I think that that’s the biggest thing for us to learn is that when we serve, no matter what the hurdles and the obstacles are, there’s always a take away. There’s always something that makes us stronger, more resilient, more capable and a reflection of what our country is all about. I think it’s wonderful. I love it! I hated taking my uniform off, I can tell you that much. (Elaine, lines 641-645)

In terms of a pattern of events, the model illustrates the sequence and outcomes of what could very well be a daily process. Additionally, the model should not be interpreted as victim-blaming. Some women experience horrific personal trauma in the military and it is completely understandable and advisable that they end their military service. The process of enduring followed by ending does not suggest that all barriers are equally difficult to get through or that all traumas can be overcome within a military enlistment.

**Ending.** Ending can be the outcome of learning or enduring and is made up of 3 concepts: voluntary, involuntary, and ambiguous. Voluntary ending denotes an end to
military service that is the decision of the service member. This is often the case when women serve an initial enlistment period and then wish to leave the military, or when long-term service members leave for family, education, or employment reasons. Also, voluntary departures are often the result of retirement from the military. Involuntary ending signifies a forcible separation from the military, either through a medical board⁸ or a chapter process⁹. Ambiguous ending suggests that although some women are not separated from the military by formal policy, they are driven out nonetheless. Women who experience a hostile climate, unsupportive command, or abusive treatment are given no choice but to end their military career. Although they are not formally removed from the military, their experience cannot be adequately represented by the voluntary concept.

Core variable

The core variable through joining, learning, progressing and enduring is negotiating gendered expectations. Negotiating gendered expectations describes the process unique to women in the military and it shapes why women join the military, what they learn, when they progress, and how they overcome. The term gendered expectations refers to those understandings of a person’s abilities, desires, and conduct which are rooted in assumptions about appropriate gender behavior. For women, gender appropriate behavior includes being nurturing, submissive, weak, loving, and collaborative. For males, gender appropriate behavior includes being autonomous, aggressive, strong, assertive, and independent. These assumptions about appropriate gender behavior also extend into more complicated attributes, such as life-paths and sexual agency. For

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⁸ A Medical Board refers to the process of being found physically unable to continue with one’s service. It is important to note that people both welcome and fight separation from the military based on medical board decisions.

⁹ Chapter refers to the type of separation one is given from the military.
example, several women in this study noted that it had never occurred to them to join the military; they had never seen it as a trajectory or way of life to consider. Something happened to them to make real the possibility of military service. Through this example, we see that available life choices are related to gendered expectations which must be negotiated to move forward in the military. The negotiation of gendered expectations for women in the military occurs across three primary categories: life choices, ability, and sexual agency.

**Life choices.** Women negotiate gendered expectations about life choices throughout their time in the military. In the process of joining however, gendered expectations play a particularly heavy role in guiding women through seeking and relating. Many women cite the opportunities afforded by the military as opportunities that were not available to them as women in the civilian world. Other women explicitly stated that the military was an alternative to a traditional female life. One woman specifically said that she joined the military to be “contrary” to prevailing notions about female abilities. Many women framed their identities within a familial subjectivity rather than a gendered one. Put differently, women found their place in the military by relating it as a part of their family life and history. These are all instances of women anticipating gendered expectations in the dominant culture and using the military to escape the limits of that system.

However, once within the military, the negotiating of gendered expectations regarding life choices becomes less liberating than it was in the process of joining. Assumptions about life choices influenced a woman’s opportunities and career path. Some women were denied certain assignments based on the impact it would have on their
imaginary families. Resentful peers asked them how long it would be before they got pregnant to get out of guard duty. Skeptical commanders wondered if they were enlisted only to achieve the rank of MRS. Traditional views about gender and femininity drive these expectations and women have few resources to negotiate them productively.

**Ability.** The deepest and most consistent negotiation of gendered expectations concerned abilities. The most prevalent concept that emerged from the data was the idea of “proving yourself.” Whether thinking back to the words of a mentor, offering their own take on a particular situation, or making a general claim about their overall experience, interviewees repeatedly stated that they constantly had to prove themselves because their abilities were put into question. Many stated that no matter what you did, you would never be considered equal to any man.

**Sexual Agency.** Sexual agency refers to the ability to make decisions about sex according to one’s own will. The negotiation of gendered expectations was especially influenced by perceptions about women service members’ sexual agency. That is, the will of women was often interpreted in reductive and exploitive ways. Women consistently spoke of the bitch/slut/dyke trichotomy, and reported that negotiating this gendered expectation was especially impactful. Women stated that gendered expectations about their sexual agency made it more difficult to develop close relationships with males, contributed to feelings of isolation, and were used to keep women in competition with each other.

The core variable of negotiating gendered expectations and the core concepts of joining, learning, enduring, progressing, and ending emerged through multiple levels of
coding, memoing, and constant comparison. The following discussion of data goes into the concepts and their dimensions in detail.

**Joining**

A particular condition (or set of conditions) marks the beginning of understanding the experiences of women in the military. Conditions include family history of military service, the desire to seek adventure and see the world, a need to support one’s family, and educational and professional goals. In creating and sharing a narrative of their service, participants begin by providing an account for their decision to join. This account is important for form as well as content. The form the narrative takes provides insight into the framing of experience, while the content identifies what particular conditions compelled women to join the military. While these conditions vary, they can best be understood through the concepts of seeking and relating.

**Seeking as a dimension of joining.** Seeking is defined by the lack or absence of something within the civilian world. Through joining the military, women sought opportunity, fulfillment, or escape. For many women, their narratives provided a combination of these factors: desire to travel and obtainment of education, patriotism and school funding, family responsibilities and job security, for each individual, the reasons were rarely singular.

**Opportunity.** Opportunity in general is the most frequent reason cited for joining the military. Opportunity is defined by the pursuit of external or tangible objectives (i.e., a job, training, travel, education).

I signed up in high school to go into the military because one, they were offering of course a job, and education funding and the opportunity to travel. I
think the biggest thing for me was the opportunity to travel; I was living in south-central Los Angeles and attending school at San Pedro high school in San Pedro California. (Andrea’, lines 4-7)

The military also provided some women with the opportunity to support their family (or the family they planned to have).

I was just out of high school. And I had a very small part-time job where I was working for an electric company. And I was issuing components to construction workers and I also had a boyfriend who's going to art school . . . and so the plan was that basically we were going to get married but art school wasn't going to pay for anything so I was going to join the service while he went to school. And I was going to do four years and then when I finish my four years he would've been finished with college our lives would've taken off from there. And the reason I picked military service was that I knew it would give me some sort of job skill, and my father was in the Air Force. (Elaine, lines 7-18)

Travel also played an important role in joining.

My family – I had come from a military family. We were able to travel. I wanted to continue to travel and experience new things. That’s pretty much why I went into the Army. (Donna, lines 16-18)

Education was also frequently mentioned:

I was [at university] to play basketball and lost my scholarship to an injury and I was walking out of the financial aid office after finding out that I had to pay for school. And I walked into an Army recruiter- actually an Army National Guard recruiter to be more specific- [who] told me I could go to college and get it paid
for [by] joining the military. Within a week I had signed all the paperwork.

(Kristine, lines 4-8)

Through these excerpts we can see that travel, education, and employment are opportunities that women sought by joining the military.

**Fulfillment.** Fulfillment is defined by the pursuit of internal or abstract objectives (i.e., adventure; new experiences; personal identification; sense of patriotism). Women most frequently noted their need or desire for adventure in identifying their reason for joining the military. For example, “I went into the Army because I wanted that adventure” (Donna, line 16). Some women said they had always planned on joining the military.

Joining the Army was something that I always wanted to do. One of my neighbors that I grew up with back in the Bronx, I can remember when Roland enlisted and went away and he came back and he always had such great stories to tell . . . and me being an adventurous soul I said it was always something that I wanted to do. I didn't want to do it coming directly out of high school. I wanted to go to college and get my degree first . . . And then you know see what the world had to offer, so I went to school and then my mom passed [away when] I was a sophomore in college...I had two younger sisters and a brother to take care of then and I worked for a couple of years and I thought the best way to give them the benefit of what my mother couldn't give them because she passed so young was to join the military, so at 25 I enlisted. (Bonnie, lines 4-15)
Women also noted their patriotism and sense of service as motivation for joining the military.

It was a decision to – somewhat based on economics, but also I really was raised by a patriotic family and really had a sense of duty and honor for the country.

Both of those played into what scholarships I applied for, for college. (Liz, lines 42-44)

Other women communicated that they wanted to expand their minds and be open to new experiences. Finally, identity emerged as an influence in joining the military – a number of women noted wanting to prove that they could do it (or, as one senior NCO put it “I wanted to piss my father off”).

*Escape.* Escape is defined as moving away from a problem or a set of conditions. For some women, the military provided an escape from their routine life.

I initially joined the military right out of high school because I just didn't want to go off to the same college that everybody else was going off to. And I didn't want to stay in my hometown and work retail. (Jamie, lines 24-26)

Many women, particularly those that enlisted in the 1970s and 1990s, communicated dissatisfaction with the traditional or conventional choices that were available to women, and found that the military offered an escape from those particular feminine destinies.

I was watching- I loved old movies… I was watching this movie channel [that] played a lot of old movies. They kept having commercials for joining the Navy- it's not just a job it's an adventure- so I thought “well do I want to spend the rest of my life with babies in Philadelphia or do I want an adventure?” (Joyce, lines 9-13)
For others, the escape was literal; most often from a bad relationship or marriage.

I joined in, well I first went to the recruiters office in October of 2004 because my parents were going through what I thought was a divorce, they were separated and it was just a really turbulent time. I had broken up with my ex-fiancé or rather he had broken up with me and I basically joined the Army to run away from all my problems. It didn't work out too well. And to run away from my crazy Asian parents. I went to the recruiting station and asked them how soon I could ship off And they said a couple weeks or a month, so I said okay let's get this started.

(Katrina, lines 4-9)

Another participant named a similar reason for enlisting in the military.

At that particular time I was in a two-year relationship that was very bad, and it felt like a really great opportunity. So I went to the MEPS10 and did all the stuff and they told me it was going to be like eight months before I could leave. And I said no that's not going to work, because by then God knows what can happen, so I pushed them and pushed them and pushed them so then finally I was able to leave in just over a month. (Kristen, lines 13-17)

Women from economically depressed communities, women who perceived limited opportunity for job security and advancement outside of the military, women who sought fulfillment, women who needed escape, women who desired to support the family they had or planned to have, and women who endeavored to go to college but did not have the financial means all chose the military in order to access something which the civilian world (or, the woman’s own immediate world) did not provide.

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10 MEPS – Military Entrance Processing Station. After meeting with recruiters and filling out the appropriate documents (this process typically occurs over a number of days or weeks), recruits are taken to the nearest MEPS station for MOS selection, physicals, and other in-processing.
Relating as a dimension of joining. Relating is defined as making a connection to or personalizing the military. In joining, women related the military to values that they sought and to their own lives. Many women used a family history of military service to frame their decision to join, while others associated particular values exclusively with the military or particular branches of the military.

Family. Women typically related their own lives to the military through family or community connection. Women frequently noted that their fathers and grandfathers had served; that they were military brats; that their parents had met in the service; etcetera. These mentions were typically brief, and often included distant relatives and extended family, but women still identified a consistent factor in accounting for one’s decision to join: a familial connection to military service.

My grandfather was a Marine. He’s in the World War II and my grandmother was a US Army nurse. They met in World War II in Vicetown, I believe or Guam during the war. I grew up with their stories. They were fantastic. The stories they would tell of the memories they made during that period. I went to an all girls’ Catholic high school. Obviously going into the military was not really a popular decision. I always wanted to be in the Marines. My teachers and administrators were trying to get me away from it. (Anna, lines 5-10)

The connection between family and always wanting to be enlisted was echoed by other women.

It was just something that I had always wanted to do, and I don't know if it was me just getting a little bit older, getting through, my going into my 30s that it's like if this is something that I wanted to do you know, I better embrace it before I
get too old to enlist. My grandfather who served in the Navy started out as an enlisted bombardier and, you know, made his way up through the officer ranks. He, he loved it. You know. military was part of his life and I just wanted to share that same experience, you know. He had I think served close to 30 years, and it was stable for him and something that he enjoyed. He liked to travel around and it was just something that I wanted to embrace too. (Justine, lines 246-254)

In both excerpts, participants offered a desire to share in or relate to the experience of a family member as impetus for joining.

**Branch.** A women’s experience in the military may be influenced by why she sought to join or what connection she had to the military prior, but it was also influenced by the features or values that she related to the military. “I just see the Marines as just a better fit for my personality. As you know, a bunch of the nuances and differences between the services, but certain personalities are drawn to different services” (Anna, lines 145-147). The reasons for relating to a branch – like the reasons for joining in the first place – were varied. Some women made very informed choices about the values they related to a branch.

When I was going through the Air Force ROTC program, we were looking at career fields that I could obtain in the Air Force. I did some work with and joined some clubs that were ROTC in general that had Army, Navy and Air Force personnel in them. I really enjoyed the hands, more hands-on capabilities of the Army. They were more focused on leadership. There were more opportunities for me, as a female, to actually be in a leadership position within the Army instead of in more of a technical position or trade. Women in the Air Force are somewhat
constrained to much more technical roles and surrounding aircraft design and that sort of thing. I really wanted to be much more with the leadership and be able to actually interact more with the soldiers and kind of be more an active role in the military instead of a technical role. (Liz, lines 49-57)

In these excerpts, the participants identify values and goals that they attributed to a particular branch of the military.

Some women related to the branch in which they had a family connection. For instance, a number of women joined a certain branch because of a father or brother. “The recruitment process for me was, at that time I had two older brothers who were also in the Army, and that's why I joined the Army” (Roberta, lines 13-14). Other women chose a branch that was not the branch of their family or relation. One woman with a career father in the Navy chose to join the Army because fewer people would know who she was.

I just graduated from high school. My father and I were not getting along. We got into an argument and my father was a 25 year Navy man, so I figured the best way to piss him off was for me to join the Army. I was in Mount Pleasant Michigan. I went down to all the recruiting stations, and I spoke to all the different recruiters including the Navy. But ultimately I joined the Army. Primarily because my dad had just retired from the Navy and he still had too many friends in the Navy. So I didn't want anyone looking over my shoulder. (Tricia, lines 4-9)

Other women echoed this same sentiment – that the military was a small world and they wanted to strike out on their own. Branch choice was also influenced by perceived
opportunities – several women reported that they decided to join the Army because it offered the most opportunities for women. Some women mentioned popular ad campaigns at the time of their enlistment or commission (Navy: It’s Not Just a Job, It’s an Adventure). In all, the category of joining is a process of seeking opportunity, fulfillment or escape and relating to the military through personalization using family and/or values.

**Learning**

The experience of the military is a constant process of learning. In basic training and boot camp, women learn how to be soldiers, airmen, sailors, guardsmen, and Marines. In Officer Candidate School (OCS) and the Reserve Officers’ Training Course (ROTC), women learn how to be officers. In advanced individualized training (AIT), women service members learn their MOS. The military is a series of schools, promotional academies, leadership positions, and new training opportunities. In addition to education and training, women learn new things about themselves and the world through the military. Narratives were filled with observations about personal growth and discovery. Women cited their training and service as introducing them to new experiences and new cultures. Yet, there is also a dark side: Women learned that in some cases, they were underestimated upon arrival. Women also learned that male leadership could sometimes be exploitive and dangerous. Certain women learned that to stay in the military they had to make radical compromises.

The category of learning is made up of three concepts: discovery, indoctrination, and distortion. These three concepts denote the character of learning. Discovery refers to information that women don’t know that they don’t know. Discussions of culture shock,
personal growth and fulfillment, and the satisfaction of new experiences are all
dimensions of discovery. Indoctrination defines the process of becoming a service
member and includes the education and training that goes into learning one’s MOS or
position. Indoctrination is characterized as information that women know they don’t
know. In other words, women realize that being in the military is a process of learning
content and the system. The last concept is distortion. Distortion is defined as the process
of women learning that they don’t know what they know. Distortion is useful for
conceptualizing situations where women learn that the system has been abandoned or
perverted.

**Discovery as a dimension of learning.** One of the ways in which women service
members learn is through discovery. The narratives of women service members were
dominated by ideas of revelation and the unknown. In framing their experiences, women
often noted that they did things they never imagined or found out things about themselves
that they never knew before. In terms of learning, discovery is conceptualized as women
service members learning information that they don’t know that they don’t know.

Discovery has two dimensions: the world and the self.

**The world.** The predominance of discovery in service member narratives makes
sense. Many service members travel the world throughout their military experience.
Some women join the military out of a love for travel and desire for new experiences.
However, as much as this might be a general expectation of military life, many women
are genuinely surprised or marked by the act of discovery. Discovery of the world is best
discussed through the ideas of culture shock, cultural appreciation, and new experiences.
The word culture shock was frequently employed to discuss the experience of basic training.

I am from a small town in Ohio…[where] I grew up there were no blacks, no Mexicans, no Asians, so I was very- I guess the word may be naïve. I just kind of had a culture shock when I went in the service. (Kate, lines 10-12)

Although culture shock was alluded to in a number of narratives, it rarely went unresolved. Put differently, women who discussed cultural shock also remarked on the benefit of going through the experience. Women repeatedly observed that the military made them more open-minded and more appreciative of cultural differences. The following excerpt is an exceptional illustration of one of the positive outcomes of military service.

I: What was your what was your experience in boot camp like? Did you enjoy it? Did you get a lot out of it?

P: For the most part I was pretty quiet. I was pretty scared. I had never really… I went to private schooling growing [up], and I did not have a lot of dealing with people of different cultures. The camp to me was pretty much of a culture shock. Being grouped with people from Asia, Africa all over the world. There was even actually a Russian in my boot camp company.

I: How do you identify in terms of your culture, race or ethnicity?

P: White Anglo-Saxon. American. To me it was just a shock to begin with so many different people. So many different backgrounds.
I: I want to ask you talk about the boot camp culture shock for you. Did you have anyone that you kind of made friends with? Someone that you got support from while you were in boot camp?

P: After I guess a week or so I started talking to my bunk mate more [and] some of the other women in the company. There were a few that I just not did not feel comfortable with approaching at all. But I did make some good friends.

I: The people that you were not comfortable approaching, what about them made you uncomfortable?

P: They were from larger cities. One girl I can't remember her name or nothing but she was from the New York ghetto or whatever you call it. She was really rough. She wasn't someone that was open to just coming up to- hard; she was just very mad and very angry. The whole world was against her. I never asked, but I know that I knew that some people went into the military because they didn't want to go to jail. Back in the 80s in the 90s the early part of the 90s. There were still judges that would give you a choice of either go to jail or go into the military. She kind of gave me the impression that she may have been one of those. My bunk-mate was African-American and she was very tall. I'm 5' 10" and she was taller than I was. She had to be about 6' 4". At first we didn't really talk much but then I guess after a week or so of being there and stuff we started talking. She kind of picked up on the fact that… She asked me if I'd not been around many people of color and stuff. And I told her no. I told her that I'd grown up in a basically a white community in the middle of Kentucky and had gone to private schooling so I didn't have a lot of experience on my part with people of different backgrounds
or colors skin color. Even from areas of the United States. What I knew of other people of areas of the United States was basically what I saw on TV or movies.

I: So you two were friends?

P: Yeah it was pretty eye-opening for me. We were studying one time and I know and I'll never forget and she said to me “you know you can touch my skin because the black doesn't rub off.” I asked her what she meant. She said “you seem like you're scared.” I told her that I wasn't so much scared as I'm just on guard.

Because it was new. By the time I finished the camp cultural difference, race difference all that just didn't bother me anymore. It just wasn't an issue. When I first went in it was a very big issue.

I: So that is something that you have taken away from the military as maybe more understanding and more comfort of other cultures?

P: Yes, especially when living back here yeah I have.

I: How has that impacted… back in Kentucky… how has that impacted your life in Kentucky?

P: When I left it was a majority white community. When I came back there [were] a lot of Mexicans here. There are a lot of blacks. Mostly because they're there to do the physical labor that no one wants to do anymore. Farming and stuff. It was a shock to see them here but it was not a shock to get along with them. It was just like well yeah life has changed. The world moves on. You can talk to my dad he is 70 something years old and lived here all his life. I can see the way I used to be compared to what I am. “Oh they're taken over, they’re moving in.” And I say “no they're just trying to make a living just like the rest of us.” Nobody here wants to
do the farm work so we’re now on the list for migrant farming units. A lot of people that have never left here have bad negative feelings about the people coming in because they were so used to the way it was. And I just don't have that. (Brenda, lines 66-108)

Through this excerpt we see the sense-making and progress of discovery. Someone who lived a fairly sheltered life went through culture shock, developed meaningful relationships, moved beyond previously held beliefs, and had a change of worldview. In order to develop this valuable knowledge further, it is useful to include an excerpt from a different perspective.

I: You know that's a really wonderful observation. Something that should be recognized as a real thing in the world . . . one of the things that I value the most in terms of my military service is that I really feel like I was part of one of the most culturally diverse institutions in the United States.

P: Right.

I: And you know I think there's a lot of changes of heart, good changes of heart that happened because of military service. Do you want to speak to that for a little while? Have you had a similar experience?

P: I would agree with you on that. Going back to basic training there were two sisters that were there that it struck me as all . . . but I was amused by it, they had never seen a black person in person. They saw stuff on TV. They used to come to me all the time because I was from New York and at first I thought it was their ignorance, but then I was like these people are really serious. They would come to
me and “you've got long hair is that all your hair? Is that real? I didn't know black people had long hair.” [pause] I thought, you kidding me?

I: Laugh

P: “But your hair is not hard. It's not nappy I didn’t know black people had pretty hair.” [pause] Are you kidding me?

I: Laugh

P: Laugh. You know “oh you're from the Bronx did you live in a burned-out building?” [pause] Are you kidding me? Honey that TV. One of the sisters, I think, she was who she's was gonna be until the day she dies, and one of the sisters was more open to learning even if it sounded ignorant as hell the stuff she said, coming out of her mouth.

I: Laugh

P: You know she would always say “I'm not trying to offend you or make you upset but I just don't know.” You know, and here she was like you are the first black people I've ever seen in person. And it just blew my mind. Like are you kidding me? 1991 and you never ever, [pause] where did you live? [Laugh laugh] In a cave? On a farm? On a farm? And you never like went into town, you never ran into black people? Not where she was from.

I: Yeah

P: And it was just like it was like wow okay. Okay. So. And I forgot where I was going with that-

I: Well just about cultural diversity and change of heart.
P: Yeah I, yeah. Sarah she sent me the link to your page for this study I call Sarah my honorary sister girl. I gave her a black Barbie [laugh laugh].

I: You made her an honorary black woman?

P: [Laugh]. I made her an honorary black woman, a sister girl, yeah. You know you form relationships with people that you would never come in contact with. That's one of the things that I truly enjoyed about my time in service is that you meet people from all walks of life with experiences that are so different culturally spiritually you know everything different from yours. If you have an open mind, it changes everything about who you are. It changes your whole perspective. On how you view the world and how you handle different situations.

I: Yeah

P: I think that overall it makes you a well-rounded more accepting more open individual.

For some women, the positive approach to cultural diversity was identified as part of the military system.

I was pretty aware. I grew up in California. We were in our group of 30 women, in our little recruit training, 10 or maybe 11 or 12, so more than 30% were black girls. The trainers, one of them was black, they thought that – they had never seen so many girls in that particular platoon. They made note of it. They said we’ve never had this many black females in one platoon. I didn’t think anything of it, but they made a note of that. Also, they would be cliquey if we were sitting together or non-working time, the black girls would sit together and the white girls would sit together. They would make a point of we needed to mix it up
because you’re not going to have this clique. The Marine Corps does a very good job of saying we’re not black, we’re not white, you’re all green. All Marines – there’s light green and dark green, but you’re all Marines. They wanted to let us know from an early age or an early time to be sure that things were mixed up a bit. Other than that, I felt a lot more cultural diversity once you get out [of boot camp], serve, and get to see people from all walks of life. (Anna, lines 203-215)

The diverse make up of the military, along with assignments outside of the United States, gave women experiences that they believed made them more open-minded, tolerant, accepting, and appreciative of other cultures and backgrounds.

Women also cited discovery through new experiences. A common theme that emerged from that data was the idea of doing what no one else has done. For example, in one woman’s recollection of her first duty station, she said “It was my first real world operation interviewing officers and seeing how the military works in a rapid crisis response type situation. The shoot for me – getting that kind of experience and being involved in a real world situation” (Anna, lines 41-43). Other women talked about enjoying things they had never considered doing (repelling, map reading, drill and ceremony) or appreciating having an impact on leadership and troop health. Narratives were filled with an awareness of the new opportunities that the military provided. Joyce, one of the Navy’s first ever pregnant sailors, reflected on her special experiences in the military:

P: Well, I was like – my stomach got really big when I was pregnant. On the 4th of July, 1976 – it was our country’s bicentennial. I was stationed in New York. I had won a contest at work to be on one of the ships, one of the MSC ships. I was out
in the harbor. They knew that I was – I knew I was sort of breaking new ground as a woman in the military and just feeling very patriotic. I just felt so good about who I was, where I was and what I was doing. It was just a wonderful, wonderful day.

I: Cool.

P: I really felt like I was a part of history and like I was just a part of America. That sounds corny doesn’t it? (Joyce, lines 273-281)

Women identified experiences that the military provided that they otherwise would not have had. From leading troops to riding an Andalusian horse, women included numerous moments of unique experiences in their narratives.

**The self.** Discovery of the self is also a form of learning in the military. Women consistently remarked on their personal growth and the internal development that they gained from their military service.

The Army taught me a whole lot, and I think I saw from your description that you had served and I believe you can relate. The Army taught me… I changed as a woman, I grew; even my parents noticed that. At first, when I told my father I was enlisting he was like shocked, he was just so surprised because he did not see that is something that I was going to do. Even my senior year of high school I was getting calls from the military academies, and it just wasn't an option for me. I just wasn't, I just didn't even see it as an option. My father was really shocked and he was a little bit concerned because it was the Army not the Navy or the Air Force, he was a little bit concerned about what I was getting myself into. I say that because when I got out of the military in 2004 my father even noticed how much I
changed. And how much I had matured. How much my self-esteem when I went in I had very low self-esteem because I was picked on almost my whole childhood because I was labeled nerd, geek, and all those things. And I'll tell you basic training was the biggest self-esteem boost to me, by the time I finished basic training I felt like I could do anything, and I didn't care who told me no.

(Cassandra, lines 48-60)

Another participant reported that the military gave her an opportunity to excel in ways that she never had before.

I was trying to do my best I'm, I'm I guess my daughter calls me an obsessive compulsive perfectionist so I was always trying to win awards not trying but just trying to get good evaluations. I felt good when . . . I would get 4.0 or got an award. I did horrible in high school so this was . . . new. (Kate, 207-211)

Women consistently remarked on the personal growth and development of the self through their military experience. In this way, women learned about themselves by discovery new dimensions of their personhood.

**Indoctrination as a dimension of learning.** Indoctrination defines the process of becoming and being a service member and includes the education and training that goes into learning one’s MOS or position. Indoctrination is characterized as information that women know they don’t know. In other words, women realized that being in the military was a process of learning the system. Although the word indoctrination has some negative connotation, I would like it to be understood less as the absence of critical thought and more as learning ‘how to do’ or ‘how to be’ within the military system.
I've never been a drill instructor but it seems like the Marine Corps really has some kind of system where I hate to use the word indoctrinate but they did get you into that mentality where you are a Marine. I don't know how to describe it better but it seems to progressively work its way to the 13 week cycles so that way when you left and joined to new duty station you knew what the protocol was we knew what the customs and courtesies were you knew how to be a Marine.

(Sara, lines 18-23)

As a concept, indoctrination covers the learning one does as a seamless part of the system.

Then 9/11 happened and from there I got mobilized as an individual augmentee, is what they call it an IA, to go augment a public affairs team basically – manage a team to go work in Afghanistan. I was with an Army unit in Kabul there with the task force. What we saw as a giant service environment. That was in the early days in 2003. Spent 2003 in Kabul, Afghanistan with an Army task force. It was really, really interesting to learn there first hand how we care for the environment because it’s just a big rush to get there, but learned a lot. (Anna, 57-63)

The narratives of female service members were filled with instances of learning the military system. Within that broad scope, women service members focused on the specific content that they learned and the process used to engender learning.

**Content.** Because of the training and professional development involved in the military, learning through indoctrination often focuses on content and technical information. Service members are constantly learning to do their jobs or perform new
duties. Therefore, the constant learning of content is a salient dimension of indoctrination.

When you could breathe, most of the time you couldn’t breathe. It was just a rush. I think people out of the service think that it’s the physical that’s difficult. For me, yeah the physical was an issue but there’s an onslaught of information that you have to learn to be acclimated. Anywhere from running the military alphabet to any score of different things. The leadership, how we are set up in the organizational chain. There’s a lot to take in. (J.S., 136-140)

Narratives were filled with mentions of the everyday; the process of training and the style of living that went along with it. Discussion of content also provided in-depth understanding of MOS demands, and demonstrated the level of difficulty that military training entails.

From the time we were off from school until our mandatory free time in the evening, we were allowed to do whatever we wanted to do, which because of the schooling we pretty much were studying anyway. So we did no time in AIT\textsuperscript{11} in the field. We now did very little. We had daily inspections to make sure you know our uniforms were squared away and our rooms were neat and things like that on the weekends. We were actually free to go wherever we wanted to as soon as school was up on Friday. Mandatory study time and personal which basically was I forget study time was like from 8 to 10 in curfew was 10 o'clock or something like that, but we studied a lot more and then a couple people within the class every weekend were responsible for going out to school and feeding of a lab

\textsuperscript{11} AIT –Advanced Individualized Training. AIT immediately follows basic training in one’s military career and is where one learns their MOS.
animals carrying cleaning caring for the lab animals on the weekend so we had a relative amount of freedom on the weekends so again we would turn around and spend most of our time studying. (Candice, lines 30-40)

Discussions of learning content also shed light on the sophistication of training programs that service members go through in the military.

One thing, through the training, three months of language, training for Malaysia, my husband and I both in the room with the tutor, five hours a day five days a week, that is the Chinese water torture… Just called something else. Three months of attaché school. (Debra, lines 304-307)

These discussions of learning and doing content also highlight the different responsibilities that women have in the armed forces. One Military Police (MP) who had been recognized early as a motivated and capable soldier explained her position at a duty station.

My job was to coordinate with the civilian police on all the arrests that were made off and pick them up and secure those prisoners and bring them back under military jurisdiction. My job was also to transport soldiers from confinement facilities in that we had to and from for court-martial and then I also went around and I do something region and apprehended AWOL and deserters (Kristine, lines 51-55)

Through narrative, women service members were encouraged to explain what they learned and what they did. The military experience is filled with new duty stations, new training, and new responsibilities, so this type of content dominated the sharing of experience.
Process. Learning through indoctrination also involves understanding process. In addition to discussing the content of their training and their duties, many women commented on learning about process. For example, one officer remarked, “So I learned some good stuff there but the number one take away was I am never to go to a staff” (Debra, lines 303-304). In this excerpt, the participant identified that her values and objectives as a leader in the military were not fulfilled through staff positions; this is an example of learning the system and one’s place within it. Another participant took a larger view of process, and explained how it contributed to better leadership and higher satisfaction.

You get challenging leadership positions, especially as an officer where you go from one job to another. Often, they just throw you into the job and it’s a kind of sink or swim. Usually people swim. You just go in there and take charge and in the meantime you learn about what you’re doing or you go to other people and ask advice. It really rounds you out as an officer as opposed to staying in one particular field. (Donna, lines 67-72)

In all, indoctrination covers the process of learning to operate within the military system according to the overt rules and practices of the system and the specific duties and responsibilities of any given position. Service members learn the details of their job responsibilities, but they also learn how the system works and how to work within the system.

Distortion as a dimension of learning. While indoctrination focuses on the explicit policy and organization of the military system, distortion addresses latent or implicit issues. Broadly, distortion refers to the disruptive impact of female gender on the
military system. The military system hums along until it hits gender difference, then it becomes distorted. No matter the real impact of the gender difference, in many ways the military institution operates on an assumption of the male body. Under this broad consideration, distortion applies to the everyday experiences of women who, for example, attend a VA hospital with no women’s care or are deployed down-range and treated to sexy NFL cheerleaders for their USO enjoyment. Both of these examples illustrate how the military assumes the male subject. In terms of learning, distortion is defined as the process of women learning that they don’t know what they know. Distortion is useful for conceptualizing situations where women learn that the system has been abandoned or perverted. These situations are generally created by gender difference, gender discrimination and sexual harassment/sexual assault.

**Gender Difference.** Some distortion is so banal that it does not merit the label of discrimination. However, in the everyday life of a female service member, distortion via gender difference was ever-present. At best, this distortion overlooked women; at worst it put them in danger.

P: We didn't really feel a lot of discrimination during the training. The only discrimination that I felt was actually on graduation day, when they were unprepared to pin my Missileer badge on with a size appropriate badge, all they had was men badges to pin on. I thought that was completely unfair.

I: Could you explain that little bit more?

P: I think on the part of the staff, they just haven't planned for females to… I guess they hadn't planned for the female uniform, because at graduation the men's and women's insignia for the missile badge are different size. The men's badges
were larger than the women's insignia because most women are a little bit smaller. And so they didn't think it would be that big a deal during graduation to pin the larger insignia on us because in their minds it was just a temporary insignia. But in my mind, the insignia I earned, after working for four and a half months, working my butt off, I wanted the proper insignia and I didn't think that that was too much to ask. Nor did the other four women who were graduating. (Sarah, lines 23-25)

In this excerpt we see that the leadership running the ceremony had not planned for the female body or the female uniform. As a demonstration of distortion based on gender difference, this excerpt shows that women can be marked by a difference which leaves them unaccounted. Through another narrative we see that gender difference created a disruptive moment in certainty and cohesion.

And then another time when I was on a ship I went on an advance party to get things set up then and ready and for the Marines that were going to be on boarded and all of our equipment. This is a Navy ship. They've got women billeting on the ship. Female sailors. But instead of giving me just a little rack to sleep in with them I had an entire birthing to myself. That is a birthing that sleeps 70 people all to myself. No lock on the door and a strange ship. And all of the male Marines that I had loaded with like 15 of them that had come with me. If you've ever gone on a ship [it] is very confusing… How to get to somewhere is very difficult to figure out. I don't know how to describe it. It was just very difficult. And they have been put three decks up and forward I had absolutely no idea where they had placed them. Or where they were. I was completely separated from all of the
people that I was to work with. All of my Marines I didn't know where we were
going to meet how we were going to meet. I didn't know what was happening.

(Sara, 182-193)

This disruption in the military system is built on assumptions about gender differences.
Women learned that they were special, different or trouble. Women learned that gender
disrupts their experience of the military. Examples were countless, and referred to
everything from NCO housing to segregation in training to assignment of extra duties to
uniform restrictions.

**Gender discrimination.** Gender discrimination refers to the discriminatory
treatment of someone based on beliefs, attitudes, or expectations about gender. Gender
discrimination is different from gender difference because gender discrimination is
explicit and deliberate (while gender difference is latent and typically without malicious
intention). Gender discrimination is withholding opportunity, denying equal treatment, or
malicious and unprofessional behavior based on pre-conceived notions about women and
their abilities. In the military, gender discrimination is a form of distortion because the
military system is built on an assumption of merit. Gendered expectations about women
often corrupt the meritocracy, creating a distortion within the military system. As Donna
described,

I was selected to go into another position and I deployed overseas to Iraq. During
that time, I was treated in a way that was just totally unprofessional. My boss did
not like women in the Army. He didn’t – I was in a key leadership position and he
did not provide information to me that he should have provided to keep me in the
loop. He deliberately kept me out of the loop. (Donna, 103-106)
Gender discrimination occurred on two levels: abilities and sexual stereotypes. Abilities refer to skills, strength, and leadership capabilities. Sexual stereotypes refer to gender expectations about reductive female identities like *bitch*, *whore*, and *dyke*.

**Abilities.** Because of prevalent gender discrimination in the military, women remarked that they learned that “you can’t win” and that “you always have to better than a man.” Women most often used the idea of proving themselves to illustrate these experiences of difference and discrimination. Roberta stated,

> And there's no pleasing, that's the point, there is no, and unless you and I've never really heard of anyone who has not had any kind of harassment or any kind of thing happen in the military, as a woman. There is no winning, I hate to talk about winning or losing, but there's no winning… There truly is no way of being completely accepted, like it is when you're a man. (Roberta, lines 279-285)

In this excerpt, Roberta addresses the issue of acceptance, which is extended to men carte blanche. Because the male subject is so inextricably tied into the understanding of soldier, individual men arrive with all the privilege and abilities extended to all men in the military. Women on the other hand, are under constant scrutiny to prove themselves. Kristine expressed,

> Oh boy, to be a female soldier. At times it’s very trying, it can be extremely frustrating, but it can also be extremely rewarding. I think one of the things that I hate the most about being a female soldier is that every new unit you go to, you have to re-prove yourself that you’re a soldier. When males go from one unit to another, they - solely on their MOS and their rank – they’re already assumed to be good. When a female shows up at new unit, the first thing is ‘oh my God, we’re
getting another female. I wonder if she’s going to be a whore. I wonder if she’s going to be any good or is she going to be somebody looking for a husband or is she going to be somebody who can do the job’. (Kristine, lines 514-521)

Other women echoed the same sentiment: that one always has to be better than a male to avoid scrutiny and to receive proper commendation for their performance.

And I have found out that the jobs that I have had that I've had to work in male-dominated career fields, and I've had to work with the Army, you have to be just a little bit better than the other guy. You cannot just be average, you need to be smarter on your weapons systems, you need to know a little bit more about your job, you need to be more physically adept than the average man. (Sarah, lines 73-82)

In reflecting back on advice given by a female superior officer, Debra, a career officer recounts the qualities associated with female success and accomplishment:

So he arranged for us to have lunch and I met her and I talked to her. I remember 30 years later the conversation with her; she was very impressive. She had been one of the earliest women promoted to such a senior rank. She was very professional, very intense, not married and spent a lot of time with her mother, but really lived to work. She said you have to do absolutely everything twice as good as the men. You cannot have any issues. There is no room for mistakes. You have to be perfect; you can't let them into your personal life. I thought ‘wow I went to Catholic school as a kid and this sounds more like the convent than the Navy. But I appreciated her being so blunt. She was a very trim, fit, actually thin, woman who always wore skirts, always wore high heels, and was always perfectly
groomed. I remember one of the comments when I first met her. She said “oh your hair - that isn't going to work.” I had long hair and I had it rolled up in the back and I said “what you mean it isn't going to work?” She said well there are a couple hairs coming down and ...It was so direct, to an Ensign from a Captain that I wondered if I should cut it now before I sit down to have lunch and meet with her. (Debra, lines 46-62)

Jane remarked on the intense scrutiny women are under, noting that any mistakes a woman makes are used as evidence of women’s incompetence and unsuitability for military service and military leadership.

Because they do watch, I experienced that and you probably did too, you have to be the absolute best girl soldier that you can be. Because if you're just marginally worse, they use that to immediately default you, and give you your return card.

(Jane, lines 342-349)

Other women commented on the oppositional standard set for weakness and toughness. For some women, performing their job to the standard invited stereotypes concerning their identity.

Whereas my male counterpart was he’s hardass. He’s hardcore. He’s a good NCO. He’s one of those hard chargers, but when it comes to women it’s ‘she’s such a bitch. She’s always telling us to do things’. The whole dynamic of the whole thing is so lopsided. You can’t be a great female NCO and not be a bitch. But you can be a great male NCO and just be considered a hard charger and not a bastard (Kristin, lines 555-559).
While many women remarked that they had been criticized for being overly tough on soldiers, other women were disparaged because they were perceived as being soft.

I: Will you talk about what you perceive as the differences between male leadership and female leadership?

P: There – I think the biggest one – if a woman is sensitive, she’s considered weak. If a woman is caring, she’s – about her soldiers, even though it is important to care for your soldiers, when a woman demonstrates that care, sometimes she is considered weak as well. There has been a study – I think it’s – my sister is also in the service. She sent this study to me when I was in Iraq. It’s where a bunch of female officers – I think they were all general officers had done a study. They had gathered input from these officers about the differences in their approach to leadership. I think those are two – I was criticized in Iraq because my commander didn’t think birthdays were important. I had a list of all the birthdays of all the people in our unit. If somebody had a birthday, I said happy birthday to them in the morning. My boss, he just thought that was weak and inappropriate. I was criticized for it. (Donna, lines 147-158)

A sense of not being able to win is clear from the excerpts. Women learn that they have to be perfect, that they have to do twice the job of a man, and that they are typically perceived to be either too hard or too soft. In other words, they learn that they can’t win.

Sexual Stereotypes. Sexual stereotypes are a part of gender discrimination and refer to the limited number of identities available to women. Women repeatedly used the dichotomy of bitch/slut and the trichotomy of bitch/slut/dyke to talk about their military
experience. Women in the military, especially enlisted women, learned that they could only be one of a few things.

The battalion commander requested that I come and see him. I remember going into his office. He was sitting in a huge chair, smoking a cigar, and he said to me I know about you. You’re trouble. You don’t want to be trouble. Moving here you have a reputation. You’re either a slut or you’re a dyke. You’ve got to choose your friends wisely. I’m watching you. (Margaret, lines 171-174)

Women were also cautioned about becoming ‘that girl’:

I: Being a female Marine, did your leadership ever kind of articulate what that meant or address it in any way?

P: Actually in Marine Corps boot camp one of the things that they try to get you knowledgeable about not so much that you are different or better or worse or anything but how to behave appropriately with the opposite gender. What is appropriate and what is not. They don't want you to be that girl.

I: Would you tell me a lot about that? I would love to hear a lot about that particular role in that kind of thing. And that particular message.

P: I'm trying to think it wasn't something that they constantly talked about I think it was honestly it was only a one hour class. Don't sleep with people in your shop don't mess with the people in your shop. Don't be a slut. Don't be that girl. It was something that they didn't want any girl to be no matter who it was. Military or civilian. They really try to emphasize that there are so few women in the Marine Corps that it just takes one bad apple to give them all a bad name. So we are constantly fighting that bad apple name. We have to be good at our jobs we can’t
be the lazy one who doesn't do anything and tries to get off not doing things because we’re women. Or I can't do that because I'm a woman. You have to put forth the same amount of effort as the man that's what they really try to get across.

(Sara, lines 65-81)

In the previous excerpt, the respondent addresses both the issue of gender difference and gender discrimination. In terms of the experience of gender difference, the participant expresses that the actions of one woman were quickly projected onto all women. That is, expectations about abilities and sexual agency were built upon the actions of a single woman. These expectations also fed into instances of gender discrimination – women were associated with a high likelihood of laziness and promiscuity; associations that male service members never suffer. Because of this, women constantly worked against the identity of being “that girl.” Unfortunately, the alternatives to being known as that girl were not much of an improvement.

Looking out – as a female in the military, you’re either a bitch or a whore. If you won’t sleep with me, you’ve got to be a dyke. So, I’m going to tell everyone that you are because you won’t sleep with me. Then, if you’re not that – so if you won’t sleep with me and you’re not a dyke, then you’re a bitch. (Kristine, lines 552-555)

This excerpt highlights the limited identities available to many women in the military. Because of the reductive nature of these identities, some women felt that they must go along with the lesser of evils in order to maintain their professionalism and authority.

Exactly because if you fight it then you get the whole, you know the different types of… You know the bitchy woman and you know all that kind of thing that
happens, we have a saying you know when you're talking in the military, you're either a bitch or a slut. I preferred to be the bitch. (Roberta, lines 57-60)

For women experiencing gender discrimination through sexual stereotypes, their social lives, personal relationships, and quality of life were all affected by the limited identities afforded in the military. Women are then regulated by these stereotypes, making sure not to have public romantic relationships (lest they become a slut), avoiding too much camaraderie with other females (for fear of the label dyke), and creating boundaries and isolating themselves to retain their authority and troop respect (thus becoming the bitch).

**Sexual harassment/Sexual assault.** Sexual harassment and sexual assault are also a form of distorted learning. Investing in the ethos of the military removes the possibility of harm or abuse at the hands of a fellow service member. Because of the order and hierarchy of the military, behavior based on gender and gender discrimination does not make sense within the military system. In other words, according to the chain of command, one’s immediate supervisor is in charge of one’s physical well-being and professional development. Biological sex and/or gender should not play a role in the warrior ethos and chain of command of the military. When that system is perverted, women service members experience dissonance and uncertainty – they begin to learn that they don’t know what they know.

When he began to- you know he approached me sexually about having a sexual relationship. Initially it was just, I didn't know that's what he was doing. I was 18…I was kind of like thinking he was being just a little too touchy-feely. I was like okay, okay you got your hand on my shoulder every time you come talk to me. I'm kind of feeling, you know. But it felt weird and then he told me he had
something to tell me, something really important to talk to me about. And then to
meet him and we were going, going to have dinner and I was like okay. You
know [it] just didn't even strike me as fraternization. You know we had had all of
these classes all this training about what fraternization looks like so you know
when he initially said it it was more like we're getting going [to] talk about work.
So in my thinking it didn't look like fraternization because we as a company as a
unit we would do things like that. We would go you know a few of us would go to
lunch or go off post and have lunch or whatever and we would talk about work for
about 20 or 30 min. or something you know- and then he- and just enjoy and have
the time. So anyway he took me to this place. It was a guesthouse or whatever.
Long story short: he took me there and he raped me. (Andrea’, lines 100-114)

Andrea’s narrative reflects the confusion and uncertainty surrounding her harassment and
leading up to her assault. Service members are trained to trust and rely in their immediate
supervisors; this very intimate dynamic can blur the line between professional mentoring
and grooming for abuse. The expectation for professional behavior within the military
system was addressed by Justine.

I just didn't know what approach to take and umm one evening there was another
supervisor there that told me… “oh it's time. You need to get off duty. It's time to
get off duty.” And I was like you know I haven't filled my 12 hours. He was like
you know the guy that grabbed my boobs wanted me to meet him at this VFW
Hall. And I'm like you know this doesn't make sense. I'm not going. “Go.” And he
had told me you know that this was an order you need to change clothes you can't
show up at the VFW Hall in your uniform and everybody was kind of like egging
it on and kind of laughing and you know he had released me for duty and when I went to that VFW hall I mean that he tried you know grabbing me again and what was really odd was was his wife was there who was a military member. And he was trying to set me up with somebody who was visiting from another base and I was just I mean I was just horrified you know I couldn't gather my thoughts I was surrounded. And luckily April I was mobilized so it got me out of that environment during that time and whenever I was mobilized you know it was with my unit which was the #/##. And now it seem[ed] like a teamwork. I just thought well this is just some crazy incident you know. And then whenever I deployed, we were in Iraq, and I saw like this acting first Sgt. kind of doing the same thing to another young airman [a female]. It just really gave me a bad taste in my mouth. You know this wasn't what the military should be about we’re here to do a job not, you know, hookup. (Justine, lines 8-25)

This female airman provides a narrative of confusion and uncertainty – a clash between how things are supposed to be and how they actually are. Disruption is marked by the experience of not knowing what you know. In narratives of sexual harassment and sexual assault, women repeatedly expressed a feeling of not knowing or of being confused. Learning the system teaches a person how things work; they have confidence in their understanding of the system. When that system is perverted, they begin to doubt what they actually know.

**Enduring**

Enduring encompasses both the conditions endured and the behaviors used to endure. Enduring refers to engagement in those moments in one’s military experience
that are understood as bad or negative. Enduring has a relationship to the length of service in the military; women who endure significant setbacks early in their military career often shorten their enlistment. The conditions women service members endure include gender discrimination, family hardship, retribution, isolation, sexual harassment and sexual assault. Coping and breaking down are the behaviors used for enduring. Behaviors and conditions are circular and sequential. For example, enduring and reporting sexual harassment may lead to retribution which results in isolation – another form of endurance. Put differently, different conditions one must endure are not mutually exclusive.

Coping as a dimension of enduring. Coping addresses the ways in which negative situations or actions are held at bay or reduced. For many women, the transient nature of the military played a large role in getting through hard times. Many women cited “waiting it out” as the best way to endure bad situations. Others cited instances of receiving personal support and professional correction from leadership as necessary for coping. Others turned away and used isolation to endure.

I: Would you feel comfortable talking about any of that?

P: Yeah I can talk to you about it, sexual harassment type things, one of the instances that happened. I was like, I cannot remember how many people were there. It started out with two of us female MPs, and then there were four. We were all in the barracks and we were all in the same area of the barracks, and on one occasion on CQ charge of quarters. There is always somebody in the barracks,

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12 CQ stands for Charge of Quarters. The person who is CQ is typically in charge of securing a station within a barracks or other installation when other senior leadership is not present. In other words, the CQ monitors the activities of a building or facility. CQ is usually assigned as extra-duty, and junior NCOs typically take turns acting as CQ over 12 or 24 hour periods on weekends.
and I know you probably know this, the CQ thing was they had a set of keys and all that kind of stuff and one time when my roommates were gone and one of the guys I worked with took the keys and came up and tried to assault me. He wasn't even working at that point it was someone had given him the keys, he was intoxicated. So those kinds of things, like over in Desert Storm the females had an hour once every five days or for five days to use the showers that we had built, the type that have the box on the top where you have to dump the water in very rustic whatever we could do at the time. And during that time the helicopters would come and fly over because they here we were in the showers and they are open and they could see. And they would also then kick up dust and dirt, so you just took a shower and those types of things that were just continually pissing you off. This woman also felt that reporting or challenging unprofessional or harassing behavior would only make matters worse.

**Coping by looking beyond.** Many women cited looking beyond the immediate problem as a way to cope. Some women focused on the transient nature of the military, knowing that they would soon be away from the source of their problems. Other women focused on the big picture, looking to other goals or objectives to get them through difficulties. Finally, women coped by associating offending behavior or problems with an individual rather than with the military institution.

I: How was the assault handled?

P: Well I was an MP and to be honest with you I didn't feel comfortable to [address it]. I talked to my immediate supervisor about it, but I didn't feel comfortable with trying to pursue anything with it, because it was one of those
situations where you're going to be a whining blah blah blah forever. So I handled it that way, and I ended up PCS\textsuperscript{13}ing shortly after that anyway.

I: Let me ask you, do you think, because my research is collaborative, I would like this to be as much about your experiences as a conversation and I kind of like to identify things that I am hearing a lot and things that maybe I experienced and bring it back to you. So here is my question to you, do you think that the kind of transitory nature of the military, you know people coming and going, you come and go, do you think that that has an impact on the way that we deal with criminal behavior? That when something bad happens that the whole PCSing thing has an actual impact on how we deal with that?

P: Absolutely, absolutely. I think that the fact that it is, that people do move around a lot and things happen and I think that has a big piece of it. I also think that my experiences as an MP and seeing what happens when women report things like that, is also a huge factor for me in not saying anything. (Roberta, lines 185-218)

Another woman echoed the same sentiment:

Our XO\textsuperscript{14} was female and she was a good friend of mine to and she would notice that he would be all like weird towards me. There was one day I don't know, we were wearing our ACUs\textsuperscript{15}, the pocket has like an elastic cord it's used to make the pocket tighter, so nothing falls out. One day I was standing doing some office work stapling papers or something and he kept pulling the cord so it hit my butt.

\textsuperscript{13} PCS stands for Permanent Change of Station. To PCS is to leave one's current duty station and move on to their next permanent assignment. PCSing refers to act of leaving.

\textsuperscript{14} XO – Executive Officer. The XO is second in command to a company commander and is typically the rank of lieutenant.

\textsuperscript{15} Army Combat Uniform – the regular uniform one wears for duty and in garrison.
He did it like four or five times. I didn't say anything, after that the female lieutenant called me on the phone and was like “Are you okay?” [and I said]
Why? And she said “that was really weird.” And I said “yeah I know, just leave it. He's PCSing anyway. So I don't have to deal with him.” (Katrina, 106-113)

Other women noted the “big picture” as a resource for enduring setbacks.

It does. I can’t tell you how many times over my career where I thought about I’m just done. Forget the retirement, screw this, I’m tired of this. But I did it. Somehow, I was able to stick it out. Maybe it was because of my daughter or maybe it was just because I was like screw that I’m not dealing with the turkeys bringing me down. (Kristine, lines 561-564)

Often the big picture includes making sense of the situation in terms of the individual vs. the system. In other words, women attribute their dissatisfaction or poor treatment with a person rather than with the military institution. “You remember that it’s the individual it’s not it’s not the Marine Corps who has done this; it is one person” (Marcella, lines 436-437). Women who cited big picture reasons or made sense of negative situations using the individual versus the system tended to have longer careers in the military.

_**Coping through support.**_ Having support was also cited as a sustaining form of enduring. Although a lack of support and community appears to be a hallmark of in-service female relationships¹⁶, service women who experienced troubling situations also report intervention from other women, and specifically, people of advanced rank.

P: When we would go up and there was stuff that needs to be done to the ship and there were not enough bunk mates to do it as a working party. We were changing out links or something on the anchor chain. And those links were about 2 feet

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¹⁶ Many women noted a competitive or hostile environment for female relationships in the military.
long and I think one link by itself weighed over 100 pounds. And I barely weighed 100 pounds back then. I was 5’10” and I weighed 110. And I can remember that the man in charge of the group was standing there screaming at me to pick up the link and move it. Basically I was almost in tears trying to explain to him that I couldn't lift it. I couldn't even drag it hardly. He would just get madder and madder at me because I couldn't do it. But it was just… I wasn't the only one that couldn't do it. There were men [who] couldn't do it. He just would not let up. So he wasn't yelling at the man because they couldn't do it. Yeah I was telling him that I couldn't do it and he was showing me that I could do it. Finally someone came over that put him in his place and . . . somebody else over there to help me.

I: How did someone put him into his place?

P: Telling him that he couldn't expect anybody to be able to walk up and pick that up. Especially someone that wasn't physically strong enough and pointed out the fact that he had two guys over there that they can't do it either. And you’re not yelling at them like you're yelling at her.

I: Was that a male or female? That did that?

P: It was a guy I want to say it was his CO.

I: What's that? I'm not familiar with that ranking.

P: Chief petty officer the guy that was in charge of the group of E5s. And the guy that he was correcting was an E7. (Brenda, lines 130-150)

In this narrative, an important contention is brought to light that many women touched on in their interviews; that a number of men in the military are not as capable or strong as other people in the military. Women would often comment on the lack of abilities or
strength of men in their unit, and observe that women were singled out while men were not. Another instance of intervention can be found in the following:

There was this one time in the reserves; I was filling some duty in Naples, Italy and I was going around changing the trash bags in the trash cans, and I bent over to get the trash bag out and one of the officers said something about my ass being the best part of me or something . . . and he thought it was so clever that he said it twice . . . luckily he said it in a room full of people and the officer that was in charge just happened to be the kind of person that would never put up with anything like that and he had to apologize to me he couldn't talk to me for the rest of the time that we were there. And so it all depended on the officer. (Joyce, lines 158-170)

The service woman’s observation that it depended on the officer echoed a sentiment offered by nearly every women interviewed: Leadership sets the standard and the tone.

I really believe that, you know, that the enlisted only do what the officers allow them to do you know. And if the officer has his head in the sand, you know, and then the enlisted will do whatever they want to. (Joyce, lines 152-154)

In terms of positive coping, women cited good leadership and strong unit relationships as resources for enduring troubling situations. Women who coped in less satisfying or positive ways focused on the transient nature of the military (particularly PCSing), the futility of complaining, and the necessity of making sacrifices for larger goals.

**Coping through isolation.** Isolation plays a large role in coping to endure.

Women expressed experiencing isolation on a number of levels. Women with dependents reported feelings of isolation during assignments that offered little aide to single service
members. Women working in hostile environments offered that they would isolate themselves from others for protection. Women who experienced gender discrimination and undermining reported feelings of isolation. Finally, women who felt a significant impact from gender segregation or gender expectations said they felt less cohesion and closeness with their male counterparts. Isolation was such a common theme that all interviewees were asked their thoughts and observations on it. The idea of isolation came from collaboration between the first interviewee and myself. In hearing her story of coping within a hostile environment, I was prompted to think of one of my own specific experiences that I had never before directly attributed to isolation or coping.

I: I want to talk a little bit of more about something you mentioned and I am, if it's all right with you, I'm going to talk as much as you do because I like this to be collaborative.

P: Okay.

I: I'm really interested in you saying that, you know, you saw a bad environment and so you kind of it sounds like you threw yourself into your work

P: Yeah.

I: Because one of the things I kind of think back on and I didn't realize it at the time but when I was, you know, when I was enlisted and I was living in the barracks, I really kept to myself too. And, you know, I went in my room shut the door and you didn't see me until formation the next day. And I felt like that I was kind of, you know, not maybe not liked, you know. I felt like everybody thought that I was a bitch, right?

P: Yeah
I: but I kind of thought that, you know…and it made me feel bad, you know, when I left the military. I thought, you know, there's a lot of people out there that think I am this . . . you know, not a nice person. And the more I thought about it, well I [realized that I] was doing that to keep myself safe you know? That I was just staying out of everything so that I could be professional and I could be safe. So do you see sort of that with you as well?

I: That's [it] exactly. I mean that yeah exactly because I just didn't even feel like I fit in, like I was an oddball. It was like after tech school and, you know, once whatever you hit your first duty station assignment and all this it was like high school or something. (Justine, lines 267-286)

In my exchange with the interviewee, we highlighted a feeling/process that was shared by the majority of women interviewed. My story (and the sense-making included within it) was often met by “exactly” or “that’s very good way to put it.” Overall, isolation was discussed primarily as a way to protect oneself and one’s professionalism or as the result of having different experiences than one’s peers.

*Isolating to maintain professionalism.* The military can often be very tight quarters. After a shift ends many people gather in rooms and socialize and drink; sometimes they go out to the clubs. A number of women noted that to maintain the respect and authority of their leadership position, they did not feel it would be prudent to join in socializing.

I: You think it is accurate to say that professional conduct for a woman in the military involves isolation?
P: That is a very good way of stating it. You do isolate yourself. (Sara, lines 244-246)

Many women observed that their male-counterparts were not under this same burden to isolate themselves to maintain professionalism and also discussed isolation as a result of not having access to the close relationships that men could enjoy with each other. A number of women noted that they could not develop intimate platonic relationships with men the way that other men could. They attributed this to the regular bonding of men, but also the challenges that mixed-sex friendship created.

I will give you an example. There were only two people in my Regiment who had the same MOS, me and this other guy. We are very very very different. We got along great, got along great, spending time together. Which made it work very well for the work that we did because we had worked together so well. A couple [of] months before I got out we went out for a couple of drinks and when he was in town and he was married. There was nothing improper we were just very very good friends. But he made mention that everybody at the unit thought we are having sex. Just because we were buddies. And I think that mentality makes it very difficult for a woman to have that same sort of teamwork with the guys because of that type of thinking. Does that make sense? Oh yeah. I'm not saying that I felt like anyone discriminated against me or used it against me . . . .It just made it very very difficult to have that sense of teamwork when they're constantly saying that she's there to do or she's going to do something with them. You're going to do go do that with them. I bet you she was doing this with him. A female service member had to watch herself all the time. She couldn't go off with one
guy by herself or be that girl and have. . . I was very conscientious about that. So I did not engage in any kind of relationship in my unit because I didn't want to be labeled as that girl. But obviously from what my coworker said everyone thought we are having sex. Even though I wasn't. (Sara, lines 210-226)

Conversely, isolation occurred because some women felt they were put into competition with other women, and therefore could not develop and sustain close relationships with women. Additionally women used isolation to deal with imposed gender identities.

Because I would be the first person to say some people didn't like me because I was the bitch, you bet, because like I said at least as the bitch they somewhat respect you still. As the slut they don't. They perceive even if you're not a slut if you're perceived that way, there is absolutely no respect. (Roberta, lines 271-274)

In other words, in order to maintain professionalism, women used self-imposed isolation to answer the dyke/slut/bitch question once and for all: they were a bitch.

*Difference in experience.* Isolation was also caused by not having the same life and experiences as one’s peers. Women with children often noted the isolation they experienced as both married and single mothers. Women on overseas tours with infants or small children were often overwhelmed by the lack of assistance available and the absence of other service women facing the same challenges.

I just felt isolated because I didn't have anybody else either that understood what I was going through. I didn't even know what I was going through you know to see my daughter abused. And you know I didn't have anybody. They didn't offer. The Navy doesn't, isn't real good with offering family support I mean they weren't
then. I don't know how they are now. (Kate, lines 304-308)

In addition to the isolation of being a single service member stationed with a dependent, Elaine addressed the systematic barriers that she encountered as a single parent.

I couldn't remember what unit I was in. I had a three-year-old and the seven-year-old and we'd been up for two days trying to get there. And I get there and there's nobody there to pick me up and that I think that particular assignment was my greatest trial in the military because it was just I got there . . . I was supposed to work 12 hour night shifts [laugh] with no babysitter, no place to live, no vehicle. So that was that was really quite a trial . . . and I was like I said I was a single mom at the time and I was working for Intel unit and the Intel unit had had crypto. They had stuff that you know they don't let any one person have access to it. So you had a two-man integrity came you had an 18 min. B team and they had to come together to do this process and so what we would do- we work a 12 hour shift because we were short of manning and then if they needed to get access to this stuff you had to, if it was your week of being on call you have to go in. So when I got there, you know, I took the first house I could take, the first vehicle you know, trying to balance getting a place to live in, getting to work because there was a lot of pressure at the time. I would work all day for 12 hours. I was on days and then I would get home and in the middle of the night I would get a call. Well I didn't have anybody to watch my kids so I would get them up in the middle of the night. I was within 30 minutes away and I would drive them. Well the facility I worked in nobody was allowed in there [laugh laugh] not even your children [laugh laugh], so I would leave my children sitting at the front desk and
go in and do this 15 minutes worth of work and then come back out and drive all the way home. Well you know my poor seven-year-old had to get up and catch the school bus, so you know thinking this is really not working for me so I went to my supervisor and I said I need to make an arrangement here of some kind and that's where I really, I was really surprised by his reaction because he says well you know I can't change the schedule for you because I might have to change it for everybody and I said well I think my situation is a little bit different. (Elaine, lines 355-382)

In this excerpt, isolation is a result of not having proper family support and assistance from her unit. Women repeatedly shared narratives of struggling to secure housing and child care to ‘prove’ that they were capable soldiers, airmen, Marines, and sailors. One woman called it “making the kids part of the game” and noted that unsympathetic commanders would make a single parent’s inability to secure child care at irregular hours into evidence of their poor performance.

*Isolation as retribution.* Finally, isolation stemming from sexual assault or sexual harassment was common. With little privacy to protect them once an accusation was made, women were routinely ostracized and isolated in retribution for reporting harassment and assault. While some women noted that the system has improved for reporting harassment and assault, a number of women offered that no such safeguards have been available in the immediate past. Service women also noted the ‘tainting’ effect of sharing or confiding with other females. This affect further isolates women from each other.

I: When I asked you if you had ever talk[ed] to other women about what was
going on and you just said “no, no, no”. Do you have any insight into why that is?
Why the women weren't talking to each other? Why you didn't have someone to
talk to? Can you talk about that a little bit?
P: We don't taint, you don't want to taint your sister. Because if she knows, then
guess what? The person that knows, now they’re going to be after them too. It's
just the way it is. So if I am stationed with Suzy Q and they’re giving me hell?
One, they have already done everything they can to brainwash everyone to stay
away from you because you are trouble. . . . So now can I go to Suzy Q and say
this has happened? No. Because Suzy Q already has it in her head you’re trouble
and whatever happened you were the problem and you were the issue and so even
if you can, even if she believes, my girlfriend of 20 some years she just found out
at a retreat what had happened to me I never told her [long pause] because it taints
the other person's career and I don't know how to explain that other than to say
that it does. Because if they [the other woman] believe you, it's like now they are
looking at the situation and they are questioning stuff and then the radar gets on
them.
I: Yep I do understand.
P: So no, you just suck it up and wait to PCS and hope it doesn't happen when you
get to where you're going and that it doesn't proceed you, because sometimes you
know that's the talk: They get together and they tell each other that your good or
that, you know . . . (Andrea’, lines 506-527).

In this excerpt, Andrea’ explains that by confiding in other women, a burden is placed on
them to question and challenge the system. The participant found this to be too dangerous
a risk to involve other women in her traumatic experiences. Another service woman echoed the same sentiment:

I: I want to ask you what kind of communication do women have with each other about these bad situations?

P: You know that's the thing that is really, that is one of the things that I think I feel guilty about, is because when things are going on like that you don't . . . want to associate yourself with it, and then the woman, because you're going to be thrown into whatever the outcome is. I think that's one of the things that I feel bad about, having not been there more for the other people that I served with.

I: Do you mean like being more supportive or bringing things out into the open?

P: Yes, and being more direct...you don't want to be associated with the trouble because you are already a troublemaker. So you just want to fly under the radar and do your job and not be a part of that. Because it is rumors that are getting around this place too, and everybody thrives on that stuff. That is a piece of it that, I think that I had close friends but it's not anything, but it was always understood that we needed to be careful that we did appear to be like separate. So it's a really tough tightrope to be walking because you need that support from other women but at the same time you can't look like you have this association with other women, you know what I mean? (Roberta, lines 435-450)

The idea of troublemaker is used to explain the self-imposed isolation of women who experienced sexual harassment and sexual assault. Women are already seen as trouble, so they tend to distance themselves from further incrimination.

*Isolation and social conduct.* The fear of being seen as a trouble-maker
contributed to feelings of isolation on several levels. In addition to trouble, women actively sought to avoid the label of being “that girl.”

I: I do think that female service members and I am speaking from my own experience- that are very interested in being professional and being very interested in the military being a meritocracy for them, tend to isolate themselves. I sometimes feel bad that there are 100 people out there that think that that I'm a jerk because at the end of the day I would go to my barracks room and I would open my door and I just walk in, you know?

P: Exactly you don't want to be that girl. It was lucky where I was at you know when we were, when I was in Korea and I would have liberty, the guys were so good to me they would take me out we would try to have a good time. I think a lot of them realize that I didn't want to break that professional barrier. They were very understanding and very kind. Like you said you do you just go home and shut that door. I feel that that is something that women miss out on. Because a lot of the times the men don't have to go home and shut that door. No they don't, they go out and get drunk and pick and pick up girls. We were in Chicago and one of our battalions deployed and I actually had a friend in Chicago so I called her up and we've gone out and had a great time and when we came and asked for . . . the admin staff were standing out front, there was girls that they picked up. They picked up half of the wait staff and brought them back to the hotel. If you or I had gone out and picked up a guy there would've been a big to do, it would've been handled differently.
In this excerpt, the respondent addresses the double standard and demonstrates how isolation is used to negotiate restrictive gendered expectations about identity.

Isolation is negatively associated with off-base living and non-military routine (family life; civilian friends) as well as social needs (high or low). Put differently, women who sought the company and approval of their peers demonstrated high social needs, while women who had companionship outside of the military culture and responsibilities that involved family and dependents typically had low social needs.

I: I'm wondering if you had experiences of isolation or where you thought that you had to separate yourself from whatever fun was going on to keep yourself safe and successful?

P: Well I wanted to say there seems to be a bar culture in the military or there used to be I don't know if there still is, you know, a drinking culture. I was just you know I'm really kind of a shy person. You know . . . really easy you know I was just kind of . . . nobody thought I was a jerk or anything like that, but my trying to fit into the culture . . . Once I discovered that I was pregnant I found that all of the friends that I had in the drinking culture you know didn't want anything to do with me anymore. So all of a sudden I found myself friendless. So I did kind of go in to myself then because I was living off base and I had my little routines (Joyce, lines 215-230)

Women with low social needs tended to be more mature, with families of their own or family members nearby.
Well, I am not a – I’m social, but I’m not as social as a lot of other people. My best friend right now is my husband. We hang out a lot together. I’m not a person who’s terribly, terribly social anyways. (Liz, lines 269-271)

Women with strong relationships outside of their unit or the military in general often cited these relationships as fulfilling needs of affirmation and company.

Women with high social needs tended to be younger, with no spouse or dependents, and felt it was important to be part of a group or to engage in the social activities of their peers. These social activities frequently organized around a drinking culture, which created further experiences of isolation:

I: I would open my door, walk into my room, and shut the door and you would not see me until formation. Reflecting on that and talking to all of you participants, has kind of brought to light the thought that what I was doing was I was making myself safe. The price of that was a bit of isolation and not being a very likable person. Do you agree? Can you build on that? Or expand on that, what you think about that observation?

P: I totally agree. Because I do the same thing now, I am out processing right now so the only thing I do is I go to PT formation and I don't see anybody else for the rest of the time, during the workday, I just go home. I do agree that it is keeping yourself safe and stuff, but I find that it is easier, especially dealing with a bunch of these single males that are from all different backgrounds and all different MOSs and stuff, I don't know how they think that way. Like talking to them for 5 seconds makes you or gives them the impression that you like them. I just do not understand that, it is easier for me to be bitchy and just stay away. So if you want
to talk to me or you want to build a friendship with me then you keep coming to me and you prove yourself and prove why you should be in my life. Because I've had way too many instances where I've gotten hurt so I don't let people in usually. I: What do you think is the emotional toll on you of not letting people in?
P: I feel loneliness because, I have to admit that that Fort Riley is super depressing, not having anybody here. . . . It kind of effects me too because I don't drink anymore, I gave up alcohol and everybody goes out to drink and have a good time and stuff especially since we have a state university right next to us. About 20 miles away. So they all go out drinking and I'm just stuck back here not doing anything. So it's kind of loneliness and boredom I'd say are the emotional tolls. (Katrina, lines 209-230)

Through the participant’s narrative, we see the impact of social needs on isolation. Her avoidance of companionship is not related to low social needs; instead, it is the result of restrictive sexual agency and a desire to stop drinking. In this instance, her isolation is the result of participating in neither the limited identities available to her nor the drinking culture. Because of these choices, she loses access to dominant social practices.

**Breaking down as a dimension of enduring.** Another form of enduring involves breaking down. Breaking down describes situations where the woman service member felt she could not sustain or move beyond a negative situation. While coping denotes continued practices and strategies of enduring, breaking down addresses situations that offer no recovery. Breaking down is an important concept when examining narratives because within the telling of a story, participants typically identified the build-up to them leaving the military. For women leaving the military because of hardship and/or trauma,
their narrative was framed by the conditions that led to their decision to leave. Often, breaking down suggested getting to a place where one’s objectives or desires were unrecoverable within the system. This loss of recovery comes from being denied professional goals, making mistakes that are serious enough to impact career progression, and enduring trauma.

I had another enlisted person come in who had been overseas. Initially overseas were done differently. They were done by typewriter. We had the hard drive; we typed on a disc and took it to the newspaper. They did it by typewriter. He came to our base and couldn’t understand why it was that we did things the way we did. He wasn’t even there for a week and he gave me a letter of reprimand cause I had simply told him very nicely – just told him why don’t you just take a week and observe what we do, how we do it and then offer recommendations?

He had come in and wanted everything done his way when he hadn’t even observed. Anyways, that started a whole big scenario. That letter of reprimand went to the non-commissioned officer in charge of enlisted people. Then, that went to my squadron commander. He called me in. I told him exactly what happened. I got the letter of reprimand. He told me – I had also gotten orders to go to Turkey and the supervisor wouldn’t sign them. I said to him that by not signing them, you’re keeping me here with you. He said that’s fine. I don’t want anybody else to have you. I was like okay. Basically what he did at that time was he ended my service career because if I couldn’t get those orders signed, I wasn’t going to get any other orders. The squadron commander knew this. He knew what I was dealing with. He knew me. For the last two months of my enlistment, cause
I requested an early out at that time because I knew I was not going anywhere.
There was no sense in me staying any longer than I had to and that I couldn’t stay
with that supervisor or I probably would have ended up going to jail. My
squadron commander actually pulled me out of my office and had me work in his
office for the last two months, which is unheard of. (Natalie, lines 22-41)

Kristen shared a similar experience:

After I'd completed school and everything to get on the ship that I wanted really
bad, I was sent to the Gulf. And then I spent three years on the ship. I had severe
problems with depression and was on medication. I was a typical overachiever, I
was killing myself trying to go to school, trying to make rank, trying to get all the
qualifications. Then I was well on my way to being advanced over, without going
over the regular process. I had such a good record that they were going to do what
they call command advance. But then this problem with depression, I think I was
just doing too much, and I got really depressed. And they told me that I could not
be on a ship if I was on antidepressants so I went on extended duty and went to
the shore command and subsequently got in trouble. I was supposed to report for
drug and alcohol counseling- a two week outpatient plan- and I got down there
and they told me that someone had screwed up and they didn't have my orders. I
went home. And I said the heck with this and instead of going back to school, I
was gone for two weeks and then went back to work. And a friend of mine, I had
also been working a part-time job with her, she'd worked under me on ship and
she had been at the command that I was at, while I was on limited duty, I was still
friends with a lot of them, and she brought up a question: she thought was kind of
odd I was helping her, working long hours, and what was I supposed to be doing, so they started questioning and they realize that I was on unauthorized absence. Well at that point in time I really didn't have a very good plan and then they asked me about it, and they said that I was not remorseful, and they took me to Capt. match or whatever and suspended me and took away my recommendation for advancement and questioned my fitness and I was still a single-parent and the female jag officer basically told me that if I can’t handle . . . . just get out. So [that] was over a year because I'd completed my probationary period...I thought my career was over, in my mind, it had been 8 1/2 years. They took away my citation for good conduct and I had no advancements for possibility for another couple years, and I didn't think I could recover after that. After all I had done, I had screwed it up. (Kristen, lines 27-51)

Breaking down is associated with unrecoverable professional goals or advancement, but it is also associated with trauma. Although not all women who suffer sexual assault and sexual harassment leave the military, women who are the victims of poor treatment and extended abuse very often do break down and leave the military. In the following excerpt, a Marine who had been raped by another Marine expressed the suffering she experienced due to the gossip and retribution that followed her from one assignment to another.

So I kind of had enough about after the third year of all this. It [harassment] never it never went away in aviation in the Marine Corps. In [an] aviation environment it's very very very small world, it's a small percentage of people. (Lori, lines 85-87)
Narratives of breaking down also include plans or objectives being lost because of negative experiences. Through a number of narratives, women contrasted their trauma with what they had planned to get out of their military service. Women who believed they had no choice but to leave often expressed how much departure corrupted their plans for themselves and their vision of their future.

I wanted to be a chief. I mean that's where I saw myself going, but after you know being in Iraq and some of the things that I saw and experiencing rape…it ruined my career I didn't know, you know, who to talk to, I couldn't look at first sergeants the same way. I couldn't, you know, whenever I got back to my unit it just wasn't the same. (Justine, lines 127-131)

As a dimension of enduring, coping is related to higher satisfaction and longer enlistment in the military, while breaking down usually results in ending one’s service. The earlier one encounters a troubling setback in the military, the more difficult it is to move forward.

And there was a lot of crazy insane people-[they] get overseas they forget they have wives. They forget they have conscious and they become animals. Basically I was raped there and uh they didn't deal with it. Uh, you know, the military pays me disability for it. That was really a bad time for me. A real bad time for me I was a kid. I had just, I think within a few months of that had just had sex for the first time. . . . I was very innocent, guarded young lady. And I got thrown to the wolves, so that sets the tone for the rest of my enlistment. And I had to fight a lot

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17 A chief is a Warrant Officer. The rank of Warrant Officer requires one to have highly specialized knowledge of one’s field and to be selected from a competitive pool of applicants.
of rumors and innuendo, a lot of sexual harassment to the point that I got out a year earlier in my enlistment; I couldn't handle it (Lori, lines 33-51)

Breaking down also describes the change in mood, motivation, and behavior of those women faced with distressing environments or situations.

I went from that person to this really dark, just I was magna bitch. That's the only word I can think of to the point where if you could look me in the eye you would be so degraded because I had so much anger and hostility toward the people. When they brought me back I was just, you know, just very hostile and very, it was like I was seething. It was a seething anger and it could be passive aggressive, but mostly it was just aggressive. Aggressive to the point of telling NCOs, you know cussing at them and saying “Hell no I am not doing that.” You know, you do it, it's your work. You get it done. I have my work here, it’s complete, and having people say, you know you are going to have to tone that down…I'm not toning shit down. This is it, you know, being sent home because [of] my appearance. . . . I would just show up and they would send me home and dock my time and say you are going to straighten up. You are never . . . you are going to do this, you are going to do that, and I would take forever and I would come back. I would do it, but it was so much angst and so much, you know like I said it was seething anger. (Andrea’, lines 461-482)

Breaking down refers to both the military system and the individual’s sense of well-being. In the following excerpt, we see multiple levels of breaking down in emotional well-being, professionalism, and trust.

P: So I would be working with him directly and he had been sexually harassing
me for over a year and so with what had happened when I first got into the unit
[she had been raped], it made me very very scared and I broke down I just
literally broke down and I told the people that were over me that I couldn't go on
that team [with him] . . . and went to my command and they said I probably
misunderstood him . . . . So I repeated to my command what he said to me, and I
asked my commander would he do that? Would he say that to me? Being a
married man living on post with his wife and children, would he say that to a
single woman living off post alone with a child? And he never responded to me,
he just saluted me which meant that that was the end of our conversation and I
didn't go on his team from that point forward. And this is in the mix of, you know,
there's a huge something and there's Desert Storm going on and we are at
heightened security, heightened everything. I have a top secret clearance, never
had a breach of security, never had anything, but I started to all of a sudden have
to do extra duty and you know getting in trouble. Article 1518 not a field grade but
a company grade you know just all kinds of stuff because you know, because I
told [on her rapist].
I: Can I ask you? Would you be comfortable saying what you told the commander
that the NCO said to you?
P: Yeah. He . . . well it was a blend of things that he did . . . The final, the final
thing that he did was while we were in the field. Well we were in the field
because annually we had to fire our weapons and qualify and he was the one
clearing the weapons [riding a rod down the barrel of the rifle to clear unused

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18 An Article 15 is a formal punishment. It refers to the document used to report one’s poor conduct, and to
detail the corrective training that the service member will have to perform.
ammunition] . . . So I'm standing there, he has to clear the weapon, and he takes this, the shaft, and he slides that, you know it's just a drop it down and pull it back out and move on. And he slid it down the shaft really slow and locked eyes with me and said “why don't you let me come over and um you know” and kind of like said “you know watch your baby for you while you sleep?” And I just kind of looked at him like because, it wasn't what he was saying it was the way that he was saying it. He was trying to, you know and I was saying no I don't need that, I don't need that, I don't need any help with my baby you know he would always bring it up to me something with my baby. You know, you need some help with your baby, you need something to give to your baby, let me do this and I was thinking well you are married and you have a wife and you don't have any kids why don't you, you know, you and your wife offer to babysit my kid or whatever? Why do you have to come 30 miles outside of the base to my house where I am by myself so you can watch my baby while I sleep!? (Bobbi, lines 182-219)

Women who experienced rape or sexual harassment were subject to punishment through extra-duty, retribution from their peers, and reputations as trouble makers and bad service members. In all, women experienced breaking down from enduring sexual harassment and sexual assault, hostile environments, unfair treatment, and denial of opportunity.

Progressing

Progressing occurs throughout a service woman’s career and is made up of two concepts: Advancing and overcoming. Advancing refers to the process of moving through the military relatively problem-free, and is the outcome of a positive learning experience. Although narratives provided few explicit illustrations of this experience, it is
necessary to conceptualize the model in a way that attends to those hundreds of unspoken moments when everything in one’s military experience went smoothly. My argument for this is that the model must signify all aspects of the basic social process. Many women presented their narratives as a series of advancements throughout their military career, and only remarked on negative or challenging situations in response to my probing questions.

**Advancing as success.** Actual instances of advancing within narratives are often framed as success. Many women attributed their successes to finding productive coping mechanisms and characterized their accomplishments as transcending gendered expectations and stereotypes. Tricia said,

Sgt. Maj. said you know that “I didn't pick you because you're a girl.” And I said that's good sir because if you did I don't think I could take the job. “No you've got a great record and you’re a soldier’s soldier. I think you're the best person qualified for the job.” I'm like ‘great sir’. So I went to Leavenworth and I ended up being a sergeant major there for seven years. I served with four different commanders; with each commander that came along I said, ‘well sir do you want a slave for a new Sgt. Major?’ and they said, ‘no Sgt. Maj. Prichard your reputation precedes you and I would like you to stay on as my sergeant major. So I stayed on with each of these generals. In 2004 I got a call from Lieut. General Dave Barnum, who I'd met a lot of different times and different conferences. I'd served on a couple panels with him when he was a major general and I kept in touch and he called asked me how I was doing and I said I was doing great sir. I congratulated him on becoming a three-star and he said what he and I said well
Gen. Wallace just came on board in July last July and asked me if I'd stay on as his Sgt. Major. And he goes ‘I was wondering how adventurous you are feeling?’.

‘I am always up for an adventure, why?’ ‘Because I'd like you to come to Afghanistan and be my sergeant major.’ (Tricia, lines 340-354)

Success was also framed generally, without any dimension of gender difference or discrimination. As Debra described,

They were still teaching Attaches to work in the Cold War environment. I said I'm a female going into a Muslim country, how do I do this, and the instructor said “wow let us know when you come back home.” He did not know what I would face nor how to prepare me for it. And I said “okay, thanks, that's great”. So I went to Malaysia and really found it to be an interesting tour. This is in 2005, we were four years after 9/11 and we were totally into the Jihad which an awful lot of Americans, as well as Muslim, view as kind of a war between the religions. We were also coming off of the tsunami in Indonesia. It had hit part of Thailand and part of Malaysia. So they had been very closed to us. There hadn't been much engagement with my predecessor, another P-3 pilot, who advised “do anything you can to get any ships in, otherwise it is pretty boring”. So we went from about three ship visits a year, to full engagement on my watch. We had 65 ship visits in those three years, including five carriers and five submarines. Massive engagement, it was just huge. I met Seventh Fleet and PACFLEET in the first month there. And they said we want engagement and I said all right engagement you got. So we ratcheted up the operational tempo. It was a spectacular success, everything worked. (Debra, lines 328-341)
Women’s narratives were populated with many success stories, ranging from personal levels to professional levels. Within the narratives, women mentioned marriages, friendships, promotions, and personal accomplishments. These instances are so ubiquitous that they are adequately understood within the category of advancing.

Progressing’s other concept, overcoming, is the outcome of enduring through coping. Women overcame the physical and emotional challenges of basic training, the intellectual challenges of advanced job training, and the personal challenges of difference, discrimination, harassment, and assault. Women spoke of overcoming in terms of resources, strategies, and results. Women often remarked on the perceived resources that allowed them to overcome bad situations. Women noted their upbringing, past experiences, and personal goals as matters that contributed to their ongoing well-being. For example, a number of women cited the work-ethic they were raised with as giving them a better appreciation for pulling their own weight and negotiating gender discrimination. Women also shared their strategies for dealing with difficult situations. Finally, within their narratives of military experience, women shared their successes, which were a product of overcoming hardship and difficulty.

**Resources as a dimension of overcoming.** Women identified a number of different resources for overcoming difficulties and hardships. The life one had before the military influenced the life one had within the military. In speaking to women about their experiences, an idea that came up over and over again was the impact that their upbringing had on their life in the military. In addition to that sentiment, women also referred to the upbringing (or background, or how someone was raised, etc.) of others in making sense of their own experiences. Who you were before the military - the things
that happened to you before the military and the values and beliefs instilled in you before the military - all of these things impacted the myriad issues in one’s military experience.

One resource that was impactful was a successful military parent. Whether expressed explicitly or latently, women who had a career military parent appeared to have more resources for dealing with resistance, hardship, or discrimination. Women also noted the influence of their perceived gender identity. When asked if they had received uninvited attention or been subject to harassing behavior, a number of women gave the answer that they were a ‘tomboy’ to explain what may have kept unwanted behavior at bay.

I: What was that environment like for you? Was there any hostility toward being a woman in the Navy or what was that situation like?

P: Actually no not for me. I should say that because I was really like a tomboy and I was there to do my job. I never dated anybody out of the shops I've worked in. And I really tried not to date anybody on my ship or my duty station or my shore leave. I knew that would just be trouble.

I: Why was that?

P: Because it's not a good breakup you still have to see each other and stuff every day at work. I knew that would be a good thing. I didn't want somebody that I would have to see if I wasn't dating them. I was there to do my job.

I: So you had a really good experience because of the choices that you made.

P: Because of the choices that I made and because of the way I was raised. My dad and my Papa they were farmers. There was no difference in my chores and
those of my brothers’ chores. I just kept that attitude there was no difference in my assignments then there was the next person’s. (Brenda, lines 306-318)

Additionally, one of the primary ideas that ran through many of the interviews in terms of things that influenced one’s experience of the military was maturity. A number of women commented that their experience was very different than the 18 or 19 year old females in basic training because they had lived out on their own, or had already experienced successes and/or failures.

I think I have something to do with it and then to, like I said growing up being the oldest girl and having younger sisters a lot of that made me say “Stop. Foolishness.” We're here to do this if for nothing else you're not going to ruin the benefit of this experience for me and, you know, so there were a couple of girls that I did gravitate to that were more mature than the rest of the girls, but for the most part a lot of the stuff I saw was silly you know like I said little . . . 18-year-old or 19-year-old girl stuff…When we would get a pass on the weekend and be able to go to the PX all oh the makeup and the clothes would come out they would lose their minds. It didn't make sense to me. You know it was hilarious I just I wasn't there I knew what I wanted to do. I knew what my plan was; I said I was trying to get custody of my younger brothers and sisters so I was there on a mission and I was focused and this was what I needed to do I didn't get caught up in all of that. (Bonnie, lines 204-220)

Finally, values played a roll in the perceived resources of women in the military. Women who identified with a certain set of values referenced them in narratives about identifying problems or overcoming adversity.

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19 PX – Post Exchange. The PX is usually a small mall or department store.
I noticed that I wasn't going to church and that kind of bothered me. I wasn't feeling so good. I wasn't feeling good about what I knew…what I thought I knew about myself as a person. (Jane, lines 134-136)

In general, women attributed some of their successes and accomplishments to the experiences they had prior to entering the military.

In addition to other prior experiences, women cited overt female socialization as an obstacle to overcome in the military. Women identified both their own socialization and the socialization of others as an important factor in the military experience.

I'm supposed to be a big girl now, but I'm still, you know, still learning. And you have all of this responsibility. You are in the world of an adult, but it's kind of hard. It's a hard transformation. First people that age to make, you know, because they are not used to this level responsibility and I don't think the maturity has caught up to it yet but that's just the nature of the beast. You know what I mean, they're not working at McDonald's they're working the military. . . . I have a daughter and she's nine…I keep a heavy eye on her. She's smart as a whip, thank God, but she is a pleaser, you know. I fear in school and I don't want her to become you know that kind of girl. You know they say that the girls’ natural confidence and stuff as they start to hit puberty in the pre-teens you know what I mean? Yeah and that's not happening with her. I'm gonna laugh laugh laugh make sure if I have to sit on her every day it is not going to happen, you know, because I am watching her and I don't want her to become that way . . . and it happens you know. I don't think my mother knew I don't think a lot of the moms back, you know I was born in 1970 so I don't think parents really knew that I don't even
think I knew that when I was growing up that I was giving up some of my natural abilities and skills at some point you know between like junior high and high school you know what I mean I don't know I don't know if you realize that you’re doing that but like you said the need to connect the need to please and be accepted sometimes you compromise,

I: Yeah I think that think a lot a lot of times it's recognized as losing your selfhood for females.

P: Yeah yeah you do and and if you come back it's scary sometimes what you may come back as laugh laugh laugh and you know that can carry on into marriage and motherhood and total losing of yourself. And that's also something else I never got into either, but in the military world it's kind of good in the sense that if you have those skills of sense of self and self-confidence in getting the job done and leading people it's a good place to do it. I think you actually have a better shot of it there then corporate you know the corporate world I think because there are things in place to help you win and to kind of keep the lions at bay.

(Jamison, lines 250-284)

Women spoke at length about female socialization, and identified the desire to be liked, the desire to not upset others, and the desire to please others as attributes that caused trouble for women in the military.

I think that some women kind of, for different reasons, you get to where you're at with a little more confidence in yourself or a little more life experience, or whatever it is. But I think that females that have a lot invested in, how women are traditionally socialized, which is to please other people...(Roberta, lines 278-281)
Women that were raised to be confident and autonomous – and protective and wary – credited much of their positive experience in the military to this particular upbringing. Women also mentioned being treated as equal to their male siblings, and having backgrounds where they were expected to carry their weight.

**Strategies as a dimension of overcoming.** In discussing how they avoided and minimized bad situations and inappropriate behavior, women often discussed the strategies they used.

I have always been very direct with men, I've always been on the scale of forcefulness may be a 60 or 70% and if I think that maybe we’re starting to head down an inappropriate road, I will call them on it right away. I flashed the yellow card immediately and I pushed back pretty hard. I do it early because what I have seen is if you call it and un-professionalism as opposed to a sexual-harassment or something else it's easier for them to recover from it. I learned with the Asian sailors about saving face. You have to give people an out. Then they realize that oh no this is not going to work. We can both get out of this and maintain some kind of relationship and we just never go back there. (Debra, lines 438-445)

Women also incorporated their personal experiences into making sense of their strategies. Maybe because I have three brothers, I just learned that you don't rise to the bait. Stay focused on what the task is and sooner or later they get tired of baiting you. That was the tactic I took with every unit I ever went to. If they tried to run the girl card or pick on you for being a girl, I would just say ‘yeah now we've established that I'm a girl let's get down to what we need to business’. They don't
really know where to go with that. They can't argue with that. So you take off the steam and off you go. (Jane, lines 328-333)

Other women provided general guidance for dealing with bad situations or distressing circumstances.

I always say when you’re uncomfortable and somebody has done something then you scream until you can’t scream no more, then you keep screaming. Don’t ever stop until somebody listens. Because if you’re somebody that someone has done something to you, you will find the right person who will believe you. Somebody will do something about you, whether it’s somebody like me, but I tell them that. Don’t give up at first because it sounds like nobody is listening. (Colleen, lines 452-457)

Overall, women offered a number of strategies for overcoming adversity in the military. The primary idea was to transcend gender; get the girl issue out in the open and move past it. Other women were adamant about cutting potentially inappropriate behavior off as soon as possible. In all, strategies for overcoming involved standing up for one’s self, looking out for one’s self, and not allowing gendered expectations to dictate one’s treatment at the hands of others.

Ending

A number of conditions influence ending one’s military service. These conditions are found through the categories of learning, progressing and enduring. The category of ending stands more as an outcome than a process. Put differently, there are many different places to end in one’s military experience. However, while the reasons for ending one’s military experience are best covered by other categories, the act of ending
one’s military service can be understood on its own. For most women, choosing to leave the military does not impact the satisfaction or overall experience that they got from the military; it does not signify giving up or indicate failure. Ending is made up of 3 concepts: voluntary, involuntary, and ambiguous. Voluntary - the result of overcoming or learning - denotes an end to military service that is the decision of the service member. Involuntary signifies a forcible separation from the military, either through a medical board\textsuperscript{20} or a chapter process\textsuperscript{21}. Ambiguous suggests two things: one, that women can voluntarily leave the military through involuntary means (giving in to a med board) and two, that although some women are not separated from the military by formal policy, they are driven out nonetheless. Women who experience a hostile climate, unsupportive command, or abusive treatment are given no choice but to end their military career.

**Voluntary ending.** Many women end their military careers voluntarily and on a positive note. Often time this choice is based on family desires and commitment, or educational or career goals. Some women are simply satisfied with a 4-8 year enlistment and do not wish to continue on with their career in the military. Many women prioritized being with their infants over continuing in the military.

I was pregnant with my son and I was spending about 120 days in the desert and 120 days home and then 120 days in the desert. And I realized that I couldn't leave a four-month old and come home to an eight-month-old. (Jamie, lines 192-194)

\textsuperscript{20} A Medical Board refers to the process of being found physically unable to continue with one’s service. It is important to note that people both welcome and fight separation from the military based on medical board decisions.

\textsuperscript{21} Chapter refers to the type of separation one is given from the military.
Other women who married men in the military (this situation is known as dual military), left due to the hardships created by both parents being up for deployment.

When we returned from England I decided to leave the service because I was afraid we would get mobilized again and we had had two children and it was really difficult for them to have both parents mobilized (Joyce, lines 82-84)

Some women found a compromise between parental roles and military service. Many women serve in the guard or reserves before completely separating from the military.

When he held up little arms and said “miss you,” I thought that's it and I put in my papers and the next day. The Army would not miss me, but my sons will. So I left in April of 1987 and went into the reserves. That was a very good choice. (Jane, lines 110-113)

In addition to the impact of dependents on ending military service, other women consider ending their service once they get to retirement (20 years) but stay on until desired opportunities dry up.

When I talk to the detailer he said, well we've got two great staff jobs, no I'm not going to do a staff job, there must be something else in command or operational or I'm going to retire. He said ‘oh no in a year or two we are going to pick an Admiral’. I said you are just running out of time. I put in my papers to retire, 28 years is a pretty good run of it. I'm not going to go sit in the Pentagon and do that whole PowerPoint drill at a higher level. Not for two years that would suck. The week I retired, they laterally transferred a surface warfare officer, a male, to become the first FAO flag. I thought isn't it something even to this day there is still such hesitancy in going with a woman. So I retired I had my change of
command retirement ceremony in September, retired in November and that's my story. (Debra, lines 354-362)

Women typically leave the military voluntarily because their enlistment is over (4-8 years), their family and/or children become the priority, or because they have reached retirement.

**Involuntary ending.** Staying in the military is actually more difficult than some people may realize. Individuals with recurring injuries or conduct issues are often formally separated from the military. Some, depending on their length of service and degree of injury are medically retired. One woman, diagnosed with diabetes while in the military, recounts her experience with the medical review board:

They sent me back home first. They sent me to Fort Gordon. I went through the medical review board and all that stuff, but there was no way. The problem was I am supposed to be handing out meds and I was at a field hospital. We were 326 medical battalion assigned to different field hospitals in Iraq. Unfortunately with the field hospitals, when I first went in, there were a lot of SCUD missile attacks and the lines kept changing. One day you’re front line, next you’re rear echelon, next day you’re front. During that time, I did have some issues but we were so busy I don’t think anybody really noticed them. Which was good because I didn’t want them to notice. Towards the end when things were ramping up – you know in the military you’re always busy. I think there was more time to notice my issues. (J. S., lines 268-276)

Medical boards are very common for service members who have sustained injuries or have chronic health problems.
Ambiguous ending. Individuals with recurring injuries or conduct issues are often formally separated from the military. Although these situations are recognized as involuntary, sometimes women – after years of dealing with injuries or chronic pain – will allow for their medical problems to be used as a way to leave the military.

I got to work for a woman who was the worst boss in the United States [laugh laugh]. She made grown men run and cry. I think if you have majors and lieutenant colonel's afraid of you and you have people dropping their papers as soon as they can to retire or going to Korea, you know, to get away from you. Then you are I think you're pretty bad and your climate is pretty bad and so I ended up working for somebody like that and that was that was my brick wall and so I kind of raise my hand and on the medical boards you know I'd been dodging it before and this time I actually raise my hand and say could you please do something laugh laugh laugh laugh you know and it was a sad moment but I couldn't fight it anymore. I could not it was things were so broken when I where I worked (Jamison, lines 527-535)

In the previous excerpt, we see how mounting troubles with a superior officer (and growing dissatisfaction with the Air Force) contributed to the participant allowing herself to be medically boarded. This scenario should not be interpreted as devious or exploitive; many service members struggle with injuries and illness that they do not report to commanding officers. In some hostile climates, any error or injury can be used as grounds for dismissal. It is completely reasonable for people to keep their weaknesses under wraps.
Another side to ambiguous endings is one of being informally forced out of the military.

I met with two MPs and my first Sgt. so he basically told me that if I signed the papers to leave he would just forget about the whole thing so that is what I did and I was gone in a week and that's how my service ended for this person who thought they were going to be in for 20 you know going to do training and you know that whole thing and it was just in that instant it was over so I don't know how he got my paperwork through I was on profile I shouldn't have even been traveling with the injuries that I had but at this point there is no documentation of course and I got my file and none of that was in there. (Andrea’, lines 302-309)

Some women who experienced hostile climates and drastic conflicts with unit leaders were given extra-duty or threatened with formal separation if they did not leave. Although their paperwork would reflect a voluntary departure, the circumstances surrounding the end of their military experience would state otherwise.

Summary

In all, the women in this study were proud and satisfied with their military experience. Although some women who participated in this research went through incredibly difficult situations, they still valued the experience of the military and the things they took away from their service. The multitude of experiences for women in the military are best conceptualized through the core concepts of joining, learning, progressing, enduring, and ending. Negotiating gendered expectations played the key role throughout these core concepts.
CHAPTER V.

DISCUSSION

Throughout this study, I have argued the importance of generating research on women service members. I introduced the problems of an underserved and under recognized population, discussed the theoretical framework of feminist standpoint theory, provided an in-depth explanation of methodology and method, and reported the results of my research. In this chapter, I incorporate the results with scholarship from the review of literature and discuss the contributions this research makes to feminist standpoint theories. Finally, I identify the implications of the study, possibilities for future directions, and the limitations of this particular research.

Discussion of Results

Women’s experience of the military involves the processes of learning, enduring, progressing and ending. Negotiating gendered expectations is the process of managing encounters of difference and discrimination that are gender-based. Through the constant negotiation of gendered expectations, women accomplish a standpoint that first identifies the ways in which gender is constructed, then recognizes the advantages and disadvantages of that construction, and finally seeks to modify that construction for the benefit of women service members. In general, women are better able to productively manage instances of difference and discrimination, and less successful with overcoming gendered expectations associated with harassment and assault.

Through identifying the basic social processes of women in the military, this research identifies those areas where women encounter the most difficulty. Important implications emerging from this study can lead to providing better strategies for
intervention and resolution. For example, the process of joining could be re-structured to give people entering the military better tools for acclimation and satisfaction. The categories of learning, enduring, and progressing can be examined for more productive ways to guide the careers of women in the military. Finally, the relationship(s) between ending and the other core categories can explicate methods for increasing personal satisfaction and professional retention in the military.

Identifying these basic social processes is important for a number of reasons, but they are of primary importance for a more sophisticated interpretation of quantitative data. Female service members are a heavily surveyed population – yet, the questions they are asked do not always yield the most productive results. A number of women interviewed commented that they had been surveyed for years, but because of an absence of context, they were able to contribute very little. “I get these emails asking about rape and assault but I’ve never thought about why not . . . why I didn’t have bad situations” (Lori, lines 187-188). Through this observation, the service member recognized the value of her experience and the ways in which current research did not attend to it.

In addition to the value of identifying basic social processes, this research also provides a more nuanced perspective on sexual harassment and sexual assault in the military. Existing research offers that several predictors of assault (e.g., isolation; hierarchy of male leadership; women performing traditionally male work; etcetera) are key features of military life. My study confirms these findings and identifies additional factors that contribute to complicity and create an environment conducive to harassment and assault: traditional female socialization, permissive leadership, and expectations
regarding female sexual agency. These results are discussed in concert with materials from the literature review.

**Gender role expectations.** Existing literature on war and gender illustrates the ways in which militarism is used to shape masculinity and femininity (Burke, 2004; Ehrenreich, 1997; Elshtain, 1987; Enloe, 1983; Enloe, 2000; Goldstein, 2001). Men are socialized to be tough warriors; women are socialized to be supportive caregivers. This concept was addressed in numerous ways throughout the interviews. First, women frequently spoke of being given secretarial positions or more traditionally female positions regardless of their rank or MOS. Enlisted women in particular struggled with being relegated to traditional female roles. One female officer reported that she had been banned from an assigned operations center due to the commanding officer’s attitudes about women in the military. However, despite these encounters with discrimination, women were able to find resources to address and overcome them. Through the basic social processes of enduring and progressing, we see not only the concepts of masculinity and femininity long associated with women in the military but also the ways in which women negotiate these issues.

Because of the character of the study, little data from this research contributed to existing scholarship regarding epidemiological issues. While epidemiological studies featured in the literature review concentrated on focused physiological differences in service members, very few participants referred to these matters within their narratives. Women would most often discuss menstruation as a physical experience of difference in the military, but generally within the context of preparing for deployment or mobilization. These discussions typically identified the ways that males were prepped for
deployment, while women received no information unique to their biological sex. For example, women would comment on how briefings would warn service members away from certain areas of town (implying prostitution), but would never address the needs or uses of the female body. The issue of buying tampons and sanitary napkins was often used to frame this moment of difference in the experience of being a female service member.

**Family obligations.** Studies on parental obligations and familial organization were both latently and explicitly addressed in the data. Some women cited family obligations as their reason for ending their military service. However, just as many cited family obligations as their reason for staying in the military. Additionally, from the 38 women interviewed for this study, it was very clear that single parents were less likely to leave the military due to dependent children than married parents. The discussion of family and parenting issues throughout the narratives corroborates existing research, but also added new dimensions to the issues at hand. Although existing scholarship typically focuses on the affects of parent-child separation in military families (Applewhite & Mays, 1996; Kelley et al., 2001), pregnancy and single parenthood in the military (Thomas & Mottern, 2002; Uriell, 2004), and the impact of pregnancy on careers (Thomas & Mottern, 2002), they do not provide insight into the sense-making and holistic nature of these issues. From the narratives, we see that many women fight to stay in the military during and after their pregnancies. In this respect, data that examines the relationship between readiness and pregnancy or retention and pregnancy typically does not address all sides of the issue and may have some false conceptualizations of the relationship between pregnancy and service.
**Media representations.** The interviews also addressed the media representations of women in the military. Although this concept will be examined more closely in the discussion of feminist standpoint theory, it can also be addressed in the context of existing literature. Current studies in rhetorical criticism use the ideas of masculinity, femininity, nationalism, and race to discuss the representations of women service members (Del Zotto, 2002; Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Lobasz, 2008; O’Connell, 2005; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Tucker & Walton, 2006). When asked direct questions about Jessica Lynch, participants tended to make observations that were similar to the findings of most rhetorical criticism; that Jessica Lynch was presented as a girl instead of a service member and that she was unfairly portrayed as weak and incapable. Women also remarked that the little media coverage of Shoshanna Jackson and Lori Piestewa was due to issues of race and class.

In all, the data provide in-depth examination and dynamic details of concepts previously identified in the literature review. The results provide real instances of how gender roles impact the experience of women in the military, and show how these roles have changed over time. Additionally, the issues of parenting and separation that emerged in the narratives suggest that research on the relationship between pregnancy and readiness requires a more nuanced examination. Finally, the research demonstrates that women service members are cognizant of issues of race, class, gender, and nationalism in terms of media representations of service members.
**Feminist Standpoint Theory**

In the following discussion of feminist standpoint theory, I demonstrate how women service members have accomplished standpoints. These accomplished standpoints are the result of identifying the myriad impacts that gender has on their military service, understanding how these impacts are maintained and perpetuated, and generating ideas and practices that correct or overcome these impacts. After this demonstration, I discuss these accomplished standpoints using existing literature on women service members.

The primary ideas that come from this research are that women service members experience multiple instances of gendered expectations. This is not to argue that the life of a woman service member is filled with moment after moment of disheartening and oppressive discrimination. On the contrary, because of regular encounters with gender difference and gender discrimination, many women service members develop standpoints that bring into question traditional notions of masculinity, femininity, and war. Specifically, through their experiences in the military, women are able to critically examine and challenge long-held beliefs regarding gender difference, nature, and ability. This particular perspective furthers feminist standpoint theories. Evidence of these standpoints can be found in discussion of sexual stereotypes, identifying moments of discrimination and prejudice, and making observations regarding the media representation of women in the military.

In their discussion of sexual stereotypes, women offered insight into the ways women’s’ sexual agency is perceived in a male-dominated field. Women noted the factors that influenced their treatment; for example, many women commented on the
impact of dating someone in the service versus being married to someone in the service. Women service members married to other service members reported that their marital status tended to ward away unprofessional or inappropriate behavior. One woman drew an association between marriage and property, observing that women who were married were viewed as already belonging to someone else. Women service members that were not married to other service members had a much different experience. Many women remarked that they would not date other service members because it instantly turned them from a person into a sexual being – someone defined by sexualization.

Women demonstrated awareness of the impact of sexual agency in a number of ways. First many women noted that they did not make their relationships public. A number of women identified “not dating anyone in my shop” or not dating anyone at work as a way to sustain their professionalism and avoid unwanted behavior. A few women noted that this was a good policy because having to work with an ex would cause emotional pain, but even more women noted that it was a strategy to avoid being labeled a slut or being reduced to a sexual object. Other women noted that men sought to take away their choice – their agency – through harassment. To be specific, some women observed that harassing behavior was used as a form of courtship. In all, women provided a substantial number of sophisticated explanations for the way that gender, sexual agency, and the military culture converged.

In terms of feminist standpoint theories, recognition of being understood as a gendered person and then taking action qualifies as an accomplished standpoint. Because of their experiences and because of their understanding of the impact of gender, women would generate ideas to change the status quo. Two particular standpoints emerged in
reaction to experiences of gender discrimination and sexual harassment. The first standpoint was one that recognized that traditional female socialization could negatively impact one’s experience of the military. The second standpoint recognized the relationship between objectification and sexual harassment and assault. In the first standpoint, women commented that the values emphasized in the traditional socialization of females could leave women vulnerable in military life. Women cited high social needs, being people pleasers, hesitancy to stand up for oneself, and problems with telling someone no as products of traditional female socialization. Participants offered a number of remedies to this problem, citing female mentoring, better relationships between service women, and parental attitudinal change as most important for providing women with resources to succeed in the military.

The second standpoint emerged specifically from discussions of sexual harassment and assault. In these discussions, women emphasized the use of the familial to avoid objectification and dehumanization; thereby reducing instances of harassment and assault. For example, a number of women offered that things would be better for all service members if they would treat each other as they would treat a family member. Women discussing sexual harassment and sexual assault would frequently comment that one of the best ways to stop bad things from happening would be to connect women service members to the family members (sisters, mothers, daughters) of male service members. One officer who actually conducted sexual harassment workshops reported that if the males in the room were inattentive, she would ask one of them the name of their sister, and then use the name when describing acts of harassment and assault. She
remarked that she found this to be a very effective method for communicating the seriousness of harassment and assault.

These standpoints both make sense within existing research on female service members. The experience and negotiation of gendered expectations builds upon existing scholarship on women service members, most notably the research of Myers (1996), Herbert (1998), and Enloe (2000). Myers’ claim that sexual respectability was a key concern in introducing women into military service is found throughout the concept of “that girl.” Herbert’s findings that women were routinely pressured to prove their heterosexuality inform the trichotomy of butch, dyke, and slut. And Enloe’s observations on the militarization of women’s lives highlights the life choices and different forms of enduring that are necessary for women in the military.

In her book 1996 book *Creating GI Jane*, Meyer discusses the issue of reductive sexual identities at length. Meyer’s contention is that the sexual agency/identity associated with the American military (hot-blooded American males, chasing skirt and swilling booze) was profoundly disrupted by the possibility of female service members. Cynthia Enloe also addresses a similar issue when she discusses the acceptable manner in which women’s lives are militarized. I will add to this discussion Butler’s (2000; 2009) concept of grievability, and how we are taught (socialized) to only grieve our own – our kin, and how conversely we are taught to dismiss (or even, seek) the grieving of others. How are these ideas connected? The first is the matter of sexual agency – women, traditionally, are not supposed to have it. Women are not supposed to be free to choose as many or as few partners as they please. Women, and their sexuality, are to be controlled (Myers, 1996; Enloe, 2000). And if it is not presently being controlled (by a recognized
boyfriend or partner, or though a spouse), then it needs to be controlled by someone else. A number of women experienced increased harassing behavior from additional men once it was made known that they had engaged in sex (consensual or non-consensual). Women report being ‘tested’ as soon as they arrived at a new duty station, to see how receptive they were to aggressive sexual attention. Young females reported having a more difficult time negotiating this sort of approach – typically because they wished to fit in and make friends.

Negotiation of aggressive sexual attention involved reductive sexual identities. Over and over again, the women interviewed spoke of the slut/dyke dichotomy – that if a woman was in the military, she was a slut or a dyke. Herbert (1998) talks about this at length and illustrates that women are pressured to ‘prove’ their heterosexuality because of the threat of being known as a dyke. Women often note that the only other option (beside slut or dyke) is bitch, but they also mention another set of possibilities. This other set of possibilities is where Butler’s (2000; 2009) ideas on kinship come in, because when asked what needs to be done to change the climate or to stop assault and harassment – or when mentioning in passing productive strategies for halting assault and harassment – women talked about familial roles. As in, “they [offending males] need to remember they have sisters and mothers and wives.” Or, in sexual assault prevention training, the trainers talking about asking a soldier who is not paying attention “what’s your sister’s name?” and the dismissive service member soon becomes more attentive. There’s a problem with this strategy, and I’ll first discuss it within Enloe’s framework and then examine it from Butler’s perspective.
Enloe (2000) asserts that women’s lives are militarized by the MIC. So even though in using the idea of family to engender better treatment, a new set of women’s positions are made available (instead of slut/dyke/bitch we have mom/wife/sister/daughter), these positions are still in service to men. The act of conceptualizing all service women as family would be to diminish their identities as soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Guardsmen. To continue, Butler’s (2000; 2009) critique of kinship as the only way to care for each other is particularly dangerous within the military culture – first of all, the familial dynamic still requires subservience from the female(s). And that subservience goes back to the issue of controlling the female who has yet to become someone else’s property. Second, kinship is very much based on familiarity of class, race, and sexuality. To put faith in a system of brothers taking care of sisters in the military means that those not so easily identifiable as sisters will not have the benefit of that preventative mentality.

Although I present a critical view of this idea of brothers taking care of sisters, the idea is still an accomplished standpoint. Using knowledge from their own unique experiences, women analyzed problems and proposed solutions from their standpoint. A number of other standpoints emerged, all theorized from the location of one’s unique perspective using knowledge gained through one’s singular experiences. These standpoints included the primary observation that the traditional socialization of females left many women underprepared to negotiate gendered expectations. Women also commented on the ways in which females perpetuated negative stereotypes of weakness and inability. In fact, a number of women discussed this particular issue as a matter of performing gender roles. The matching of lived experience to theoretical ideas is
impressive, and I argue that saturation in a male-dominated culture is the explanation for such sophisticated standpoints on gender.

Standpoint also was illustrated through the particular values used to address certain issues. For example, I asked participants how they saw women service members represented in the military. In their responses, it became clear that they used their own experiences and own sense of self in making sense of media representation. Put differently, there was a projection of their own narrative in their response. One Marine’s narrative focused on providing for her daughters and enduring hardship to be successful; when asked how service women were represented in the media, she observed that the media failed to show how hard women in the military worked. Another woman who had endured sexual assault commented that service women were rarely shown as strong; instead they were often represented only as victims. Through these two examples, we see a different side of standpoint. Although not every single woman responded in a way that was heavily associated with her narrative, enough women did that it became apparent in analysis. This adds to standpoint theory in a very compelling way; when we speak of identity, we speak of ourselves. We are always so tied to our own experiences and our own knowledge that we use ourselves (knowingly or not) to make sense of the world.

**Intersectionality.** Intersectionality recognizes that different types of oppression are not mutually exclusive (Crenshaw, 1991) and acknowledges that *all* women do not share the same subject position. Woman is not a unified perspective, and matters of class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and culture influence not only how we experience the world, but how we experience our gender. Intersectionality addresses the fact that “oppression is not monicausal; rather, forms of oppression can intersect in unique and plural ways”
Intersectionality impacts the standpoint of women service members in a number of ways; most notably in issues of class.

Within the model of basic social processes for women in the military we see that resources and experiences affect the way women endured and overcame difficulties. Many of these resources and experiences can be understood within the framework of intersectionality. Women who had previous experiences of power or privilege struggled less than women who had entered the military with limited resources. Put differently, women who had the benefit of a middle class upbringing had more resources for avoiding or overcoming bad situations. Women from middle class backgrounds were more likely to: already have an education upon entering the military, be an officer rather than enlisted, and have lower social needs.

Women of color reported some instances of being treated poorly due to race, ethnicity, or culture, but for the most part they attributed their experiences of discrimination and difference to gender. Women of color who had negative experiences of difference observed that their abilities and competency were sometimes put into question due to race, ethnicity and culture. One woman remarked that people had certain negative expectations about her background and education because of her race. Another African-American woman observed that her white husband enjoyed much more authority and respect because he “looked and fit the part”. Women of color also had positive experiences of difference, most notably the self-discovery and cultural appreciation that came though the process of learning. When asked about the impact of race on their experience of the military, women acknowledged that it had some influence but not as
much as being a woman. Overall, for the women interviewed, the experience of the military was impacted by gender and class much more than any other identity marker.

Implications

The most obvious implication from the results is that women contribute to military operations at all levels (several of the participants were combat veterans), a reality that is not adequately represented through media or in public discourse. Through their discussions of learning, progression, enduring, and ending, women provided narratives that covered nearly every aspect of the military experience. Women also reflected that we are currently in a time where their male counterparts are equally aware of the contributions and capabilities of women, and the “old school” or Vietnam-Era attitudes that have in the past diminished women are on their way to extinction. This assessment is important for a number of reasons, but it is crucial for situating the public understanding of the dominant discourse against articulations of reality to the contrary. Put differently, our world is largely made sense of in terms of war. War is made intelligible through a variety of rhetorical tropes, including ideas about sex and gender. Authentic articulations of the lives of service women (and service men) serve to erode some of the dominant understandings we have about war and gender.

In her 2006 article “The dangers of playing dress-up: Popular representations of Jessica Lynch and the controversy regarding women in combat,” Shannon Holland argued that PFC Jessica Lynch was made to stand for or represent every woman in the military. A latent (and sometimes explicit) mention in the discussions with female service members is that all men are used to stand for or represent one man in the military. In other words, any man in the service, regardless of his strength or ability, is extended the
warrior mythos of the military. All women, regardless of strength or ability, are questioned according to the alleged weaknesses and deficiencies of any one woman.

Another implication of this study is that there are varying levels of difficulties and set-backs that are unique to women in the military and greater resources are needed to aid in preventing and enduring these situations. Women join the military for fulfillment, opportunity, and escape. Their transition from the highly regimented world of basic training to the looser climate of their first duty station is fraught with perils that are largely the product of traditional gender socialization. Recognition that young people need more resources to avoid bad situations is paramount. Females entering the military, particularly high risk females, should have more straight-talk guidance in terms of avoiding coercive situations and gaining confidence through autonomy. This training could be integrated into the existing Equal Opportunity training provided through the military. Additionally, the military would benefit from a program that recognizes the importance of mentorship for women. Women currently use informal systems to reach and guide others; an institutionally recognized program would help bolster the legitimacy and efficacy of those mentoring relationships.

Conversely, the participants in this research offered a number of examples of success and perseverance. Therefore, another implication of the data is that there are ways to be happy, successful, and safe (relatively) in the military. These observations will be organized into a reader-friendly document and distributed to advocacy groups. One great accomplishment of these collaborative interviews was creating a sense that a massive resource was going untapped. Women consistently remarked on how productive it was to sit down with someone and identify why things went right; not just when things
went wrong. I believe this particular orientation to research and advocacy is incredibly important, and I am committed to continuing to provide a forum for this kind of work.

**Future Directions**

The manner in which women’s sexual agency and identity are regulated and policed within the military culture is worthy of further study. The U.S. military is heavily involved in producing effective training materials, tracking the success of their newly implemented programs, and investing in practices that increase satisfaction, cohesion, and retention. Put differently, the military is surprisingly good at implementing productive programs. Currently, a number of advocacy groups like American Women Veterans and R.A.I.N.N. (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) are pushing for greater awareness of MST and ways to reduce its prevalence. We live in a time that is supportive of advocacy and ready for policy change.

This work also identifies productive strategies and interventions for avoiding and stopping sexual harassment. Sexual harassment and sexual assault have a communicative dimension; most of which are rooted in forms of coercion. I believe that a number of the ‘bad situations’ shared by female service members demonstrate a relationship between performance of gender and coercion. Put differently, I believe that many specific instances within the data support an argument that gender is a form of coercion. Through discussions of being “that girl” or the trichotomy of bitch, dyke, slut, I believe women articulate an idea that the reductive female identities available to them are a form of regulating or policing. Through discussions of sexual harassment and sexual assault, women identify instances of coercion based on gendered expectations. I would study the relationship between coercion and gender by returning to the data and focusing on
expanding core categories and dimensions within the experience of sexual harassment and sexual assault. This expansion would be possible through additional interviews.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include the small number of participants and the lack of specific criteria (other than being a female service member) for participation in the research. However, this limitation was a necessary part of creating foundational data. In other words, the basic social processes of being a woman in the military would have suffered from under-development and omission had I focused on specific criteria for participants. Put differently, the variety and difference between each individual woman’s experiences was precisely what allowed for me to identify fundamental similarities in the data.

There were a number of differences within the population, including: the decade or generation in which one served; the combat or war-time experiences of the participant; the length of time spent in the service; and the participant’s MOS. Participants were not screened for shared backgrounds or experiences (i.e., combat veterans for example, or women who served post-Desert Storm), therefore, the narratives collected offered a wide and varied number of experiences. Additionally, the majority of participants were veterans (most very recent), rather than active duty service members. The consequence of this is that the most current experiences of female service members are not as well-represented as the experiences of women who began their military careers in the 1990s. Again, these limitations can also be seen as beneficial to the research. Although twenty years or more had passed between the experience of one woman service member and another woman service member, they still included the same aspects of military service
within their narratives. This is a strong demonstration that the grounded theory approach to women service members’ narratives was an excellent methodology for creating foundational research.

**Conclusion**

In this research I identified joining, learning, enduring, progressing, and ending as the basic social processes for women in the military. I identified the core variable of negotiating gendered expectations and discussed how it occurs across life choices, abilities, and sexual agency. The significance of this study lies in a greater understanding of the particular experiences women have in the military. This research identifies the unique character of challenges and difficulties that female service members face and provides a more nuanced understanding of the context of those situations. This scholarship also identifies the productive ways in which women can better negotiate gendered expectations.

In this dissertation I introduced the issue of women service members and argued that their experiences are unique and worthy of study. I explained the relationships between gender and war, and observed that the subject position of woman service member is a disruption of dominant discourses regarding militarism and gender roles. I used the theoretical framework of feminist standpoint theory to posit that women service members occupy a position that gives them a unique perspective into military culture and the performance of gender. I provided an in-depth explanation of grounded theory and explained the procedures for gathering my data. In my analysis of the results, I provided an extensive examination of the data and identified the core variable within a model of basic social processes. In my discussion, I put the results of my study into conversation.
with existing research and identified the limitations and implications of my findings. Overall, I provided a forum for women service members to explain their understanding and negotiation of military culture.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

What is the ‘story’ of your enlistment?

Why did you join the military?

What was the process of your enlistment?

Can you give me an example of what it is like to be a female soldier/airman/marine/sailor?

Does being female have an impact on your experience in the military?

How are you made aware of being female in the military?

Within the military institution, are there any services that are lacking or needs that are not met?

How is the role of women in the military discussed?

How do you see female service members represented in the media?
APPENDIX B

My name is Manda Hicks. I am an Army veteran and a doctoral candidate in the School of Media and Communication at Bowling Green State University.

I am interested in interviewing women service members and veterans for my dissertation. My research examines the experiences of women in the military, with a focus on bridging the gap between the public understanding/media representation of women in the military and the actual lived reality of women service members. This research serves as a platform for women in the military to give voice to their experiences.

Please contact me at mvhicks@bgsu.edu to learn more about participating in this important research.
Sometimes interviews become a conversation of two minds. As she speaks, I hear my theoretical framework; I feel her understand and articulate to the point that I share and explain.

Multiple times, I have been prompted by the flow and direction and content of her narrative to say:

My idea is this: My idea is that if you are part of an institution or an organization that does not privilege you, that marginalizes or oppresses you, you are going to understand more about that organization than those who it does privilege.

And she says yes.

And I say that my goal or my drive is to expand the intelligible world, to make real experiences that have been denied space and life and light.

And she says yes.

I get to the point in several of my interviews where it is comfortable and reasonable and welcome and productive to explain theory – I don’t give it a name (sometimes I mention outsider/within or Patricia Hill Collins; sometimes I say standpoint but I never dare say feminist . . . and I could). This is collaborative; this is member checking.

When I summarize an experience – especially because I share it or I feel it a certain way – and you say “no”, that’s fucking wonderful. Correct me; explain yourself.

This idea of isolation; this idea of loneliness it is present and so real. It is offered and I share my brief experience and no one says that’s not the way it is; except for the super dikey CSM.

My interview with *******is warm and loving; two smart women (eventually) comparing notes. I listen to her forever. She remarks at the end that it is wonderful to be listened to. She has so many amazing observations – and they are true and real and hers.

With all due respect Cynthia Enloe, this is even better and even deeper.

She is matter of fact. Her rapes; her pregnancy. Every time someone listens to her story; every time someone gives credence and honor to her experience, she becomes more and it becomes less.

This sharing of experience and observations is transformative, it is productive.

Her insights on minimal number of women and small groups – the minimal have to watch out for accusations of lesbianism; the groups get to watch out for each other.

I don’t want to move away from the computer; I don’t want to step away from the notes. This moment is deep and magic.

I feel her, on the other end of the hung up phone, still sitting there, still with my mind.

Someone who listened, someone who understood, someone who wants to make it real and valuable.

In this attic where I call and record and listen and type and type and type and type, she has given me her presence. I live with these phantom lives and type them into importance and type them into significance and type them into theory and type them into
knowledge – like a motherfucking buffalo, I use every piece. I use every piece of what you gave to me and I will not exploit you and I will not make easy answers and I will do no disservice in service to an end. I guess that means I’m not a very professional scientist.
APPENDIX D

I am all smiles as I hang up the phone – she wants me to re-enlist.

***** knows. Different from my other old-timers, she is more open, more candid with her perspective. She’s used to telling the story of how she joined – how she went from a drama major dreaming of Broadway to being in ROTC. She talks about dad. She talks about mom. She talks about a history of male family members in military service.

Fort Huachuca was like an extension of college, except they always wore the same clothes. They were drinking and partying, and she stepped away from it. She goes on with more of her history (got recycled; a bunch of West Pointers came in), but I lead her back to that choice.

I talk about socializing and making different decisions. I ask about isolation and peer pressure. I ask about professionalism. She says that it wasn’t really the professionalism; it was her father’s history with alcohol. She had always been under a watchful eye; she was a good Catholic girl; she was experiencing new freedoms; and she turned away from it because she “didn’t want to be that guy”. She went into isolation – she did it to herself. She acknowledged that it was hard, and that it is hard for young soldiers to make that decision, but it is important. She says she tells her female soldiers to keep their eye on the prize and not get caught up in that stuff.

But before all this, she had gone from Huachuca to Hawaii in her story telling, and she briefly mentioned the girl that picked her up from the airport. “She was pretty crazy; a wild woman with a wild reputation” Wanted to help set her up in an apartment, and she declined the offer. I hadn’t asked to hear more about this woman, but there is humorous middle-class disapproval in her telling, and a story behind the interview that says: There are women we avoid. There are women we stay away from. This was one of those women. I’ll never know who told her to stay away . . .

I roll back to West Point, and she talks about those guys but not in a damning way. She was intimidated and they let her be – no real talk of hostility or discrimination.

She talks about a few more deployments (Korea, 3 times), briefly mentions meeting a first husband, talks about two pregnancies and we are brought to the moment she gets out. Mind you, we are brought to that moment because I ask about how long she was active duty and how long she was reserve. The split between these two times is a third pregnancy and a moment of truth with her 2 year old. She has told this story before:

Woman that took care of the kids had to leave; they started daycare; the 2 year old came out after the first day and said “miss you”. “The Army will not miss me but my sons will”
We go back to the WPers, she doesn’t really tell a damning story – just how they made her eyes roll and how over the years she has shaken their cage. They have a community and bond and she appreciates that.

So I ask what’s it like to be a female officer in the military, and she gives me a historical analysis:
Reagan, post Vietnam [Vietnam is emerging, especially for the older officers, as a marker of a mentality and culture] Women had broken down the door; there is a new understanding of their capacity for service. So, she’s been there for some watershed moments.
She talks about “Little Darling” being patronized; being given things associated with traditional women’s work (he’ll command the motor pool; she’ll command the dfac, cus it’s a kitchen).
The CMDR who asked her to make coffee.
“He walked by all the men and asked her to make coffee” So she made a shitty pot.
Great observations of the notions of womanhood at the time “Samantha Stevens”. She observes that Intell is more accepting because of history of women (spies) – I should follow up with a probe, but I don’t

She says “You had to learn how to deal with it”. Sees so many females getting worked up.
“I tell my females” be the best soldier you can be, “Never fall back on feminine frailties”. Maybe it’s because she had three brothers – she didn’t take the bait.
She says you have to take the fight out of a man. You have to be the best.
Officer who taunted her ‘guess this job is too hard for a girl; you’re not going to cry are you?’

OK, I ask. We have lots of instances where you stood your ground and it was good, how about when it wasn’t?
Oh yeah, she says.
The officer at AIT that wrote cut this fucking shit out on her lesson plan. She confronted him, they laughed, but she got shit assignments. I write down the word retribution before she says it . . . twice.
The officer who would swear and caught her rolling her eyes (making a mom look, she says); he never swears around her again. She eventually leaves and says it was a pleasure working with you; even though you have a bad reputation. You’ve been such a gentleman”
He says: “It’s easy to be a gentlemen when someone expects it of you.”
And then she says, I knew it, I knew it. Expect the best from people and they will give it to you and she says she tells her females this and that and she understands that they worry about things, that they worry about people liking them or not liking them and they just need to get past it.
They need to get past female socialization [my thought]

So I ask what services are not there? What needs are not being met? She says post-deployment they need immediate care for females. PTSD, PDI.
She says she called the emergency hotline and it was closed for the weekend. She called the number on the voicemail and it was disconnected. She call the commander and told him and he was appalled. She put herself in the soldiers shoes and was upset by that situation.

I say, ok, that’s treatment. What about prevention? And she says training. Making a woman empowered.
Don’t go drinking
Should learn this from a young age – stand up for yourself, be in control of yourself
Again, she’s talking about socializing females.

I notice we use the term “Bad Situation” a lot.

She talks about sexual harassment training, some guys in the back of the room not taking it seriously. So she asks the name of their sister, and starts using her name in the discussion.

She dares to say “Western American sensibilities” in discussing the role of women in the military. Yes, she has had the conversation. Women are in combat. She says some people you just don’t talk about it – there mind is set. You consider the audience and you make your choices from there.
She says women don’t want to go to war and most of the guys don’t either.

Her view of media representation is favorable. She says it is favorable. The 70s and 80s were tinged with lesbianism.

Her story of Jessica Lynch is an apologia; she confuses Lori on time, place and race. She’d let women into combat arms, but they would have to meet the same physical standards.
February 1, 2011

TO: Manda Hicks
COMS

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11D112GE7

TITLE: Experiences of Female Service Members

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of February 1, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on December 19, 2011. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (or email: hsr@bsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:
Stamped consent form is coming to you via US mail.

c: Dr. Saundra Faulkner

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
Female Service Members
Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of female service members in the military. This study is being conducted as part of a dissertation and will assist me in gathering important data from female service members. Specifically, this study examines the experience of difference due to gender in military service. Your participation in this study also will provide you an opportunity to discuss and examine your views about gender and the military.

Your involvement in this project includes participation in an individual interview session. This interview will last approximately 90 - 120 minutes and will focus on your experiences as a female service member in the military. The interview will be audio-recorded. I may request a short follow-up interview to ask for clarification or elaboration as needed. These interviews will be conducted face to face, by telephone or e-mail. Please realize that e-mail communication is not 100% secure.

Risks of participation are minimal and no greater than those risks that you experience while sharing stories and insights about your military service. My procedures are designed to safeguard your confidentiality. To maintain this confidentiality, your name, names of other people, and any identifying information you mention will be removed or coded in the printed transcripts of the interview. I will be the only person to listen to the audio-recording. The audio-recording and transcript will be kept secured and only will be accessible to myself. Upon completion of the transcription, I will offer you the opportunity to read the transcript so that you may edit out any content that you feel might put you at risk (of identification, retribution, or both) before it is analyzed for publication. Upon completion of the study, the audio-recording will be deleted and the original transcriptions that include identifying information will be destroyed.

Further, you have the option not answer any questions you chose not to answer. You may withdraw consent and terminate your participation at any time during the project. Ceasing participation will not have any negative effect on your relationships with programs at BGSU.

Additional questions about this study can be directed to Manda Hicks (208-699-8366 or mvhicks@bgsu.edu) or the dissertation advisor (419-372-1998 or sfaulkner@bgsu.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University (419-372-7716) about any problems or concerns.

Your signature below indicates that you are 18 years of age or older and you have been informed about what is expected of you as a participant in this study and the confidentiality procedures, and that your participation is entirely voluntary.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Signature Date

________________________________________
Printed Name

________________________________________
Phone Number Email Address