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## **The Emotionally Supportive Sister-Soldier: How the United States Military Values Normative Femininity and Devalues Nonconformist Servicewomen**

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**The Emotionally Supportive Sister-Soldier: How the United States Military Values  
Normative Femininity and Devalues Nonconformist Servicewomen**

**Kristal Gray**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Science**

**in**

**Gender and Women's Studies**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato**

**May 2013**

## **Abstract**

### **The Emotionally Supportive Sister-Soldier: How the United States Military Values Normative Femininity and Devalues Nonconformist Servicewomen**

**Kristal Gray**

**Gender and Women's Studies Master of Science Program**

**Minnesota State University, Mankato**

**May 2013**

Women need to be vigilant about the rights and strides they have gained to be sure they are not circling back to feed an oppressive system. Women may be serving in the military but they are filling specific roles as the feminine presence within the ranks. Women are gendered and sexualized from the day they swear in. My research gives valuable insight into the world of the military and how much emphasis is placed on conforming.

I explain how servicewomen are expected to act and then interview eleven servicewomen to see if they are behaving according to the military (and U.S.) cultural standards of femininity. I also include my own perspectives as a veteran and feminist. Specifically, I demonstrate how servicewomen are emotional laborers that must prove their competency, they must be emotionally available and supportive, and must be sexually discreet. If American servicewomen joined the military to change or improve their lives, they should be aware that they are maintaining femininity by serving in this

heteromasculine normative institution and that this femininity is defined by masculine society to maintain the status quo.

The knowledge produced in this thesis is helpful for the study of gender and women because it allows us to peek into the world of the soldier and see just how gendered of a world our “heroes” exist in. My results demonstrate servicewomen are valued by male and female peers alike when they conform and are devalued when they do not present normative gender characteristics. We can examine the culture of U.S. soldiers and what they are trained to value and devalue to better understand why ideologies and violence exists in the military. Findings further show the U.S. military is essentially hiding female soldiers in plain sight by coercing servicewomen into believing notions of how a female soldier should look and behave, causing restrictions on mobility for women. By smiling and remaining cheerful about their current situation, women in the military are quietly, knowingly, and docilely conforming to men’s needs and desires.

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## Introduction

Military culture continuously genders servicewomen as a feminine presence in a masculine institution. In this thesis, I refer to femininity as a set of behaviors and gendered rules for women that include weakness, incompetency, passivity, empathy, and cleanliness as identifying characteristics that masculine culture assigns to all women that highlights women as Other. Women soldiers have to work harder for equal credibility compared to that of male soldiers and their contributions go largely unrecognized. The United States military attempts to present itself as a do-good, gender-neutral, peace-motivated institution when in fact it violently and blatantly reinforces dying ideologies about gender and suppresses anyone that resists existing norms of masculinity (Silva, 2008). Society and gender norms assign femininity to women and therefore femininity is what gives women credibility as women. American servicewomen work hard to maintain femininity (Silva, 2008).

I am just beginning to understand the river of oppression beneath my perceived reality that has shaped my entire existence and I am being reborn as a feminist. Women's close proximity to the military as civilians, voters, wives, and soldiers has "military policy makers," according to Enloe (2000), "[dependent] on the very notion of femininity" (Enloe, 2000, preface p. x). For me, examining women's gendered experiences in the military has been an opportunity, as Enloe (2000) would say, "to delve into the gendered dynamics of society's political life" (p. xi). I interviewed twelve feminist and nonfeminist servicewomen about their personal experiences with gender in the military so I could understand their perspectives, offer my own feminist analysis on

what military culture means for women and examine experiences from my service in the Army.

Gender awareness, being aware of gender roles, why they exist, and how they influence your daily life, is less intense between soldiers who live and work in close proximity on a daily basis as gender becomes something of a side note if the group has “a shared commitment to the group’s mission” (McSally, 2011, p. 152). I know the relationships resemble a family environment because I enlisted in the Army at seventeen and still have a relationship with soldiers I met in 2003. My section sergeant during a ten month deployment in Iraq was like a father figure for me and the other soldiers I worked with were like siblings. Unfortunately, the entire United States military is not a big happy family with the same goal since servicewomen have to prove they belong while civilian feminists question whether they do.

In this thesis, I argue that women soldiers are valued when they remain silent about their sexuality, participate as emotional cheerleaders, and repeatedly demonstrate mission capability. Only after are they respected and regarded as *sisterly* to their male peers. I will refer to this stereotype as the sister-soldier. The heteromasculine institution that is the U.S. military values women that demonstrate appropriate behavior. In contrast, I also demonstrate that any servicewoman new to a unit, who is sexually active, or otherwise does not fit the mold is slut-shamed, made to feel negatively about her sexual activity, or lesbian-bated, labeled according to assumptions made about her sexuality, and considered incompetent within her military occupational specialty (MOS), the job she was trained for. All behavior is gendered and judged for appropriateness by people who place value on heteronormativity. If the sister-soldier is having sex, she is doing it

discreetly and with someone in a distant unit because men do not want to imagine women they respect capable of having and enjoying sex. The silence surrounding the sister-soldiers' sexuality is oppressive as is the double standard for women soldiers who are sexually active. Gender policing is a cruel system that casts humans into two genders (Butler, 1993). Little boys are taught to play with guns and drive trucks. Little girls are taught to be clean, polite, and quiet. Nothing less than cleanliness, politeness, and emotional support is expected from a "good" woman soldier.

Male soldiers anticipate that the sister-soldier is emotionally supportive. Although her competency is considered below that of her male peers, the sister-soldier is capable but more importantly is content and pleasant to work under male soldiers. Arlie Hochschild (1983) says emotional labor is the demeanor and behavior presented by the laborer to elicit a positive response from the recipient (p. 12). The flirty server, the concerned psychologist, and the woman soldier practice emotional labor on the job. Any woman soldier that does not present herself as emotionally available is labeled a bitch. The sister soldier is respected because she acts as a morale booster and counselor to her family of male battle buddies. The sister-soldier, in return for discretion and emotional labor, receives male protection, improved status, and might even get laid without being labeled a whore.

Sexual relationships in the workplace are common knowledge and all too often rumors spread until everyone knows what *she* did. A love affair in any work place is a distraction but in the military a distraction could mean someone's life, or at least someone's paycheck. On my deployment, a male major shot himself in the head with his m4 rifle because he and a lower enlisted servicewoman were fraternizing and he faced



Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) punishment. Fraternization is loosely defined as a relationship between an enlisted person and an officer (Uniform Code of Military Justice). Fraternization is more commonly known to soldiers as any sexualized behavior involving soldiers who work together and are unequal in rank. Soldiers are taught that a variety of sexualized behaviors will lead to punishment. In basic combat training, any subtle body movement, smiling with teeth, “giving the eyes,” or flamboyant gesturing could be perceived as being flirtatious and the guilty party would be subject to Corrective Action through Physical Exercise, a CAPE-ing. Even though any sideways glance could lead to hours rolling around in the dirt as punishment, fraternization inevitably occurred regularly.

Interestingly, almost every servicewoman I interviewed was sexually active during her time in service, although many advised other women against it. Fraternization is happening in the military, people do date, and there are married couples in the service. To confuse matters, the U.S. military considers married couples are mission ready and competent in their jobs even while presumably sexually active. Married couples are allowed to live together during deployments. Single servicewomen who openly fraternize are labeled, devalued, and ignored. The sister-soldier must be silent about her sexuality in order to be protected and accepted. In order for the military to maintain its masculinized identity, militarized masculinity needs femininity to be visible. Regulations for fraternization distribute article 15s and other written punishments to fraternizers meant to halt sexual activity among soldiers. There are hazy gendered regulations for fraternization in all branches of the military that should at least be clarified and probably revised. In most situations there is a double standard around women’s sexuality.

Women who are active and open with their sexuality are thought to be incompetent and unworthy of protection. Regardless of sexual activity, woman soldiers who are not clean, polite, and quiet are categorized as sluts by the heteromasculine culture they have been chosen to enlist. Slut-shaming, being disrespected by peers, considered lazy, accused of using their gender to get promoted, is a way of controlling a woman's sexuality.

As of January 24, 2013 woman soldiers have been authorized to serve in direct combat positions formerly reserved for men in the United States military. This is effective in every branch by 2016 but despite these changes women will still have an inevitable decision to make: sister or slut? Can't hoes be good soldiers? Why the dichotomy? Certain qualities of the woman soldier are accepted and expected. Woman soldiers have to prove they are capable of being a "good" soldier *and* a "good" woman. I use quotations around "good" to emphasize the relative definition of what is good. What is good for you might not be good for her. My thesis will demonstrate how the perceived limited physical capabilities of servicewomen and the pressure to prove their competency are directly related to United States military servicewomen's sexualized and gendered behavior.

This is a study about twelve women in the military. I interviewed these women to learn more about their gendered experiences and because I wanted to go beyond the limited scope of an autoethnography. The following literature review has three main bodies of knowledge that focus on U.S. military gendered policies, women's self-objectified sexuality, and feminist critiques on militarism. I will further explain the process of interviewing and the participants' demographics in the methodology section. I

use a feminist lens to analyze participant responses in the results section. In conclusion, I will address improvements for this research and potential future research.

## **Literature Review**

In contemporary American culture, the military has been a proving ground for male heteromascularity. U.S. military policies and regulations on sexuality and gender actively portray the military as an asexual organization all the while silently reinforcing gender roles (Rich et al., 2012; Silva, 2008; Sjoberg, 2007). The military is actually so gendered and sexualized that military leaders and planners create gendered regulations in an effort to maintain a heteromasculine image. In this literature review I provide an overview of gendered military policies, silenced sexualities, and feminist critiques of militarism.

### **Gendered Military Policies**

United States military policy regulates the gender expression of soldiers. Kimmel (2008) explains, "Masculinity is coerced and policed relentlessly by other guys" (p. 51). Men are not naturally aggressive as a result of their gender because gender is culturally constructed, not innate (Kimmel, 2008, p. 51). In United States culture, little boys play with guns because they are being taught that real men behave violently but little girls do not because they are taught to play with kitchen sets and baby dolls. Throughout history, there has always been war and, however surprisingly, there have always been women fighting in war (Jones, 1997, p. 13). This literature review will briefly discuss current theories and perspectives regarding servicewoman, demonstrate that gender and sexuality are inseparable from policy and opinion in the U.S. armed services, and discuss concepts of sexuality, oppression, and gender visibility.

The United States military has heteronormative policies in regards to gender and sex. Specific U.S. military policies manage to enclose gender and sex within sexual

harassment, sexuality, and former combat exclusion. D'Amico (1997) claims any service member faces discrimination who identifies as not heterosexual, not masculine, not male, or not white. This section reviews some literature by Meola (1997) and Rich et al. (2012) on sexual harassment and homosexuality, literature by D'Amico (1997), Rich et al. (2012), and others that demonstrate military support for heteromascularity while ostracizing the other, gender roles in relation to the exclusion of women in combat, and, finally, Sjoberg's (2007) study on gender roles and media coverage.

The United States government has always been involved in its citizens' personal matters, such as gender expression and sexuality, claiming them to be matters of the state and therefore public. Jakobsen and Kennedy (2005) argue that heteromascularity is perpetuated by the state. The military is similar to a dangerous and highly influential international business that teaches other militaries and citizens U.S. gender expectations about militarized gendered nationalism (Enloe, 2000, xvii). The military controls sexuality with policies like Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) that silence marginalized people in the military (Rich et al., 2012, p. 271). Lesbian and gay people in the military face discrimination for how they identify sexually. Rich et al. (2012) writes that the main reason for a policy to silence LGBTQ people in the service, like DADT, was "the maintenance of the ideological image of the soldier and his heteromascularity" (p. 271). In fact, since DADT was repealed, Rich et al. (2012) argues LGBTQ individuals are more silenced due to homophobia from fellow soldiers and believes the Department of Defense has effectively relegated nonheterosexual identities to a "hyper-private realm" (p. 272). Rich et al. (2012) explains this rejection of military policy to acknowledge sexual differences as it does race or religious differences forces queer soldiers to remain

closeted out of fear. D'Amico (1997) argues claims of gender-neutrality tend to silence those individuals not holding power. D'Amico (1997) makes clear that not talking about gender only reinforces the dominant gender, masculinity, as the norm. In this way, the military can maintain its image of a gender-neutral, asexual organization while at the same time remain oblivious to its hyper-masculine tendencies. The military has refused to protect people who identify as a sexual minority in the military.

Adams (1997) asserts that U.S. military policy supports patriarchy and that traditional hierarchal family values place males in charge and leaves no room for alternatives. The military is not an asexual organization. It sits staunchly in the realm of heteromascularity. D'Amico (1997) explains, "The language or discourse of war is raced, gendered, and sexualized" (p. 200). Khalili (2010) posits there is a hierarchy within counterinsurgent troops that redefines and situates masculinity and femininity in a position that supports imperialism. Military policy maintains this level of masculinity because, "A military that enlists women must remain a military that is appealing to men" (Enloe, 2000, p. 238). Rich et al. (2012) explains, "Large organizations like armies or factories historically controlled sexuality by excluding or segregating women from men as well as stressing heterosexuality or celibacy (p. 273). Not only that, but the military genders characteristics that are not generally considered either masculine or feminine, or are considered the opposite in the civilian world.

Enloe (2000) bring up an interesting observation about gender regulation in the military when she asks, "Which soldiers should wear high heels?" (p. 261). Enloe explains throughout the years of different uniforms women soldiers have donned the uniform was meant to "preserve[e] visible signs of women soldiers' femininity" (Enloe,

2000, p. 270). It would be accurate to assume modern U.S. military uniforms were designed with camouflage for concealment as a main feature but it would also be accurate to note that every aspect of the uniform was considered with gender in mind. Women soldiers must not be confused for males but women soldiers must represent the kind of subtle, respectable femininity sanctioned by the military. Military uniform regulations have gone so far as top gender aspects of the uniform like pocketed pants, umbrellas, lip color, waistlines, shoes, and chest pockets (Enloe, 2000). Enloe goes on to explain that the opposite of feminine for a woman soldier is “mannish” and the opposite of militarized for the woman soldier is “marginalized” (Enloe, 2000, p. 264, 267). The design of the women’s military uniform has evolved over the decades and varies in each branch but they all have helped women soldiers balance the fine line between femininity and masculinity that comes with the occupation. The point is that femininity is allowed in a masculinized environment that the military is however it must be downplayed to be respectable.

Race and class have a great deal to do with the hierarchies present within the military. Khalili’s article, “Gendered Practices of Counterinsurgency,” demonstrates how a white upper class female soldier can be higher in the power hierarchy than a working class male general of color, which is precisely the result of race and class (p. 1482). This study focuses on gender as a key point of comparison between soldiers. A snowball sample is not random, so my sample was not representative of the military as a whole, and I was only able to interview one servicewoman of color. Future research could focus on race and hierarchy in the military. Also, the American woman does not represent all women nor do the women I interviewed represent all women in the military. The U.S.

military does have a reputation to uphold as a highly aggressive masculine institution. D'Amico (1997) argues that the conflict in Vietnam, current peacekeeping missions, and troop depopulation have illustrated an image the military does not approve and has put the military on the defensive as far as their maintenance of their masculinity is concerned. Although the U.S. military's mission is peacekeeping as well as war, its focus in recent years has been on war planning and "peace enforcement," not diversification (D'Amico, 1997, p. 207).

Supporters of a homogenous military argue U.S. military unit cohesion and war prowess will be weakened by diversity. A common argument against women in the service is that their gender will weaken the "social cohesion" of the unit. However McSally (2011) says studies show "task cohesion," or having a common goal, is more effective for mission readiness (p. 152). McSally (2011) has written an article in which she discusses the U.S. government's knowledge of several training missions that have demonstrated "mixed-gender units perform better than all-male units" (p. 154). General Eisenhower and President Carter are just two influential Americans who thought women should have equal rights and perform well in the military. Maybe not so surprisingly, McSally (2011) goes on to say that in 1973 when the draft ended and more women were volunteering for service, "military leaders acknowledged that female recruits were performing better on aptitude tests and had fewer discipline problems than male recruits" (p. 154). Remember, domesticity and passivity are regarded as feminine traits. For the reason of the military not wanting to seem feminine, D'Amico (1997) argues the military is changing policy to restrict and control populations of color and women, especially women of color. Since the general population would notice if there was not at least an



attempt to look diverse, the military allows women to serve and this year opened all positions to women. Alfonso (2010) states women have been excluded from combat and therefore have not been promoted as often. Male soldiers want to serve alongside the “ideal female soldier” according to Sjolander (2010). Female soldiers are invented to be “as capable as a male soldier, but as vulnerable as a civilian woman” (p. 93). Conformity, not diversity, is valued in the military.

In this regard, U.S. military policy values heteromascularity and devalues femininity. United States military claims to be neutral in regards to gender and equal opportunity for all citizens but, as Weinstein (1997) argues, “Military masculinity is problematized by women, homosexuality, and families (p. xvii). Nonchalant leadership and meek political response to the fervent and constant sexual harassment of female soldiers, the appearance and physical fitness regulations sustaining feminine qualities, and former sexist policies like combat exclusion that prohibited female advancement suggest women soldiers are not valued the same as men (Alfonso, 2010; D’Amico, 1997; Rich et al., 2012). Meola (1997), an Army Officer who was sexually harassed during her service, was penalized for speaking up about being sexually harassed. She posits because of the hierarchal structure of power in the military it is difficult for some female soldiers to report sexual harassment because the harasser may be in her chain of command. Meola’s military experiences with sexual harassment demonstrated subsequent disregard from her leadership and, I argue, demonstrated her devalued status as a feminine presence outside her gender role. The military presents itself as a just organization waging fair wars manned by heroes who make their citizens proud.

Stereotypes about gender reflect how we, as United States citizens, think about war and who we think should (or could) get involved. McSally (2011), a veteran of 22 years in the Air Force and the first woman fighter pilot, describes the former combat exclusion policy, in the words of one commander, as “legal fiction” and she uses phrases like “romantic paternalism” for the military’s traditional policy on gender roles that consider women in need of protection (p. 151, 157). McSally’s (2011) article demonstrates how the U.S. government, by way of former and current military policies, is ultimately sexist and limiting to the potential of the military by placing importance on gender roles and uniformity when ultimately the focus should be about “task cohesion” (p. 152, 156). The link between military service and citizenship is eloquently established by McSally when she discusses the specificities of the draft and its exclusion of half of the citizens of this country suggesting their inferior citizenship status (p. 157). The military should be representative of the citizens they are protecting but excluding half of the population from conscription because of gender makes some bold assumptions about the nature of women.

Women are essentially assumed to be peaceful and their feminine qualities, that they must have since they are women, somehow must reflect weakness, softness, and nonconfrontation. Understandably, many feminists regard war as a capitalist venture and globalization through war as oppressive. Therefore combat can be seen as essentially nonfeminist and for some women military service is against their beliefs. I will expand on feminist critiques of militarism later in this literature review. For the women who do serve, Decew (1997) explains the former combat policy that excluded servicewomen from some military jobs is a perfect example of the glass ceiling blocking women from

promotion, higher pay, and economic benefits. The former combat exclusion policy was founded on ideals that reinforce stereotypes that women are too emotionally and physically weak for combat. Alfonso (2010) asserts how this military policy was outdated and did not match current military practice or combat operations. For example, women were prohibited from having a combat MOS but many women, like me, were attached to infantry units as support. My official job was to train my company in chemical warfare operations but in reality I spent my time driving in convoys or cleaning weapons alongside the soldiers with an infantry MOS. Alfonso (2010) argues that participation in the armed forces is a mark of equality for women and military policy needs to be changed to reflect the current situation of women in the military. She argues that placement in the voluntary service should be based on specific requirements of the job and have nothing to do with gender. Thanks to constant media bombardment, it is hard to imagine gender as insignificant to military service.

Turn on the news and you will see images and video of places occupied by the United States military. We see heroic soldiers (white and male) driving or “humping it” through city streets or in the mountains. If female soldiers are seen in the media, Sjoberg (2007) says Americans see her as “at once a cause for the war, a justification for the war, and the human face of the war” (p. 92). Sjoberg (1997) explains how media representations portray women in the military as vulnerable women in need of protection, as resources used for warfare, or as a feminine ideal soldier. D’Amico (1997) would add that women must conform their gender in the military to be “one of the boys, ultra feminine, or neutral-professionalism” (p. 222). Rich et al. (2012) claims the military maintains control over sexuality by making it “thoroughly naturalized” (p. 274).

Servicewomen are not the only women militarized and ignoring the other women whom are affected by the military is to normalize militarization; “*inattention is a political act*” (Enloe, 2000, p. xiii). The military needs women so it can normalize the ideal feminine woman for citizens, servicewomen, military wives, girlfriends, and daughters. Statements to the media typically only specify gender if the soldier is a female. The U.S. military’s general disregard or ambivalence toward gender discrimination then becomes noticeable. Sjoberg (2007) argues the lack of comment by the military and media response to the torture at Abu Ghraib is an example of how gender can be downplayed. The female soldiers involved in that event were outside their gender norms and the military chose to officially decline comment on the role their gender played. The silence around gender is *gendering*.

As a heteromasculine institution, the military creates policies that carefully regulate any deviance from gender norms. Sexuality is controlled by fraternization policies that broadly restrict sexual activity. Gender is controlled through the use of sexual harassment. There are military policies protecting complainants from sexual harassers and outlining procedures for reprimand but women soldiers are still daily victims of sexual harassment. Discrimination for being female is a common theme in military policy reflecting patriarchal values. Women’s sexuality is then in the control of regulations and policies created by masculine perspectives.

### **Silenced Sexualities**

Women often think about sexuality from a male perspective which explains why women have such a hard time defining their sexuality. Self-objectification occurs when women view themselves through masculine lens. Feminists hold that a woman’s sexuality

is owned by men. Gender norms place women in a passive role sexually. The servicewomen in this study often gave contradictory responses regarding their sexual behavior. Frye (1983) beautifully explains how oppression can mold and shape a person's existence and reality using a bird cage example; each bar of the birdcage is one system of oppression holding the oppressed in (p. 4-5). Frye says gender norms and widespread ideas in the United States about women's sexual behavior make it impossible for women to have real control over their sexuality. Many women are subject to objectification by self and society. Bellamy (2011) interviewed women and concluded that sexuality is difficult for women to define. Feminists assert women are trying to define sexuality from a male perspective, defining their sexuality as that of the pure and passive, penetrable, body. This is a review of literature that discusses the silence surrounding the sexual double standard for women, highlights some feminists who break apart dualistic ideas, and offers definitions of feminine sexuality, ownership, and rights.

There is a double standard surrounding nonhetero- and nonmasculine sexual activity. Sex is everywhere, according to Rich et al. (2012). It is especially apparent when you are the only one of your gender present as many servicewomen have experienced. The demand for certain kinds of sex, along with the very definition of legitimate sex, is still controlled by heteromascularity. Monogamy in U.S. society controls women's sexualities because it limits the quantity and quality of the kinds of sex women could experience. In supporting the idea of one man and one woman, military policy allows for soldiers to marry one another and even encourages intimacy by housing married couples together on deployments. Bay-Cheng (2007) criticizes the double standard that values male sexuality and devalues female sexuality and gender variation. Lesbian-baiting and

slut-shaming are common in military culture. This double standard described by Lara (2008), that allows men to be sexually promiscuous but punishes women for doing the same, controls female sexuality and defines it from the male perspective.

Bay-Cheng (2007) conducted a study and asked women who identified as feminist, nonfeminist, or egalitarian to define their sexuality. She found that gender norms and the sexual double standard repress women's sexuality. Bay-Cheng (2007) found egalitarians attitudes about sexuality range between feminists and nonfeminists. Egalitarians support feminist values but only for their own self-interest. This individualist self-interest is translated as neoliberalism by Bay-Cheng (2007) and she argues it does not serve to foster social change or solidarity among people with similar desire for personal autonomy and equality. Militarized women feel separate from one another. There are social boundaries that are strategically put in place by military officials that keep women isolated. The military keeps women pitted against one another and in constant competition so they remain unaware of "the political manipulations of gender affect[ing] them all" (Enloe, 2000, p. xiii). In U.S. culture, women label sexually active women "sluts" and women who like sex are made to feel ashamed but this was not always the case.

Pre-colonial Aztec women were encouraged by other women and men to be sexually active because it was considered important for their feminine energy and spirituality. Lara (2008) furthers the discussion of dichotomized sexuality for women as she focuses on language and culture in Latino culture. Lara blames religious, namely Christian, undertones in Hispanic stories and the Spanish language (Mexican and Central American dialects) that highlight native deities as "putas" and Christian saints as

“virgins.” Lara (2008) explains before colonization native populations, like the Nahuatl-speaking people, did not possess words for virgin or whore. Lara (2008) explains “the closest word to ‘whore’ was *ahuiani*, ‘the joyful one’” (p. 103). Lara wants to “re-sexualize the sacred” (p. 107). Lara (2008) cites Anzaldua about living in the space between to deconstruct dichotomies such as this and calls for modern women to break down essentialist and dichotomous language and epistemologies. Organizing sexualities into binarisms and using masculinist terminology makes defining women’s sexuality a slippery task.

Female sexuality is difficult to define because it is socially constructed (Bellamy, 2011). It has always been defined from the male perspective using masculine terminology and an unclear understanding of exactly what sex is. Bellamy’s (2011) study supported the hypothesis that women use masculine language and perspective to reflect what they think they know about their own sexuality. Thanks to religious influence in the western world we generally define sex in terms of reproduction. Every woman is going to define her sexuality differently. Heteromascularity has a hard time accepting that not all sex is reproductive or penetrative. Mainstream ideas about sex and sexuality limit the potential of individual sexuality and diversity. Women are encouraged, from a masculine perspective, to see their bodies as passive recipients and sex as something that happens to them. Women are objectified as objects of male desire.

Further, according to Ryan, many women would define sex as penetrative and a result of male desire. Ryan (2001) debates whether sexuality can ever be liberated and calls for a “massive relearning about sexuality” (p. 95). Ryan (2001) believes this can be achieved if men and women practice “mutual recognition” (p. 104). Ryan explains there

is a power dynamic in every relationship that can be balanced if women define their own sexuality, initiate and negotiate sexual activity. Ryan believes that male responsibility to a partner's needs and recognition of a partner's desires will be empowering for women's sexuality. Moreover, multiple understandings should be respected and valued, according to Bellamy (2011). Ryan (2001) criticizes the "woman-centered approach," where women have control of and define their own sexuality. Ryan argues the issue is fundamentally deeper than initiative and instead focuses on passive sexuality arguing it is not satisfying.

Estrich (2000) would argue for women not to be silent, ashamed, embarrassed, or passive in regards to their sexuality. She claims this sexuality is exactly the ticket women need to negotiate equality encouraging women to demand their rights and question the current system. She would argue that servicewomen retaliate against slut-shaming by fully enjoying their sexuality. Estrich (2000) wants her readers to pressure the heteronormative, male-centered system and make them feel judged.

An opposing feminist viewpoint holds women and men need to voice their experiences and alternative perspectives. Speaking out about sex will help to claim their existence in popular culture and end individualistic ideologies powerful in the United States today. Only when we end the silence around gender and speak up about our sexuality will women be able to break down binaries, destroy sexist mainstream ideologies, take our equality, and enjoy our citizenship (Estrich, 2000; Goldenberg, 2007; Jakobsen et al., 2005). To self-define feminine by phallogocentric standards is an imitation of masculine ideology (Butler, 1993). These authors agree U.S. culture needs to stop obsessing over sexuality from a singular heteromale perspective and instead



use multiple, diverse perspectives to experience sex. Nonwhite middle class male thinkers by far outnumber those heteronormative mainstream ideologies.

Challenges to current monologic frameworks rock the foundation of heteromascularity. After decades of attempts to categorize and include communities of women, one feminist theory holds that women are impossible to define or group. Schussler (2012) would argue this diversity is precisely what makes women potentially so powerful and asserts there is a definitive and tangled relationship between pleasure and power. Goldenberg (2007) posits, “Because categories *create* rather than *reflect* the world, there is no reason to think that we must limit ourselves to a single world view” (p. 148). Judith Butler (1993) eloquently reminds her readers the body came before the conversation (p. 30). Goldenberg (2007) argues we would have more gender power in our differences. This range is exactly where the power lies and Goldenberg argues we should develop polylogic thinking. Goldenberg’s categorization focuses on difference rather than similarity. A common theme argued by Goldenberg’s (2007) is generalization leads to essentialism and then to “false universalism” (p. 141-2). Understanding how the current descriptions of matter came to be illuminates what the political undertones are. Butler (1993) impenetrably expounds on critiques of Aristotle and Foucault by Irigaray that the feminine is excluded from the form/matter binary in the phallogocentric act of naming “women” started a discourse that limited women from agency to name themselves as a category or not (Butler, 1993, p. 39). Some feminists are more materialist and, with concern about bodily violence, they worry a poststructuralist discourse will strip the body of its power and rights.

Women as a category are more than the discourse we have created for them. If we allow ourselves to examine and critique this classification and why it exists this way, then we stand to learn that the category of women is larger, better, and different than our language used to describe the category of women (Butler, 1993, p. 29). Goldenberg's multifaceted worldview, and refusing to use the oppressor's language or epistemology to define ourselves, will void otherness by voiding monologic. Goldenberg (2007) makes the argument that there are more of us excluded from male patriarchy than included and it is impossible to essentialize us. Butler (1993) would agree that a shift in thinking could create new categories with permeable definitions for describing bodies and "new ways for bodies to matter" (p. 30). Goldenberg (2007) claims we can use our differences as a "tool to throw off otherness" (p. 148) and find strength and unity in what we *are not* as opposed to what we are. In other words, U.S. citizens can better reach their full potential if less energy was spent gender policing.

Gender roles restrict and control all genders. To be in the military is to be manly, to be manly is to be masculine. Masculinity is represented by violence, apathy, grungy, etc. The main concern the military has for allowing women and people who identify as nonheterosexual entrance is the fear that the military will become feminized. Being perceived as anything but having masculine identity and interest is unfavorable for current military policy and all men are taught from boyhood how to be manly (Kimmel, 2008). Phallogocentric discourse assumes that all matter is in a neutral state masculine, that masculinity is within the discourse and femininity is outside, and that the masculine is the "impenetrable penetrator" (Butler, 1993, p. 50). Rich et al. (2012) explains that gay men serving in the military are the ultimate threat to heteromascularity.

Homophobia exists because men fear losing their masculinity. Kimmel (2008) explains that men are scared “*of* other men—that other men will perceive you as a failure, as a fraud.” (p. 50). Rich et al. (2012) explains, “This crisis of heteromascularity results from the realization of its own penetrability and its own queerness” (p. 287). Men are constantly required by their gender roles to prove their masculinity and often this occurs through fraternization with servicewomen or other militarized women Both Estrich (2000) and Rich et al. (2012) believe ignoring matters of sexuality and gender does nothing to challenge the generalizations of heterosexual patriarchy. Furthermore, continued dialogue focusing on gender and sexuality can only educate and broaden current beliefs about female sexuality. Is allowing oneself to be militarized really an opportunity for equality or is it just another layer of oppression stacked on top of previous layer that simultaneously helps to hide the other layers of oppression, silence the Others that have become aware of their unequal status having searched for an opportunity they think will help, and strengthen the system of systems set up to maintain masculinity (Enloe, 2000, p. 238).

### **Feminist Critiques of Militarism**

There are two opposing theories embraced by feminists regarding militarism: separatism versus equal opportunity. The first argument for equal opportunity acknowledges that militaries and battles have existed as long as humanity and understands there will always be populations trying to oppress others. These feminists think war is inevitable and women should take the opportunity to level the playing field. Some feminists, like Enloe (2000), question whether a woman participating in government can maintain feminist values while serving a sexist and patriarchal institution

by asking, “Are femocrats transforming the state or being co-opted by it?” (Enloe, 2000, p. 279). The second main argument of feminism, separatism, defines militarism as an extension of capitalism and the leading catalyst in the globalization of power and poverty. The idea is that feminists should separate from male-dominated institutions such as the military.

The separatist theory, also referred to as “care ethics” by Peach (1997), maintains that both women and feminists should avoid the backwards, hierarchal, dominating institution that is the military (p. 106-109). There are many degrees of separatism and many feminists are actively separatist. Rădoi (2011) reports women are often considered peaceful and cooperative, having promoted and organized hundreds of peace and antiwar movements throughout history, whereas men are considered warlike and power hungry. Frye (1983) introduces feminist separatism as a very real way to reclaim power while avoiding male-dominated institutions in her chapter “Oppression” (pp. 95-109).

These two arguments about female participation in the military that argue oppositely on care ethics and justice ethics are outlined by Peach (1997). Peach (1997) claims this argument uses “justice ethics” to explain that the military could be a gateway for women to come into power eventually obtaining equality and influence international relations. Being the male-dominated hierarchal institution of power the military is, there is evidence of injustices in the use of that power. Cockburn (2007) effectively argues, “Feminism can lead women both towards and away from militarism” (p. 223). In this section on feminist theories on the military and women in the military, more detail is provided on the current literature surrounding each theory on women in the military,

specifically conversations regarding gender oppression, militaristic antifeminism, equality opportunity, and female representation.

Does the military provide an opportunity for females to break away from mainstream gender roles? In a study conducted by Silva (2008), she asks female university ROTC students about their gender expression in the confines of the military. Silva hypothesizes that these female trainees feel the need to emphasize their gender. The females interviewed claim the military was a place where they did not have to pay attention to or care about being feminine. However, females try to present themselves as feminine while in uniform. She concludes the female soldiers tried fit a gender norm by distinguishing themselves as feminine rather than neutral or masculine. Silva (2008) explains the female soldiers saw the military as a “gender-blind institution” although their gender self-awareness and description of “femininity as natural” in interviews would suggest the military compels females to conform to gender norms (p. 950). Silva (2008) argues that women’s presence in the military only makes them more aware of their gender. However, Silva counters that military service and femininity are foundationally oppositional but because women do serve they are actively deconstructing notions of femininity as weak and passive as they defy gender norms in their duties as soldiers.

If women do join the military, they are subject to gender oppression and pressure to be the ideal female soldier. Media representations, military reduction in size, and stricter entrance policies have helped to create an image of an ideally perfect female soldier (D’Amico, 1997; Sjoberg, 2007; Sjolander, 2010). Sjoberg (2007) argues that media portrayals of Jessica Lynch and Janis Karpinski as well as institutionalized forms of gender oppression have generalized that to be a female soldier it means she must be

“tough, but not violent,” “brave, but not self-sufficient,” “masculine, but not above femininity,” “frail, but not afraid,” and “sexy, but not perverse,” (p. 93). Any female soldier with behavior too feminine or too masculine will be ostracized and face political and social consequences. According to Rich et al. (2012), lesbians who serve threaten military heteromascularity and probably for those reasons have been discharged at a rate three times that of gay male soldiers. Female soldiers constantly have to prove they belong.

Feminists are not even sure whether women belong in the military. Khalili believes women who serve in the imperial forces are only perpetuating colonized oppression on a global scale, even though they may momentarily experience a heightened sense of power (p. 1481). Khalili argues using a quote from Anne McClintock to explain that white women knowingly, “unambiguously” help colonize and therefore were colonizers, even if it was with “borrowed power” and even if they were simultaneously “colonized” (p. 1481-1482). Khalili calls it, “serving the empire” and explains how the military uses qualities deemed feminine, like humanitarian work, interviewing female civilians, and other “softer tasks,” to further its war cause. (p. 1483). An ethics of care, described by Peach (1997), empathize female nonviolence and the desire to protect life. Others point out the purpose of the military is at its simplest foundationally nonfeminist in that its purpose is hierarchal centered power, exploitation of the less capable, and a mission of death and destruction. Historically, women have started and lead peace movements and social protests around the world. Since women are capable of creating life, an argument of care ethics is that women naturally do not want to take life. Peach (1997) explains some supporters for women’s exclusion from the military argue there are

physical differences between most men and women, such as the fact that women can make babies and men have stronger upper body strength. The U.S. military, by its own description, is focused on controlling unruly nations and waging war wherein killing occurs. Peach (1997) cites that care feminists argue war lacks validity and morality. Care feminists are fundamentally against all forms of violence; the military wages wars. Meola (1997) would argue one of the most common forms of violence perpetuated by the military against its own citizens is sexual harassment.

Feminists who support care ethics also argue that the military's mission is an extension of capitalism to the global arena. Jakobsen and Kennedy (2005) demonstrate that the current social meaning of freedom has been skewed by people with race and class privilege who use the word to justify their domination of marginalized peoples. Peach explains that care feminists worry that even if women obtain equality in the military, they might be participating in a larger system of inequality that perpetuates oppressive ideologies. Goldenberg (2007) argues we need to stop using the language of the oppressor, which only serves to justify his motives, and stop thinking in monologic, masculinist terms in order to shift our thinking to a pluralist, inclusive framework.

Peach (1997) goes on to report that feminists who support justice ethics consider that the military provides opportunity for access to employment, benefits, and national esteem as well as the opportunity for women to affect foreign policy, to exercise their rights as U.S. citizens, and be represented in a largely male establishment. However, military policy prohibits women from serving in certain positions within the military because of ideas about female femininity as weak. These restrictions have been protested by a number of justice feminists, including Alfonso (1997), D'Amico (1997), Decew

(1997), and Radoi (2011), among others. Justice feminists argue there is no need for physical strength to be a prerequisite for service because of the way wars are now fought. Some women still might choose a career in the military because it provides job security as well as decent financial and health benefits. Radoi (2011) agrees with NATO and the EU in that she supports women's entrance into the military for reasons of gender equality. Peach (1997) explains that justice feminists argue permission to serve is not enough and that women should have access to all jobs in the military including combat. D'Amico (1997) blames combat exclusion on the "protector-protected dichotomy," which holds that women need protection from men who will protect them. The argument is that women and men can be separate but equal. Exclusion from combat is argued by feminists as gender oppression relegating women in need of protection from men. Decew (1997) argues that restricting women from combat achieves "economic subordination" by giving women less chances for recognition, less chances for promotion, and therefore less monetary gain (p. 89). Since the way nations fight wars has changed, Alfonso (2010) argues that women are already serving in combat and this disconnect between policy and practice needs to be amended to acknowledge female soldier's contributions in battle.

Justice feminists point out that historically women have always served in the military. Jones (1997), in his book *Women Warriors*, gives examples of female warriors throughout history. In an attempt to give women role models to exemplify, Jones argues that female participation in war is neither unfeminine nor a new phenomenon. Jones wants women to access any power source existing enabling us to exercise full citizenship. He acknowledges that women who "exemplify the warrior" will have their sexuality



immediately judged in a way that male soldiers are not (Jones, 1997, p. xii). Why is a woman's sexuality always deviant if she breaks the rules?

Jones (1997) supports feminist justice arguments for women in the military, although he is careful to note he is not a supporter of war itself, stating, "Everything men have ever done in warfare, women have also done... and they have done it better" (p. xiii). Peach (1997) demonstrates that other feminists argue that to deny females entrance into all positions of the military denies females full citizenship, limits the number of women who can serve, and creates "bottlenecking" in promotions (p. 104). To deny women access is to maintain a male perspective and this makes the military not representative of the population that is half female. Khalili (2010) counters this perspective by arguing war is often closely tied to women's rights in an attempt to justify imperialism and she coined this "colonial feminism" (p. 1488). Peach argues combat exclusion of females creates disadvantages for male soldiers as well because females are exempt from duties and responsibilities requiring our male battle buddies to pick up the slack.

Peach (1997) suggests a reform of care and justice ethics to create a combination of the two where females have equal access to all service positions but also use moral judgment to consider how war is and oppresses other women and children globally. Peach (1997) and Alfonso (2010) argue that women should participate in the military in order to transform this masculine, patriarchal institution. They call for the need to reevaluate contemporary and historical U.S. military practices globally. Fulton and Koch (2011) analyzed defense spending and conflict behavior by women holding office in various countries and found that women do hold sway in government foreign policy.

Justice feminists argue women in the military and government can alter international affairs and limit war to only those conflicts that are “just.” Peach (1997) explains women should exercise the power to influence military policy thereby making violence a last resort, to be avoided if possible, and eliminated as a method of oppression.

Feminists do not agree on military inclusion of females because people have different ideas about the necessity of warfare. Those that believe war is unavoidable and sometimes necessary for female equality argue for full female inclusion into the military for representative, economic, and historical reasons. Feminists opposed to war argue female soldiers are not given equal opportunities because of sexist values held by the military and that the military further oppresses female soldiers due to sexual harassment and the oppressive nature of U.S. military foreign policy.

Discussion of military policy for gender demonstrates its oppressive connotations. Feminists’ views about female sexuality debate it as empowering or oppressed. Feminists hold opposite positions on female enrollment in the military based on their justification about the need for war. The goals of this research are to learn of the experiences and perspectives of women who have served in the armed forces during the current conflicts and continuing occupations involving the U.S. military in various parts of the world. Ultimately, I aim to learn more about how other women thought about their sexuality as well as the nature of their work, their environment, and how they perceived their gender. The perceived capabilities of a woman soldier are directly correlated to policies and people that regulate her sexualized and gendered behavior requiring that woman soldiers continuously must prove their competency.

What follows is a feminist analysis of the opinions, experiences, and behaviors of thirteen lower enlisted woman soldiers regarding their capability and competency in their military occupation specialty and on the regulation and frequency of fraternization.

Through a feminist lens, this research will demonstrate that women soldiers have a strict and specific role to play as female soldiers. Women are taught as girls how to act. If women soldiers play the role well they are rewarded with respect, acceptance, protection, and credibility.

## Methodology

I employed a semi-structured in-depth interviewing methodology to gain insight into the world of women in the military and analyze their valuable stories. Personal interviews allowed me to gather data directly from participants as they experienced it. This research is hence qualitative in nature. I interviewed a small sample of eleven enlisted women who have served or are currently serving on active duty in the United States Military to analyze their common gendered experiences. All participants signed consent forms and received a copy. Of the twelve participants including myself, five were in the Army National Guard but had served on active duty during a deployment, three were Marines, two were active Army, one was in the Air Force and one was in the Navy. I included my own experiences as the twelfth woman of my research because I wanted to cross examine my personal experiences with the experiences of other servicewomen.

I relied on the snowball effect to locate participants. I recruited participants through military acquaintances and friends of friends. I used the social media site, Facebook, to post the status, "I'm talking to women who served in the U.S. military for my thesis. Are you a servicewoman interested in sharing your perspective with me? Do you know a woman who might want to tell her story?" I received a response from two of my Facebook contacts who gave me contact information for two other women who had expressed interest in participation however only one woman responded to my email only after I had finished conducting interviews. I used the same explanation in emails and phone conversations to recruit participants and have included an example in the Appendix "Recruitment." Five participants were personally asked by me to do an interview and the remaining six were referred to me using the snowball technique.

My research focuses on women who have served on active duty in the U.S. military. I am interested in the behaviors and attitudes of female soldiers. During the transcription process, I coded for demographic information such as military occupational specialty, branch of military, sexual orientation, relationship status, identification as a woman of color. I similarly coded a range of experiences including the frequency of fraternization of each participant, her opinion on the regulation of fraternization, identification as a feminist, level of personal safety felt by each participant, level of protection from peers felt by each participant, and camaraderie or closeness with peers felt by each participant. I found common themes surrounding servicewomen's capability and competency in correlation with known fraternization that simultaneously creates a sister/whore dichotomy for the categorization of woman soldiers.

I started each interview by asking the participant a number of questions regarding demographic information. All participants identified as women. All participants had served on active duty as lower enlisted. Only one participant identified as a woman of color. Lack of diversity in my research has undoubtedly skewed my findings. Each individual woman's intersecting identities influence her unique experience and undoubtedly women of color have had a different experience in the military than white women. Khalili (2011) has researched that "war and violence have always been gendered, classed and racialized," and informs that "they shape social relations (and are shaped by them)" (p. 1473). Participants joined for a variety of reasons ranging from boredom to battling for child custody. I found that every participant explained her enlistment in a way that suggested the desire for social mobility, which I will discuss in further detail later. Out of the twelve servicewomen included in this study, nine joined between 2002 and

2006, two joined in 2009 and one joined in 2012. I asked participants about their sexual orientation and found eight identified as straight or stated, "I like boys," three were bisexual, and one as lesbian. One participant identified as a transgendered woman and explained she previously identified as a gay man. Fraternization, being sexually active with another soldier, was denied by four participants and confirmed by eight. The definition of feminist was unknown to some participants but after defining a feminist as, "A person who thinks women and men should be equal but are not," seven identified with the term, one said, "it depends," and one said, "equalist" while the rest denied being feminists. Participants generally felt safe, protected, and close with their male peers. AA, who identified as a transgendered woman, did not feel protected or close to male peers although she did feel safe. Later I will discuss some areas of improvement in the interview process and demographics obtained.

How did lower enlisted servicewomen feel about their experiences as women in a male-dominated hierarchical institution and are their values in this regard feminist? Lower enlisted servicewomen are those woman who have voluntarily joined the Army, Marines, Navy, or Air Force as noncommissioned soldiers E6 or below with the lowest rank being E1. None of the women I interviewed were responsible for larger than a platoon sized element, which is approximately ten to 60 lower or equal ranked people. In the following section, I will discuss why I chose to interview both friends and friends of friends using an informational email, phone call, Skype, or Facebook and why unstructured in-depth interviewing was important for a methodology. In conclusion, I will offer some limitations and criticisms of doing a study of this nature from my positionality.

An informational email or voicemail introduced my thesis to my potential participants and also allowed for anyone interested in participating in my study to learn about its purpose and ask questions. The purpose of this email was to get the conversation started, to explain my project, to schedule interviews, and to distribute consent forms. I started the email by namedropping our acquaintance then followed with a brief introduction of whom I am and why I am conducting this interview. I felt it was important to also state that I had served in the Army and was a veteran, which I stated clearly in the emails I exchanged with every participant, although four participants seemed unaware of my veteran status by the way they explained simple military terminology to me as if I were a civilian. I did not reinform participants that I had served in the military because I did not want my personal experiences to influence what they would share with me. I understand how thinking I was civilian could influence a participant to answer differently as well. The use of email and online social media messaging were very helpful for recruiting and informational to participants.

Unstructured interviews more accurately captured the lens through which I wanted readers to see the situation of United States military women. I chose in-depth interviewing as my methodology because it “is a particularly valuable research method feminist researchers can use to gain insight into the world of their respondents,” according to the chapter on feminist in-depth interviewing in *Feminist Research Practice* (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007, p. 114). I used my own insights as a woman veteran and feminist to understand the struggles and little victories these women face in a life of service. I have asked these servicewomen open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview to get them talking and to help them remember their experiences. I wanted to

have some control over the direction of the interview but I also wanted to maintain a conversational tone. A semi-structured interview has minimal hierarchy. I did not want to seem like I was “in charge” because I wanted these women to be honest and open about their behaviors and experiences. As a female veteran, I did not want to assume their experiences were anything like mine so taking my own intersectionality into account was important for asking inclusive questions, gaining rapport with my participant, and fully grasping how their experiences and perspective vary from my own.

Many participants seemed defensive at the beginning of the interview although all seemed to gradually relax and share more detail later in the interview. I will include discussion of this in the results chapter. Interviews were held one-on-one in a private location, over the phone, or on Skype. Three participants typed their responses and mailed them to me with their consent forms. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted 30 minutes to approximately one hour. I interviewed participants individually to maintain anonymity and separate their responses from their identities. Participants were not required to use their real names for the interview. Participants received a two-letter pseudonym for the study.

Signed consent and IRB approval were needed for this study. Participants were informed of the intent of this study in the informational email and prior to beginning the individual interviews. The consent form also had information regarding the intent of my research, potential risks to participants, and their rights regarding participation.

Participants who I did not meet in person received a copy of the consent form and either mailed or scanned and emailed a signed consent form to me. I mailed a blank consent form and stamped self-addressed envelope to two participants that they signed and mailed



back to me. All participants were told they did not have to answer all or any of the questions or any question they found uncomfortable. Participants were told they could “pass” on any question they wished to omit and were told they could end the interview at any point.

Participant responses to interview questions are kept confidential. At no time are participant’s actual identities be revealed. Asking women about their experiences is validating for the women being questioned because it gives them a voice and allows them to share their stories and perspectives. I asked servicewomen about their experience as females and how they expressed their gender. I understand that as a fellow veteran who has served in this state, anyone interviewed might be hesitant to share names or information with me for fear I will know too much about their specifics.

I did not wish to ask about any trauma or trigger any negative memories although I understand that conversation around the topic of active duty could have sparked traumatic or unpleasant memories for the participant. I simply wanted to understand what motivated women during a period when they were less represented and completely oppressed as a gender. Hopefully, sharing their stories and finding common themes in the stories they share will empower and educate not only other female soldiers in the U.S. but also in other institutions where women have traditionally been excluded or marginalized.

I wanted my interviews to make women in the military aware of their unique intersectionality and to help women see themselves as agents of history. This study has helped me understand some of my own gendered military experiences better and forced me to examine how my individuality has been suppressed by the military and other heteromasculine systems in power in the United States. These interviews are helping to

preserve memory and record emotion felt at this moment in global history. My findings may be disseminated to the public by word of mouth through the potential interviewees or through access to my thesis, which will be located in the Gender and Women's Studies office or on the website.

## **Results**

In the results chapter I will discuss how my findings support my thesis that servicewomen are devalued for nonconforming to gender normativity. The results include direct quotes from participants and my subsequent feminist analysis using theory from the above literature review. Here, I will discuss establishing rapport with participants, the “ideal” feminist presence, women’s work, gendered combat, the sexualized double standard and fraternization, and finding the perfect balance for regulating gender norms.

### **Establishing Rapport**

I was able to interview servicewomen located near and far because of the various techniques, such as using phone and Skype interviews, I employed. The women I interviewed were mostly Army and Marines located in the United States (California and Minnesota); the Air Force servicewoman was located in South Korea; and two soldiers were stationed in Afghanistan. I interviewed two servicewomen located in California, one a soldier and one a marine, and seven servicewomen located in Minnesota. Further research will need more diversity in the interview sample to include the experiences of women from different regions of the United States, a more representative sample of women of color, the experiences of men soldiers and every gender in between. A more diverse sample of participants would provide more insight as to why people join the military at all.

Education benefits and social mobility are two reasons women join the military and were also why I joined the military during my senior year of high school. I joined the Army when I was seventeen so that I could get a higher education without going into debt. I was the first women in my family to serve, I was the oldest child, and I wanted to

make my father and uncles proud. All the men in my family have served in the Army. We are a working class family and my parents never managed to save a dime toward their children's secondary educations. I think this is true for many of my interviewees and probably for many people serving in the U.S. military today. Two participants mentioned being raised in military families, which I think could have made the transition from civilian to military life that much easier as they probably knew what to expect more than others. Seventy percent (including myself) are using their education benefits. Women join the military to move upward out of their current social situation and class status. I think women are joining the military to increase their socioeconomic status, gain access to higher education, and move out of their current social situation. Eleven out of thirteen have served in combat zones. Women were serving in combat before the combat exclusion policy was lifted earlier this year and were using their veteran status to gain access to higher status through education.

A snowball sample requires word of mouth to obtain participants. Four participants are friends of mine and know me on personal level, two are acquaintances, and people I know referred the other three to me. Most of the women I interviewed were initially cautious about answering questions regarding gender in their military units and about the motives of my interview. I sent an email with the interview questions and consent form attached by email to everyone I interviewed. Three women were interviewed on Skype, two submitted written responses because they are currently stationed in Afghanistan in the Army, two I met in person, and the remaining two were interviewed on the phone. About half were unaware of my military veteran status. My

rapport changed with each participant since my relation to each participant varied so drastically.

Rapport varied because of how I knew the participant and what the participant knew of me. Friends of friends participated in the interview with a sense of understanding that they were aware I was a veteran and maybe thought positively toward me due to our mutual friend. My friends who I know personally from my military service are aware of my personal opinions and may have been somewhat hesitant to divulge all of their experiences and opinions so not to injure our friendship. While some participants were explicitly aware of my military experience, others were informed in the invitational letter but did not seem aware that I was a veteran during the interviews. I did not want to influence the participants' responses with my military status although I am aware that a civilian status could also affect their responses. A participant might have shared more if she knew I had experienced similar situations but then may have altered her responses about fraternization knowing I was a fellow soldier. My goal was for the participant to share as much as she felt comfortable revealing about her experiences. I tried to be agreeable and open to all of their unique and compelling experiences. The servicewomen participants were at times defensive about their positionality.

Defensiveness of the participant stems from uncertainty about my, the interviewer's, personal opinions about the military and women serving in the military. Not all of the participants knew of my veteran status and none of them knew exactly my stance on the military or on feminism. The two participants unaware of my military experience were so excited to discuss their military experiences with someone they thought was outside of their military world, and they were explaining their experiences in

such great detailed explanations, that I could not bring myself to tell them their lengthy responses were unnecessary. If I shared that I was a veteran, I can imagine their responses would have shifted to brief introductory explanations and ended with, “Ya know what I mean?” I did not want the participants to feel as though a “raging” feminist from the Gender and Women’s Studies department was snooping into their service in the military for the purpose of belittling their service. It was my intent to critique mainstream ideologies of military culture, not of the individual servicewomen.

Often, the participants’ answers were contradictory in that some responses fit neatly within the prescribed gender norm but later responses were candidly reported of their actions. For example, they were asked to define fraternization then later asked if they had fraternized. By their own definitions, one third of participants had indeed fraternized but claimed they had not. Only one participant acknowledged her ultra femininity before joining the military stating she was her town princess while the rest claimed to be “tom boys,” have “many brothers,” or always hung out with the guys. Although half stated they were not taught at all about what it means to be a girl, when asked to define a time when they felt feminine, ninety percent said wearing a skirt and every participant mentioned being “clean” as feminine. Did the participants know they were giving me contradictory responses in an unconscious attempt to be perceived as the “ideal” female soldier? I wanted to behave as if I knew what they were talking about but also act naïve enough to get an explanation. Being agreeable and nice are two great ways to help someone feel comfortable enough to go into detail about scandalous experiences. Another great way to establish rapport is to be in the same boat.

Class status could have influenced women to join the military and affected rapport. One third of my interviewees needed money for college, another third admitted to being in financial distress, and the remaining third were bored and needed something new. Middle and upper class citizens are generally not joining the military out of boredom or need for college money. Recruiters typically try to lure working class recruits with large dollar signs and education benefits. For a brief period during my time in service, I was assigned to assist a recruiter troll Northfield, MN and make phone calls to find potential recruits. We drove the government car in our sharp urban camouflage uniforms to trailer parks and apartment complexes looking for young people to train. The recruiter and I were looking for young adults in one of two predicaments: those who could not afford to go to college or those who were in trouble with the law. Young adults in either predicament are looking for a way out and for some the military is the solution. Of course it was always good for the quota to recruit from any gender; we never discriminated but that invisibility ended upon enlistment.

### **An “Ideal” Feminine Presence**

Gender awareness is persistent in the military. The most obvious highlight of gender by the military is the variation uniform for soldiers with vaginas. Women are assigned a feminine gender and expected to behave according to the gender norms of U.S. culture. A servicewoman who does not fit into the assigned gender role might be perceived to peers as “dirty” or known as a “bitch.” The “ideal” feminine woman soldier is described as clean, looks and smells good, and counsels her unit. Does any woman fit inside these rigid guidelines for the perfect servicewoman?

Women cannot be defined solely on the basis of gender because it is not their singular identity. Furthermore, this study should not be generalized to the entire military but should be read as an analysis of a small snowball sample of lower enlisted United States military mostly white women who mainly joined to stimulate change in their lives. This thesis views women as active agents of their own lives who have joined an all volunteer military. In the following analysis I will refer to the women by their initials offering an analysis of how their military experiences were gendered.

Servicewomen are expected to adhere to a certain level of normalized femininity to be considered a competent woman soldier. Femininity entails cleanliness, acceptance of physical limitations, and need for protection. Servicewomen walk a fine line between femininity and masculinity because in this profession they are women doing “men’s work.”

Interestingly, one of the reasons people argue that women should not be allowed in combat is feminine cleanliness. Participants were asked what they were taught about being a girl and overwhelmingly the response given was having “cleanliness.” Ninety percent of female participants used the word “clean” to describe women or women’s work during their interviews. BJ was concerned with how the males are going to handle the integration of women into previously all male units believing women serving alongside men is “not a good thing because of living conditions in the field.” Although her dad probably gave her a lot of advice about how to be a good human, one piece of advice BJ remembers learning was to “stay clean.” AA remembers field exercises during basic training when “women were brought back to the barracks every night to shower.” Daily showers during training seem excessive even for military policy. I remember an



FTX when women were brought to the barracks to shower if they were menstruating, and since anyone would like a hot shower on a cold rainy day, I'm sure more than a few servicewomen used that opportunity. Aren't women's vaginas self-cleansing? How did women as a gender ever make it living out under the stars for thousands of years without daily showers? Policies like this are unfair to the men who are not given access to shower facilities as often as females. Apparently, servicewomen's hygiene in the field is a hassle and needs to remain invisible.

War is dirty business. The 2003 mass invasion of key cities in Iraq happened so quickly there was not a lot of time for personal hygiene. The initial invasion of Iraq and the unsanitary and inhumane conditions the marines faced during the 48-hour road trip to combat example was used against female integration. Military leaders argued that women could or should not have to bear that kind of humiliation and illness. AM2 understands that the reason women are not allowed to do certain jobs is for "health risks for women" and "it is easier for us as females to get things like yeast infections if we don't take care of ourselves." Do women need military policies to regulate their own health? Does this mean men do not want to see women in pain? Is this a form of protection? Or do men think women's weaker immune systems and inferior physical capabilities are the reason why women would not last on a mission of that sort?

In reality, there is often little time or patience for feeling embarrassed about hygiene or bodily functions in the military, regardless of gender. During a convoy training exercise in the Army in preparation for deployment, I found myself with a full bladder. The exercise was timed and graded. The entire company was anxious and was completely submersed in the game. My commanding sergeant, the woman in charge of

my mobility, gave me permission to use the latrine-the area not inside our vehicle. We stopped in a defensive box formation that required our convoy of vehicles to park closely in a square on the road. As soon as the hummvee stopped I threw my weapon over my shoulder, hopped out, and dropped trou. I did not care that thirty higher ranking male and female sergeants, officers, and peers were surrounding me in their vehicles. No one else cared or seemed to notice either. How much more emphasis do we place on gender in the United States than other parts of the world? On another training exercise in Norway I learned how significant gender is in the U.S. Male and female Norwegian soldiers share showers and latrine facilities and sleep in the same tents in the field. Americans are sure to have a separate “female tent.” These examples are meant to demonstrate the absurdity of putting as much importance on gender as military culture does.

    Servicewomen not only must look and act feminine, but they need policies for protection because they are seen as physically inferior. Even though servicewomen have loaded weapons, ninety percent of the women interviewed felt protected by their male battle buddies. No one said she felt safe because she had a loaded rifle with a mounted laser scope. BJ explained that in her company, “People act like they’re my big brother.” LE even had bodyguards at a FOB (forward operating base) overseas after an incident when a male sniffed the back of her neck at the chow hall. For servicewomen’s protection from men soldiers, the participants were often separated, heavily guarded, required to travel with another woman, or given a curfew. Clearly, the military’s policy is segregate the females instead of educate the males. In BJ’s barracks the females had a floor of the building to themselves with a separate entrance and cameras recording around the clock. The excuse is that these men are sexually deprived and have strong sexual urges from

forced celibacy. The U.S. military effectively normalizes gender roles by separating men and women. Sleeping arrangements and sexual harassment policies teach women and men what their expectations are, even if the expectation is to be scared to walk without a male escort at night. In reference to feeling protected by the two men in her section, AW simply stated, “my guys knew better.” Military policy is set up to protect women from men implying women need protection by men from men and that sexual harassment and assault are inevitable. U.S. military policy has regulations specifically for women’s bodies.

FR explains a special rule for women on the flight line is in case of pregnancy. Pregnant women are protected by the military from being around or near hazardous materials. A woman can get in trouble for disregarding a rule designed to protect, not the woman, but the fetus. Marilyn Frye (1983) explains this rampant concern with fetuses, such as the heated media debate about abortion and special policies to protect a woman’s body when she is carrying a fetus, as parasitism (p. 100). The idea that women are in need of protecting from men is ridiculous and the idea that women need men’s protection from other men is narrow. Women have always decided if and when to terminate a pregnancy as they should since their bodies are their own.

Persistent oppressive ideologies have trained the population into believing that women are physically and mentally weaker than males. These ideas are so widespread that the women soldiers in this interview described women as innately weaker and passive compared to males. When asked about gender assumptions, AA responded, “It was assumed you [women soldiers] couldn’t or didn’t want to do the running around and heavy lifting and stuff.” Grouping all women as physically inferior to all men we can all

agree is sexist and dichotomizes all humans into a singular gendered identity. What is the response for a servicewoman having more physical strength than what is expected of the feminine? LO says her male battle buddies are always surprised at how much she can lift. Contradictorily, she understands women being banned from certain MOSs like artillery because men are physically stronger. BJ believes men and women soldiers are treated equally however she noticed that males get picked for certain details, quick unofficial tasks, that require heavy lifting but the females never get picked. FR's MOS requires loading missiles above her head onto F16 fighter planes and she confirms, "There is a lot of heavy lifting." FR is a woman and fully capable of the physical requirements of her job. Logically, if servicewomen believe all men are physically stronger then they must all be more intimidating as well.

Soldiers need to intimidate their enemies and unfortunately, mainstream ideologies stress that feminine qualities are not intimidating. AM2 claims men are better for certain tasks commenting that, "the women we have here are not as strong or as large and it's better to send [to combat] those who are more intimidating." Woman soldiers are defining themselves from a male perspective using masculine terminology. Intimidation, which stems from confidence and perspective, is nothing more than happenstance. Often servicewomen talked about "heavy lifting" when describing the physical differences in men and women's duties. This was usually in response to the question about men and women being equal in the military. As these servicewomen's varied experiences demonstrate, woman soldiers are fully capable of "heavy lifting." Decew (1997) believes exclusion from jobs and promotions is a perfect example of how sexism and the glass ceiling are legally protected in the military.

Women in the military have different physical fitness requirements, sleep in separate and guarded locations, and their fetuses, if a woman in the military should find herself pregnant, are protected by military policy. The physical fitness uniform shorts, made of a silky material and quite short on the thigh, were banned in the Marines RA assumes “because of the females.” The military changed its uniform policy to protect women instead of respecting women or educating men soldiers about sexual harassment. Women were feminized in numerous ways by these policies that offer them protection. The U.S. military could be offering women many opportunities for advancement if their protection policies were revised to more accurately describe current reality.

It is perplexing that these stereotypes persist even though women in the military joined voluntarily and admit to being less feminine than average before joining. Gender is always an issue. Are servicewomen unaware of just how feminine they have been trained to behave? When asked if she thought she was equal to her male battle buddies and had access to the same kinds of opportunities, AM said, “I do believe that it is harder for us to do some things due to the fact our bodies are built differently. But, I try my hardest to make sure I can do as much as they and I see other females doing the same. I don’t believe that we always have the same opportunities.” Servicewomen are continuously reminded of their gender. Finding the right balance between soldier and women is essential. Women in the military are expected to appear a certain way, not to be too strong and to need protection.

U.S. military policy is gendered and includes policies regulating feminine appearance. I asked participants to recall a time when they felt feminine during active service. The servicewomen interviewed felt most feminine wearing the formal dress

uniform skirt and pumps. Soldiers wearing skirts is an example, as outlined by Enloe (2000), of military policy defining what femininity looks like. Dress uniforms in the military are designed to complement the gendered body. LO says the most feminine she felt in the military was at last year's Christmas party when she wore the skirt and pumps for the first time. BJ remembered feeling especially feminine when she wore earrings for the first time in uniform at her graduation from Army basic combat training. Others also mentioned feeling feminine while wearing makeup and perfume in uniform. Adding these feminine touches is evidence the servicewomen wanted to internally feel more feminine which in turn made them feel self-credible. Dressing and looking "as they should" made these servicewomen feel like they were playing the correct role in the most masculine institution in our country. In U.S. society most would agree with the assumption that skirts, pumps, makeup, and perfume are feminine. The U.S. military defines proper femininity in a slightly different manner.

All branches require servicewomen's hair does not go past the collar of their uniforms. Even in combat or at an FTX (field training exercise) servicewomen cannot let their hair down. AA explains, "It's hard to juggle what's expected of a woman and what's expected of a soldier; it's often conflicting." Servicewomen are taught what is expected of them in basic training and that training is a deeply engrained schema. I remember feeling embarrassed whenever my hair slipped out of my neat bun in uniform. A schema is like planting a seed in someone's mind. An idea that changes the way they think thereafter learning it. A schema sets up the brain to think a certain way. Butler (1993) explains how schemas created by phallogocentric discourse have given labels and meaning to specific forms (p. 33). Hair needs to be tucked away so servicewomen do not

appear too feminine but their hair cannot be too short because they cannot appear too masculine.

The uniform itself can make some servicewomen feel too manly so some servicewomen feel the need to enhance their feminine features. Being feminine makes women feel like “real women.” There are many derogatory labels for women who do not abide by the femininity rules meant to discredit them as something less than womanhood. Servicewomen I interviewed did not feel highly about themselves when their self-perception was less than ideally feminine. FR, defending her altered appearance in uniform, explains, “I feel like just because you’re around men [it] doesn’t mean you have to act like a man. You can still look presentable and these uniforms don’t do much for you anyways.” She wanted to appear different than the male troops all around her; she wanted to present herself as the feminine presence. Cultural social norms categorize certain appearances as feminine and women are taught that to be a woman means to be feminine. When placed in a masculine or potentially gender invisible environment women are labeled according to gender as opposed to being titled soldier. This is because “playing soldier” is something little boys are taught as the gender norm.

### **Women’s Work**

Gender norms are strictly upheld in military culture. The participant responses demonstrated how whenever possible female soldiers are effectively distinguishing themselves as feminine and are distinguished by U.S. military policy as feminine instead of gender neutral. Silva’s 2008 study on gender in the ROTC found female soldiers have opportunities to break gender roles but are not. They are entering a masculine institution like the military caring a great deal about presenting their femininity as innate. Any

attempt to erase or silence gender in the military simply makes all soldiers more aware of their gender.

AA was a servicewoman in the Army National Guard who was essentially silenced into a gender norm and then ignored. Peers noticed when AA wore non gender conforming civilian clothing. As a transgender woman, AA had a different experience that highlights the importance the military places on gender conformity and its resistance to gender variation. AA says that trading the uniform for civilian clothes did not get her noticed or harassed but says that in civilian clothes, “I lost credibility that the uniform gave me.” Being in uniform de-feminized AA’s appearance making her “recognized” as a male by the military. Servicewomen have to look and do the work of the female gender.

A masculinized institution such as the U.S. military has definite women’s work. LO worked “in admin” doing paperwork and payroll. Administration or “admin” jobs are usually filled by servicewomen, are inside, air-conditioned, with regular hours, and “easy” jobs. AJW worked in the hospital with a lot of other females and noticed, “When I first was in the navy I worked for flight deck fueling department and that was mostly men.” There are women assigned other masculinized jobs in the military but that only means the servicewomen have additional “feminine” tasks. FR functions as the morale booster in her shop and on the flight line describes her male battle buddies as “depressed and angry, just going through the motions.” FR says she frequently sings songs to draw their attention and boost moods. Not only were many women in a caretaker role but AJW explains it as “appealing” for women, as what these women wanted. Interestingly, as a child I always envied those soldiers running around on the flight deck directing jets,



loading munitions, and filling fuel. Women have erroneously been taught that we should and other women do want to be feminine.

The integration of women into all branches of the military and the recent revisions to combat exclusion policies seem to demonstrate the policymakers might actually think women can do everything men can do. Some feminists mark this change as equal opportunity and rights gained for women in the military. “We scarcely know enough about how militaries rely on, and try to control, women’s talents, women’s aspirations, women’s nightmares—and how women with and respond to those maneuvers” (Enloe, 2000, p. xix). Is femininity being transformed in the military as something better or more oppressive to the range of womanhood that is reality? It is true women have always been fighting in wars alongside, behind, and in front of men, however women in the current U.S. military have overwhelmingly been assigned to light duties traditionally known as women’s work involving caring for others, staying clean, cleaning, or cooking. The argument remains that women are simply better suited for different tasks.

Women in the military are confronted with social obstacles that put them at a disadvantage. AA makes an interesting point when she is explaining the disadvantages servicewomen face both physically and mentally. She says women are, “obviously physically starting off at a disadvantage. You can get there but it takes more. You’re also mentally starting off at a disadvantage because boys are basically are taught to be soldiers.” JS, a veteran of the Army who has served in combat, believes, “I can’t do everything a man can do but I have seen other women who can. Some can do it better.” It is erroneously dichotomous to argue women are physically less capable than men. Judith Butler (1993) explains how our society can start to make assumptions about nature when

we give it labels, values, and meanings (Bodies that matter, p. 5). Many women have to try even harder than the males just to get recognition for being capable.

Servicewomen have a small role to fill wherein they have to work hard just to get noticed for doing the job but not too hard or she will be considered less of a woman and lose credibility in that sense. The “ideal” feminine woman soldier would have to be able to drag herself out of combat but probably would not be able to dead-lift and fireman carry an immobile man soldier to safety. In basic training every soldier is required to lift another onto her shoulders and carry the casualty to safety 300 yards away. Many women in today’s military do not fit this ideal, not for lack of trying or because they are incapable, but because the ideal is unrealistic. Many servicewomen could drag a wounded male soldier to safety and probably go back for another. In the heat of a life and death moment, if someone is wounded nearby, regardless of gender and with the proper combat lifesaving training, any servicewoman or man will realistically attempt to save their life by dragging them to safety. But this kind of behavior is perceived as masculine.

Obviously women in the military feel masculine at times because our society defines many of the actions women perform alongside their male battle buddies in the military as masculine. A “good” soldier has been deployed overseas, served active duty, been to combat, has security clearance, or were smart enough to be commissioned but weak, feminine, lazy soldiers have easy “inside” support assignments. Commissioned soldiers can start in ROTC, through an officer program that trains them over several months span, or by already having a degree. Many soldiers admitted feeling masculine when a mission or detail required heaving lifting or other use of physical strength. FR, an airman, claims that her job on the flight line is different from most of the “inside jobs”

most women in the military are assigned. FR goes on to explain, “I feel masculine quite a bit actually. People give me so much crap because I have really large hands and kind of wide shoulders so they say I ‘man handle’ the munitions.” FR’s body type and job requirements make her feel masculine. How do service women balance being a “good” soldier with being a “good” feminine woman?

All women could describe at least one time when they felt masculine because they surpassed standards, were assigned to a specific task considered “man’s work,” or, as AM and AM2 say, they can “hold their own.” Simply standing up for yourself or passing standardized tests will get you labeled masculine as a servicewoman. The masculine label demonstrates to servicewomen that they have gone outside the realm of women’s work. LO feels most masculine during PT tests because she says, “guys are always really impressed with how many pushups I can do.” She adds that people are similarly impressed with how much she can lift. It is not only physical behavior that makes these women soldier feel masculine. LO also mentions her vulgar language as something that makes her feel masculine or like a “tom boy.” Physical height is something that can be perceived as masculine. FR recalls, “I was in the stinkin band flight; I didn’t even play an instrument. They said I was in the band flight because I was tall; I carried a big bass.” FR was assigned to a task she was not proficient at because of her height while many servicewomen are not offered details because of their gender. We see an interesting paradigm when AA answered the question about a time she felt masculine. She shared a story with me about the deployment when her battle buddies considered her a man, albeit a thin, wispy, blond, probably gay man. AA is a transgendered woman who while on deployment in 2009 was still living as a male. This is our conversation:

KG: Can you recall a time when you felt masculine?

AA: When I was in Iraq, I worked out a lot. My whole body got bigger, much bigger, than it ever could have gotten without continuous working out like I did. But it was never mentioned by anyone, which is odd because everything was mentioned and picked apart about everybody by everybody about everything so the idea that it wasn't mentioned meant to me that they were uncomfortable with the idea.

KG: With your masculinity?

AA: Yes by my working out, getting stronger, doing better on PT tests.

KG: Was it not talked about?

AA: It was actively ignored. They had to try to ignore it and not talk about it. My last drill in June or July 2011 we had a PT test down in Faribault and out of the whole unit I think there were 10 or 11 that passed. They were the E8s and above [leadership] and the officers and me and a couple other lower enlisted. And no one said anything except, "god damnit, AA." I still couldn't get a compliment out of them. The entire platoon failed except for me.

This sort of behavioral modification is how heteronormative culture controls any behavior, sexuality, or race other than white heteromale, and this is especially true in the military. Silencing gender variation into conforming to norms is exactly what Rich et al. (2012) argued in that repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell was even more oppressive to the LGBT military community because it forced many into silence. When AA starting looking more buff, read masculine, his battle buddies ignored it, effectively

silencing AA, demonstrating what they would define as a “normal” male body type. AA was living as a male during deployment in 2009 but was not rewarded for his body building because it was seen as normal behavior whereas his feminine civilian attire was viewed as abnormal and therefore he lost credibility as a nonconforming gender.

Silencing “the other” centralizes the norm. All participants stated they did not notice race being an issue in the military.

Race devaluation is evident when the silence surrounding it is examined. One participant identified as a woman of color. However neither she nor any participants claimed to notice women of color in the military being treated or labeled differently because of their race. This is a perfect example of white privilege at work. They did not notice race differences because they did not have to. The soldiers I interviewed were not personally impacted by racism and therefore to them it did not exist. Women are subjected to this silent oppression and often find themselves as the oppressors. Sexual and racial identities fall into a hierarchal ranking in the military. Khalili (2010) explains that race and gender work differently in the military using the example that a white working class female soldier has more power than a black upper class male general (p. 1482). Black men are sexualized in U.S. society and this is also true in the military. The “ideal” woman soldier is neither too masculine nor too feminine, has a specific cheerful but passive personality, has white skin, and is silenced into their assigned women’s work.

### **Gendered Combat**

Gender was effectively silenced and oppressed until recently by combat exclusion. Women were serving in combat zones before the recent policy amendment to “allow” women into the more traditionally male “combat” positions. Many stereotypes

persist about the threat of women in combat. RA is one woman soldier who does not think women should be allowed to hold certain jobs in the military. Those against integration of the U.S. military claim women are a distraction and a liability. Shockingly and overwhelmingly, the argument I heard most against women in combat was their cleanliness as a factor. Women acknowledge there is a change happening as generations evolve socially to be more comfortable with women's expanding roles. Gender policing, the social construction of what women should be, offers arguments against women in combat.

Stereotypes would have that women are emotional and morally superior to men as a group. Several participants acknowledged being the one to give out relationship advice to battle buddies. Battle buddy is the term used to describe peers in the military. The servicewomen functioned as a sort of peer counselor. Another moral argument against women on the battlefield is that when women are injured, men will not know how to react. LE, for example, is okay with an all-female military and thinks that a lot of women could even do the tasks better than men. LE has deployed three times on convoy operations and thinks having a coed military is not so much a distraction as an instinctual liability. Her argument surrounding instincts focuses on assessing casualties on the battlefield. She thinks men have innate instincts that will make them want to rescue a damsel in distress. This makes me wonder, where are these instincts during the overwhelming occurrences of sexual assault by men against women in the military? LE argues men become "ineffective" when confronted with a wounded female soldier and are unable to justly assess multiple casualties when one is a woman. Women, according to common assumptions, somehow elicit unwanted emotions from men at inappropriate

times, like in combat. Similarly, women supposedly have a wider spectrum of emotions than men, which somehow makes them weaker psychologically and emotionally. Those that argue war is no place for a woman claim women cannot handle it. Servicewomen have heard this rhetoric so often they believe it. And yet the reality is that servicewomen can do it.

Women served in combat previous to policy changes saying they could. The change to the combat exclusion policy has not sufficiently impacted the women I interviewed for them to have definitive opinions about it but nine of the women I interviewed had served in combat zones and shared their gendered experiences with me. While on the “front lines” on a forward operating base, LE, being the only female, slept in a tent with two males. These sleeping arrangements were only acceptable because one of them was a medical doctor. LE says that on missions off base, “the [gender] lines just get really blurred.” Units operating on the front lines, in real world, life or death situations are more focused on the task at hand than any sort of social cohesion and task cohesion is the foundation of camaraderie (McSally, 2011). On convoys, JS slept in the truck or on the ground next to her male comrades. Convoy missions involve as little as three vehicles following one another to a predetermined destination usually through dangerous territory. LO thinks gender is less eminent the more presence women have in a unit. She recalled being attached to a chemical unit with a more balanced gender ratio and being treated “like everyone else.” Attached to an infantry unit, LO was part of a very small population of women and describes, “I would obviously be treated differently. I would be treated like a girl.” While out on convoys, JS describes how she and a couple men soldiers would assist each other with hygiene. She says her male battle buddies “put

up a tent with our shelter halves so I could go back there and wash with a couple bottles of water. They would guard to make sure no one went back there and then I would stand guard for them. We were very careful about nudity.” These responses demonstrate how some women believe gender is less highlighted when more women are present or when the mission is overbearing. A common perspective was that women and men in the service should have to qualify for the position.

Servicewomen interviewed think soldiers should have to qualify for their assigned MOS instead of focusing on gender. McSally (2011) explains how the “business model” might strengthen the U.S. military arguing that being gender-selective in the military restricts and weakens the military as a whole, limiting the potential of each position (p. 151). BJ said, “They should only take the best of the best women for combat jobs. I think they shouldn’t base it off their ASVAB [the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery that measures high school students’ abilities using a multiple choice method]. Make sure they are capable of doing combat jobs. Not all women are badass.” She agreed they should have to qualify for the position. LO believes, “everything in the army is voluntary. You voluntarily join. You voluntarily choose your job. I think if you volunteer to be in the infantry, why not?” But does this kind of thinking really help women? “Now that they are willing to accept the fact that a woman can have the same training that the men have,” JS predicts, “it is going to make for a much better qualified, stronger, and smarter army than we have right now.” Clearly women are already participating to the fullest extent in every aspect of the military and share the opinion that they are fully capable of combat duties. Military leadership still holds a patriarchal viewpoint about servicewomen’s capabilities.



Stereotypes persist in the minds of those who believe women are incapable of certain tasks due to gender. One of FR's supervisors assumed she was incompetent at everything because of her gender. She recalls her supervisor asking her one day, "FR, how does it feel that everyone thinks you don't know what you're doing, I don't mean just in the military I mean in life in general?" FR explained, "He would always ask if I needed someone to come out and help. He admitted it wasn't just about work; he assumed I didn't know how to do anything." FR's male leadership assumes she is incompetent for no other reason than the fact that she is a woman. When asked if she was treated differently than her male battle buddies, AM said yes she is excluded from specific tasks because "they [male leadership] don't think a female can handle it so they never put a female in for the mission." AM2 states, "They picked all men to do these missions. Many of the women were upset and felt the discriminate[d] but the women we have here are not as strong nor as large and it is good to send those who are more intimidating to do these missions." AA covers the stereotypes associated with being a woman in the military when she explains, "girls are expected to just not want to get dirty...be proficient at paperwork...be a counselor." These stereotypes persist because military culture perpetuates gender norms. Men are supposed to like lifting heavy things. Ideologies such as these only serve to limit the potential of individual women and similarly the U.S. military.

Heteromascularity erroneously assumes that servicewomen are incompetent and incapable. When I asked participants if it is hard to be a woman in the military, an overwhelming majority answered yes because they felt they constantly had to "prove" themselves. I found these results shocking because servicewomen go through the same

training that the males do. Why, when they arrive at their duty stations, do women have to “retake the test” and prove they can hang with the guys? AM stated, “I feel that you do have to prove yourself to the males that you can do what they can. I do think that it is definitely harder to be a woman in the military compared to men.” AA also claims, “I had to work extra hard to prove myself.” BJ describes why women have to prove themselves, “We get looked at differently; if we do something wrong it’s more noticeable. If a female does something wrong, they [the males] expect it from us.” Assumptions about gender create limitations in the amount of progress made by government institutions like the military.

Every experience for servicewomen is gendered. Being the new face in a company is especially challenging if your face is feminine. LE confirms, “If you’re new you have to prove yourself.” LO recalls being new and then being put in charge of an entire platoon. Instead of required monthly counseling and leadership training on how to successfully command troops, her command said and did nothing until finally she received a negative NCOER, the yearly status report on a soldier’s performance. Although it is good that she was in a leadership position, LO could have learned more from that experience had she been given the right guidance. Gender creates a challenge that servicewomen must overcome.

FR explains that being a woman in the military is “challenging” but with determination to “stay focused on your job and what you’re there for, it’s definitely rewarding.” FR advises that to survive as a woman it is essential that women, “Don’t take handouts. You’ve got to prove yourself unfortunately. That’s just the way it is.” Gendering illuminates masculinity as superior and anything other as inferior. However,

women remain optimistic about acceptance into the fraternity that is enlisted military life even while combating stereotypes that women have it easier than men in the military.

It is widely believed by military men and women that servicewomen use their gender to gain opportunities and make life easier for themselves in the military. All the servicewomen I interviewed knew a story about someone who slept with someone to get something. This stereotype is obvious when the responses of these participants are analyzed using a feminist lens. If these women soldiers felt so adamantly about defending their work ethic it is because they have been criticized before. FR defends her work ethics, "I won't sit there and let everyone think I get things handed to me. I make sure I bust my butt out there and earn what I get and people do notice." LO thinks is harder to be a woman in the military the higher ranking a woman is. She explains, "As you go up in the ranks I think it's harder because people don't necessarily see you as an authoritative figure. And I don't know if that's for anybody, I know that's for me. People don't see me as an authority figure regardless of rank." LO explains how she was in a platoon of all women; there was only one man. When I inquired as to why, she said everyone in that platoon worked in an office and the one maintenance person was the male. Here are examples of two women with good work ethics just trying to do their job in the military.

I am also defensive as a woman veteran amount my job and what was required of me during my military service. Just recently a male airman accused me of probably never having to do anything during my time in grade, that is, my achieved rank, and added a sideward glance and a wink at the end of the sentence. He meant that I used my looks to get out of the "heavy lifting." I immediately chastised him and defended my honor as a

hard working enlisted leader in my unit. My defensiveness is evidence of repeated assumptions about my gender awareness in the service. He only made those assumptions about me because of my gender expression.

Even when women do their equal share of work, they are still gendered. Our standards were a lot higher than the males because every day we had to prove ourselves. JS remembered working around men in the Army and recalls some of the sexist discourse, “They’d say, ‘oh women are not supposed to be able to be in the army, they shouldn’t be doing this job.’ The minute I made a mistake, it gave them miles to say ‘she’s incompetent, she’s not a good soldier, let’s send her home.’” Again, here is this idea of a “good” soldier somehow being vastly different than a “good” woman. Js was assumed to be incapable because she was a servicewoman. The women I interviewed were very aware of their opportunities and what was withheld from them due to gender.

FR explains that even if you’re doing the same amount of work as the next airman you’re going to get noticed just because of your gender and therefore would argue that women have more opportunities than men. Getting noticed can help you get awards, promotions, specialized training, and special treatment. Another marine, LE, explained it another way saying women have access to more opportunities in the military simply because there is less competition. Women not only compete with other women but a woman is more likely to be recognized for her hard work because of her gender. Women fight hard to gain respect at work however I would suggest women end the silence surrounding their required femininity and fight hard to gain respect for being the soldiers they are. Estrich (2000) wrote about the pressure women are under to conform to male standards. She encourages women to demand their rights, speak out, and be proud of

what they are doing with their bodies. Women cannot be okay with male standards of femininity; we have to make our own.

Are servicewomen accepting their inferior status or are these women broadening the scope of what constitutes feminine? Servicewomen have the unique opportunity to break down gender norms because they are fully immersed in masculine culture. Did these women know what they were getting themselves into when they joined the most masculine of proving grounds in U.S. culture? When you have signed the contract it is too late to go back but, luckily, it is possible to move forward and make change. AA wants other women to know they “should not be afraid to break stereotypes” and says, “Volunteer to move things.” She is referring to the idea that men get chosen for mission because supposedly they are physically stronger and like doing the heavy lifting. Men are supposed to be okay with women “liking” to stay clean, passive, and get by as burdens for their male battle buddies but that mentality is unfair to men *and* women. JS thinks, “In the military the whole gender thing needs to go out the window.” LO thinks if a woman can prove she can do the job, let her do it. Women gain respect from their peers by accepting challenges and proving their competency but unfortunately also by having their sexual activity regulated.

### **The Sexual Double Standard and Fraternization**

According to military policy, when it comes to gender, sexuality, and service, women are wrong. An argument against women in the military is since there are so few women, and since servicemen go for months without sexual contact, men could become out of control. The claim is that women soldiers are a distraction that men are unable to

avoid and hinder the mission because men are unable to resist emotional and sexual urges.

Sexual harassment is commonplace in the military with a shocking twenty percent of military veterans have been subject to sexual trauma (Veterans Affairs Department). Military women in combat zones are physically at risk of assault by someone on their own team. When a man sleeps with a woman peers reward his behavior but when a woman does the same she is at fault even if she was the victim of assault. The argument is that men will be unable to control their sexual urges during long stints of celibacy in combat if females are present. LE talked about the phases of initiation women endure every time they get to a new unit. She said new male marines have a similar initiation except that for a woman “everyone is trying to fuck you.” Boys are taught young that their sexuality is beyond their control and being pushy is manly. The attention women receive is usually unwanted, even if they are wearing perfume, jewelry, or two bras. This heteronormativity oppresses servicewomen by controlling women’s movements, actions, and behaviors.

Servicewomen occasionally modify their own behavior to avoid unwanted advances in the military. LO says, “On deployment I stopped going to lunch because of the way that I was looked at when I was walking down the food line. I got sick of being looked at like I was on the menu.” She goes on to say she avoided the chow hall for two to three weeks until eventually she got used to the harassment because it was unavoidable and happened everywhere, not just in the chow hall. LO adds that “on deployment people get crazy” and “men are animals.” This assumes U.S. servicemen, our national heroes, can “lose control” and become “animals” with no morals, capable of extreme violence for

the satiation of their sexual urges. U.S. society has taught the masses that men always want sex and women always resist sex, and that it is okay. The reality is that respectable human animals like men do have the capacity to control sexual urges, sexual urges that women have too.

Women in the military are actively engaged in consensual sexual activity. Nine of the servicewomen interviewed in this study were sexually active at some point during their service. Two women said they were never sexually active and one passed this question. Military fraternization is prohibited between subordinates and leaders but the exact definition of what actions specifically qualify as fraternizing is contested among the participants. Recruits are trained not to make eye contact because it could be perceived inappropriately. AA specifically defines fraternization as “Any personal interaction that could be construed as taking away from the readiness of the mission.” This seems simple enough to understand. Dating someone in your chain of command could get complicated after a breakup. Public displays of affection are probably not a good idea either. LO agrees fraternization is hard to define but when I asked if she has fraternized, she says, “In all of the years I’ve been in, absolutely. I think everybody does, and I don’t think it’s a problem until it’s with your leadership or your leadership with enlisted, their subordinates.” Subordinates are those people lower ranking and enlisted and the officers are the leadership responsible for their designated unit of subordinates. But what if a soldier is dating someone outside of their assigned unit and that person gets transferred into their unit? What about two people of equal rank dating but then one person gets promoted?

Fraternization is hard to define and hard to avoid. When asked what they thought of fraternization in a military setting, women stated they did not have a problem with it as long as it did not interfere with their job or mission. Many women did fraternize according to military policy and their own definitions. Women constitute 15% of the military; nine of the twelve servicewomen in my sample had fraternized according to their own definitions while I would argue all fraternized according to the broad military definition. Participants did not feel as though their fraternization had a negative impact on their work environment.

Many women reported feeling neutral or okay with current military regulations regarding fraternization in their branches. All participants agreed that fraternization is okay unless it affects your career or work environment. Several said they did not fraternize but when I asked how many sexual partners they had or if they dated, they answered that they had in fact fraternized, even after I asked them to define it in their own way to me. FR defines fraternization as “when two people in the same shop, with one higher ranking than the other, are getting together or dating.” My next question was, “did you fraternize?” FR explained, “not with like a boss or anything like that. I dated someone that was higher ranking than me. We started out in the same shops. I wouldn’t consider that fraternizing.” This is an example of a direct contradiction in a participant’s response in order to fit into her gender role of a sexually passive feminine soldier. AJW was involved in a physical and emotional relationship with her leading petty officer who was a woman in the Navy. Most women were okay with the fraternization they knew about but AM recalled some favoritism. Most people are not okay with some getting special treatment.



On deployment, there was a lower enlisted admin servicewoman sleeping with our major who was married. The major was in charge of our company and had the power to give out duties and special privileges, which he usually gave to the specialist he was seeing. Several of us knew about the affair and tried to tell our female captain about the inappropriateness of an interoffice relationship. Nothing came of our tattling. JS's argument against the regulation of fraternization is, "It's not world war one; it's not a big deal to be on birth control. A lot of the relationships [on deployment] were not inappropriate. They were just two people that needed each other and a lot of times I think that's how people got through the deployment." When asked if she thought fraternization should be regulated like it is, AJW said she knew a male officer on deployment who committed suicide because he was in a relationship with an enlisted woman and was going to lose his rank and pay. AJW defended their actions, "Love is love and sometimes you can't change who you fall in love with." Maybe military policies regarding fraternization needed to be tweaked to better reflect the reality of our soldiers.

Even when women were okay with the idea of fraternization and had indeed fraternized themselves, the participants insisted on further regulating other women's sexuality by promoting discretion. LE shared the unwritten code: "pick a dick and stick with it." She goes on to add that fraternization is best used with "discretion." BJ warned women who would join the military, "you shouldn't come to the military to find a husband; a lot of women here do that." Relationships and sexual activity are regulated by gender expectations in the military. BJ believes people have "crazy" behavior trying to fraternize but that "minor" fraternization is not a problem. She describes the sexual activity of women soldiers as a spectrum with most women falling on either extreme:

“you’re either a hoe or you’re just talking to the guy.” This supports my theory that women are placed into a binary in the military of either being a slut or a sister-soldier. When asked what she thought about how fraternization is currently regulated in the military, she shockingly explained, “these days they’re really strict about it because girls go out and get raped.” Gender norms are perpetuated to the point that some servicewomen are actually blaming the victim of a rape crime. This is a clear example of victim blaming and how gender norms are upheld in the military. I have a hard time believing servicewomen actually fall into two categories of sexual activity and tend to believe that this is a double standard created by heteromascularity to control women’s sexuality.

These servicewomen’s experiences with fraternization serve to highlight the double standard women face in the military. AA concludes, “You have to set a good example of what you want to see in others otherwise you’re just perpetuating these stereotypes.” Women do not want to see other women exploring outside their gender role, meaning women are just as guilty as men in allowing and perpetuating a standard for how each gender is supposed to behave. LE said fraternization is not allowed and said she never had any sexual partners during her deployments. Does this make her a “good” soldier *and* a “good” woman? Women are contained and limited by their gender. Sexuality becomes something to regulate and conceal in order to be labeled a “good” servicewoman.

The two most common labels participants used or heard revolved around women’s sexuality and were in reference to have “too much” sex or having the “wrong kind” of sex. The use of a derogatory label lets women know when they are outside their

gender bounds. The “right” kind of sex is anything heterosexual in which a man penetrates a passive woman. Men actively pursue sex and women are the recipients. Labeling women soldiers bitch, slut, or lesbian lets them know exactly how they are not conforming to gender roles. RA, a marine, recalls, “When you go to boot camp your drill instructors tell you that once you go into the fleet you’ll either be a bitch, a slut, or a lesbian” A negative label consequently devalues the person labeled. Often promiscuous women in the military are considered only good at having sex, not being soldiers. AJW remembered women who were sexually active labeled “sluts” but also noted that fellow soldiers had “good gaydar.” People are able to guess at other people’s sexual orientation because of gender policing (Kimmel, 2008). Gender policing is society’s way of labeling, name-calling, or stereotyping others so they know exactly what they are doing wrong for their gender. What attributes are stereotypical to gay men and what attributes does a straight man have to portray in order to not be considered gay? Gender norms teach boys that men disrespect women and have uncontrollable sexual urges. Sexually active and proud women are labeled as “whores” and any woman who has sex is pressured to remain silent.

Woman soldiers are expected to remain silent about their sexuality. Common labels revolve around sexual activity or emotional expression. Women who have sex are sluts. Women who do not smile enough are bitches. This silence is oppressive in that it forces grown women to behave as if they are not having sex, are uninterested or guarded from sexual activity. If women stray from the norm they are looked down on and devalued as soldiers. It would be appropriate to conclude here that women who are public and unashamed of their sexual activity are labeled “ho.” Women with this label are not

respected by males and are therefore devalued by males and females alike. BJ later advices, “people that are ‘easy’ get labeled.” Basically, liking sex is bad. LO was labeled a “flirt” because she had male friends that she spent time with and says, “It doesn’t matter what you do, they still label no matter what, and ‘oh you’re pretty, you must be a whore.’” One woman drill sergeant told LO not to “use her looks to get ahead” when she pulled LO and another female battle buddy aside one day and added, “Do the right thing.” The woman drill sergeant was assuming two pretty women in the military would try to use their physical appearance to gain acceptance and promotion through their military careers.

I was invited to a specially guarded, secret cafeteria on base by a major who wanted everyone to call him “Coach” as opposed to military procedure that would have enlisted personnel call him “sir.” Coach made friends with our female captain and asked her to bring other females with her to a Friday night dinner at the engineer chow hall. It was a small chow hall, only accommodating 20-25 people, and on Fridays they served grilled steak and lobster. They also had a special “morale” building with couches, a pool table, gaming consoles, and a huge television. I gained access to Friday night feasts and a relaxing atmosphere for no reason other than because I was a woman. I am positive my battle buddies hated me for these privileges.

All branches of the military prohibit “relationships” between enlisted personnel and officers or those who would otherwise be in charge of subordinates (Uniform Code of Military Justice/Manual For Courts-martial). Relationships are more difficult to define here because they are broadly recognized as partnerships, exchanging or loaning of money, or any sexual act (Uniform Code for Military Justice). Some interviewees claim

they did not fraternize when they had and the number one bit of advice they would tell other women in the military is to keep their fraternization discrete. AW stated she did not fraternize but did sleep with 15 partners. This discretion is ultimately engendering because silence around what is reality represses the actual experiences of women in the military. Bay-Cheng (2007) found that women who conform to gender norms are repressed sexually by the double standard revolving around promiscuity. Women are categorized into a “virgin-whore” dichotomy wherein the virginal women are competent, passive, and valued. Women labeled whore are perceived to be incompetent, untrustworthy, and devalued. Society devalues women who proudly use their sexuality. What does a woman’s sexuality say about her and what does she say about her sexuality?

### **Finding the Perfect Balance, Regulating Gender Norms**

Respected servicewomen had to keep to themselves so as not to draw attention to their gender. BJ explains, “Girls that keep their lives private are respected by the males.” Many of the women I interviewed talked about making the right decision, respecting yourself and not being easy in regards to their sexual activity. These women were advising others to play by the rules. There is an obvious double standard for sexual activity. Kimmel (2008) explains “hooking up” often is about proving manhood to other men (p. 192). My interviewees confirmed the opposite of this is true, that not hooking up is about proving womanhood to other men. Women are meant to be passive, follow men’s lead, and respond to men’s desires. This is what women have been taught in American society since before they were even born. Straying from the gender norm will draw unwanted attention. The “other” is bad.

While some women are actively adhering to traditional ideologies surrounding femininity others are attempting to ungender themselves by altering their physical appearance. Servicewomen with short hair are considered less feminine according to AM. When asked why women with short hair were treated differently, AA says it is because long hair is, “kind of like the classic symbol of femininity.” Servicewomen have an opportunity to break certain social gender norms and are doing just that. AA speaks truth to power when she acknowledges the correlation between hair length and femininity (read: girlhood versus womanhood). She explains, “it [long hair] can’t be easily taken off like a hat. It’s kind of a strong statement. To chop all your hair off is a commitment so you wouldn’t do it unless you had a good reason.” Women will sometimes cut their hair for the military to throw off femininity and unwanted male advances, thinking hair care would be easier, or make a statement. Although the intent is true, the alteration of appearance to modify another’s behavior is not empowering or liberating. Women with short hair were assumed to be lesbians, tougher, or promiscuous. AA sarcastically enlightens, “oh obviously, obviously they were lesbians.” Lesbian-baiting and slut-shaming are means men use to control women’s behavior letting military women know what men are expecting from their gendered battle buddies. Women regulate other women’s behavior just as adamantly as men do.

Women police the behavior of other women to follow gender norms. This regulating of gender to match certain cultural norms is known as gender policing. Participants were asked what they would tell other women in the military and their advice was quite regulatory. Everyone interviewed wanted women to respect themselves but what exactly does that mean? The explicit advice these women would give other women

is to “have some respect” and “don’t be a whore.” Two participants used the word “ho” to describe a woman who is sexually active. Women must be desexualized and degendered in order for men, and therefore other women, to respect them. Implicitly this vocalization about the sexual behaviors of some human beings is an oppressive white religiously organized male perspective that serves to meet male desires. Marilyn Frye (1992) coined this mainstream heteromasculinist world they have created as the “Patriarchal Universe of Discourse (PUD)” (p. 7).

Whether the soldiers are having sex or not is beside the point that sexual activity is to remain discrete if the servicewomen are to be regarded as respectable. Every woman I interviewed agreed there are certain stigmas that threaten hard working military women. Men and women alike devalue women openly sexually active by gossiping and labeling. LO would give this advice to other women who would join the military: “Don’t be a whore. Stand your ground. Don’t stoop to that level that they think you’re going to. Just don’t do it. You have a job to do, do it, and sleeping around with all the guys is not that job. That’s not it. So just be proud of who you are and don’t disrespect yourself by doing that.” Again I ask, can’t hoes be good soldiers? The women I interviewed wanted to tell other women to respect themselves first and maintain their own identities. This is a male-centered approach that objectifies women and it should be abandoned for a woman-centered approach and a reevaluation on what we currently think we know about sexuality. Why do women care who other women sleep with? Why are there levels of respect that have to be earned by servicewomen?

Gaining respect is no easy task for military women. A woman marine has to conquer phases to gain respect. LE explains how the “sister phase” cannot happen right

away. The first phase involves the new woman marine to prove she is not a “typical” girl. Remember, too much femininity is not good. The next phase is when she is bombarded with sexual harassment and advances. This behavior demonstrates how males are also trained how to act by our society. If she has sex, she does not gain respect. Remember, too much masculinity (enjoying sex) is not good. Then she has to be emotionally available to every male she works with. This emotional labor is part of her act as a “good” feminine servicewoman.

Noah (2013) made a report in the online journal *New Republic* that “emotional labor served identifiable emotional needs” of the “emotional economy” by “economy’s bottommost rung” (p. 2-3). In instances of sandwich maker, flight attendant, or feminine woman soldier, the emotional support and empathy are benefiting a class based marketplace wherein the consumer often is affluent if not well-off. As I discussed above, recruiters often drive through trailer parks or low-income neighborhoods trolling for their next enlistment because upper-class seventeen year olds who are thinking about a career in the military are probably going to West Point Academy and not Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri where I and many other working or lower class recruits end up. A common sales pitch recruiters is free money for a college education and good medical benefits. What this means is that the majority of our military is made up of working class people. Working class women in the military are emotional laborers. In a sandwich shop that means the sandwich artist is being nice to you to get a tip and because the “proper emotional responses are mandatory” (Resnikoff, 2013). In the military, it means woman soldiers become the femininity dumping ground where male soldiers bring their counseling because they assume the females are emotional laborers.



Eventually a close camaraderie may be obtained with the males they work closely with, and, for many women, it is the ultimate goal and proof of respect. This ultimate respect is when a servicewoman is treated like a little sister. Sjoberg (2007) illustrates how the “ideal” feminine woman soldier has to walk a fine line balancing masculinity and femininity. Ten out of twelve servicewomen described having a family-like relationship with their peers. The final and anticipated phase is when they finally accept you as someone like “a little sister,” according to LE. Ultimately, the female soldier must not be perceived as a threat to military heteromascularity. If the servicewoman passes all of these tests she can rise to the level of respectable soldier. If she is too masculine or too feminine she is labeled and devalued.

## Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates that women are fully capable of anything the military has to offer. Women are taught from a young age that they need to be prissy, clean, indoors, physically flaccid or soft, and this makes men feel good. Men benefit from women's weakness because it makes men feel needed and manly. Women are, from male's perspective, thought of as incapable and incompetent. A little girl who plays outside is called a "tomboy" and regarded as someone outside the "regular" behavior of a little girl. Both men's and women's behaviors are limited by what society deems appropriate for grown males and females but this restriction only acts to oppress women whereas its purpose is to maintain white men's superiority (Frye, 1983).

Maintaining a dichotomy maintains the oppression. By separating women, as a group, from men, as a definitively separate group, men are able to oppress women. Women do not get paid as much and do not have equal access to jobs and promotions that men have (Frye, 1983). Men who behave protectively and women who take pleasure in being protected not as a comrade but exclusively because of gender have established and maintain that women are not as competent, skilled, or proficient as men and therefore need men for survival and existence (Frye, 1983). The jobs women are allowed to work in, the extra measures of protection, the separate well-lit living areas, sexual harassment in the chow halls, and the explicit labeling and judgment of women's sexual and social behavior are all examples of the systems of oppression upheld in the U.S. military.

Conducting interviews with other servicewomen has helped me understand the experiences of other women and appreciate the struggles with gender we all face. My hope is that my participants, soldier-scholars, and other servicewomen and men might

read my research or other academic work like mine to educate themselves about the oppressive nature of socially constructed gender norms. Finding common themes that might be true in their own lives and are similar to the experiences I have analyzed here could help to culturally enlighten readers and hopefully promote change.

Learning about the gendered experiences of servicewomen and analyzing what they have shared with me using a feminist lens has been pivotal for self-reflection of my own military gendered experiences. My goal was to make participants aware of their unique intersectionality and see themselves as agents of history. What this research did was help me reflect on memories I had suppressed and enable me to understand that my experiences were gendered and help me see that I have contributed to this massive system of oppression. If I could change the past, I would turn down surf and turf Fridays because I now know that my presence at these dinners was for the benefit of the high ranking male officers. With self-reflection comes more unanswered questions that can only be answered with more research.

The more I learn the less I know. This research left me with many unanswered questions partly due to my own naiveté with conducting research. I did not ask as much demographic information as I should have to obtain some specific data which would have been helpful. Upon reading the analysis, I thought of many more questions I should have asked and other demographic information I should have obtained. Many questions arise from what was not said because of what was not asked. Socioeconomic status became a focal point for why women join the military, how they were raised to think about gender, and how they are treated as enlisted. Questions I wish I had asked include: How old were these participants? What were their ranks? Were they all enlisted or were some

commissioned? What part of the country did they originate? Were they raised in military families or liberal families?

Data demonstrates that the United States military is gendered and sexualized but it is not fully conclusive and leaves plenty of space for future research. Future research could focus on the definition and amount of fraternization by men. I would be interested to find how often pornographic material is viewed during active duty or deployment and if it is used for solely sexual purposes, aggression diffuser, or stress reliever. Further, I would like to know what women and men in the U.S. military think about the repeal of the combat exclusion policy, how this affects gender and daily life, and if it is a step toward equality for servicewomen. I would be interested in conducting more interviews with more servicewomen and men to expand on this research.

The questions I asked were intentionally ordered to elicit specific responses from participants. The ordering of my questions was intended to encourage interviewees to explain themselves and to answer candidly and honestly. I intentionally asked questions about perfume and hair after I asked if they had ever changed their appearance to appear more appealing. For example, AM2 said she uses a sock in her hair because she likes how it looks but later answered the question about changing or adding to her hair to make it look more appealing in the negative. There are some contradictions in the responses and I asked similar questions in different ways to try to tease real experiences and perspectives out from women who are militarized and work in “a man’s world.” I tried to start with light, easy to answer questions leaving the more complex questions for later in the interview.

The final question in my interview, besides do you have any questions for me, was *Do you identify as a feminist?* AA offered a perspective when asked if she was a feminist. She explains, “I find the further I get into female territory, the more I begin seeing things like male privilege and the female stereotypes and roles, things that are expected and requirements [of being a woman].” Few I interviewed actually knew what a feminist is. I defined feminism to FR as, “the idea that men and women should be equal and that in the current state of things, women are oppressed because of their gender.” FR confirmed she does identify as feminist after I clarified the definition and other women would also state they were in fact feminists after I gave them the previous definition. AW and AA both immediately said, “Yes,” they are feminists but followed up with stating neither is “crazy” enough to “burn bras” and “hate men.” People know what a misogynist is without doubting the definition they have just googled. Why is feminist such a wishy-washy term for people to accept?

Is it possible for the military to be an equal arena for women and men? This question might be impossible to answer because we have yet to see an arena where equality truly exists. The military is not a vacuum, although it is a subculture in its own right, and U.S. mainstream culture undoubtedly influences policies and opinions in the U.S. military. Creating a military that is representative of the general population would be the first step toward making this institution equal for women and men. De-emphasizing gender by changing appearance policies, putting women in leadership positions, and making individual job requirements that are not based on gender will also help break the glass ceiling of the military. Of course, people’s ideologies about gender need to be completely deconstructed for any of these changes to have any real affect.

By smiling and remaining cheerful about their current situation, women in the military are quietly, knowingly, and docilely conforming to men's needs and desires. Women have the urge to be pretty but who defines what is pretty? LO says she wore makeup and even got her eyeliner tattooed on because she felt the uniform did not make her look pretty and some days "a girl just wants to look pretty." We're told to smile and look cheerful or we're considered a bitch. In basic training, soldiers are taught smiling means flirting, flirting means fraternizing, and fraternization means punishment. Men desire women to be content with their subordinate status so they can continue ignoring women's reality, which in the military especially is shockingly violent (Frye, 1983). The U.S. military is essentially "hiding" its female soldiers in plain sight by coercing servicewomen into believing notions of how a female soldier should look and behave. This creates an "ideal female soldier" and many women aspire to be good enough: not too feminine and not too masculine in the military uniform and as a soldier. Defining women creates a barrier that causes restrictions in mobility for women. By grouping women into a subordinate status and telling them they cannot load artillery or that their deaths would be more painful than a man's death, limits the full potential of each individual woman and benefits men who in turn have unrestricted access to better jobs, better pay, greater degrees of respect, importance, and relevance (Frye, 1983). It also lets men off the hook.

Fraternization is not a problem among soldiers who are peers but becomes a problem for peers when the relationship is between two soldiers of unequal ranks working in the same place. The power balance causes unfair treatment of most subordinates while one or a few get special privileges. This power dynamic creates a

ripple effect and negatively impacts people's perspectives of servicewomen's motives, competency, and ethics. I am not talking about coercion, sexual harassment, or assault and I am not victim-blaming. Fraternization between superior officers and lower-enlisted servicewomen creates tension among women and creates a slew of problems in the workplace. Servicewomen should be aware of this power imbalance and know where their agency lies.

Do not assume that men get out of control when deprived of sex while on deployment and that a lone woman in the midst is likely to be assaulted. When we have the take this perspective, we are viewing all men as potential rapists and all women as vulnerable and victims. Men are expected to be emotionless and war-like; women are expected to be emotional and weak. This is why prevailing stereotypes exist that women are unfit for war and that the nation would be up in arms if women were on the front lines. Women are sensitive and in need of protection according to the logic of our society, even though women's sphere tends to encircle basically every aspect of reality and therefore all the grimy, dirty, hard to handle situations of life.

Women's equality is limited by cultural gender norms that continue to reinforce existing ideologies. I think women in the military are like any other heterogeneous "group" on the planet in that they are behaving selfishly and proactively in their own survival, in sophisticated and purposeful ways to insure their piece of the pie. However, women are just as much at fault in limiting their forward potential in society, general welfare, status, rights, because women in the military have participated in their subjection by maintaining or at least participating in gender roles and differentiation. This is a reflection of U.S. society as a whole. Our armed forces have the potential to demonstrate

how a community can function better, at a higher potential, if it were more representative of the society as a whole (McSally, 2011; Silva, 2008).



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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

What branch of the military were you in? When did you join and why? How long was/is your service?

What do women think about women serving in the military?

Did women soldiers have special rules because they are women? If so, can you give me an example of one such policy?

Did you notice women of color being treated or labeled for different reasons or differently? Please tell me about one of those experiences.

Is it hard to be a woman in the military? Please explain.

Does being a woman help you achieve opportunities in the military? Please explain.

Does being a woman make being in the military easier or harder? Please explain.

About how many other women did you see or talk to on a daily basis?

Did you ever hear about another soldier or yourself being labeled a certain way? What were they called and why do you think they got this “nickname”?

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How would you define fraternization?

Did you fraternize? Can you tell me about that/those experience(s)? Do you feel positively or negatively about it?

Please describe your sexual orientation.

Did other soldiers assume you couldn't or didn't want to do a task because of your gender?

Did fellow soldiers treat you differently in civilian clothes? In PT clothes? If so, how?

Why do you think this was?

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Did your recruiter give you any advice about how to act? If so, what kind of advice?

What was said? Was your recruiter's advice successful?

Have you ever tried to alter your appearance from regulation uniform? Example, wearing a regular bra versus a sports bra or no bra. Please explain.

Were females with short hair treated differently than females with long hair (in a bun or ponytail)?

Were you ever told to smile more or asked why you looked down or mad or upset?

Did you ever go to MWR events, dances, sports events, games, or other activities outside of duty? What did you do? Did you feel accepted?

Did you wear a ring so people would think you weren't single?

Do you feel like you were treated differently than your male battle buddies? If so, how?

Were/Are you close with the people you work with (were in the service with)?

Do you feel like you are equal to male soldiers? Do you have the same opportunities?

Did you feel like you were being protected by male soldiers you knew?

What were the sleeping arrangements like during active duty? Were males and females separated on different floors or by dorm room?

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Did anyone in charge of you or higher ranking ever tell you to change your appearance either because you looked too masculine or feminine? (example, I know one girl was told her hair was too short)

Describe a time when you felt masculine. What were you doing? How did people react?

Were you allowed to wear makeup? Did you?

Did you wear perfume or jewelry? Did you ever put a sock in your hair?

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What was your job title? What did you do on a daily basis?

How would you describe what it's like to be a woman in the service?

Do you identify as a woman of color? What was it like to be a woman of color in the military?

What were you taught about what it means to be a girl? (in life generally, not just the military)

Do you remember the first time you put on the uniform? Describe this experience please.

What would you want other women to know about how to survive as a woman in the military?

Did you feel safe at night on a military base?

Were you attached to an infantry or combat unit?

Describe a time when you felt feminine in the military. What were you doing? How did people react?

Did you change your hair or add to it to make it look more appealing?

Were you single, dating, married, polysexual, or did your relationship status change during active duty?

How many sexual partners did you have during active duty?

What did you think about the fraternization you knew about?

Do you think fraternization should be regulated like it is?

Describe the first time your family saw you in your uniform.

Do you identify as feminist?

## **Appendix B: Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study**

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Gender in the Military

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kristal Gray. The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of women in the U.S. military and to understand what empowered these women during a period when they are underrepresented as a gender: how women felt about being a female in the military and how they perceived and expressed their gender and sexual identities. Your participation will involve honestly telling the investigator about your experiences. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded.

#### Risks and discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this research. Some of the questions may cause discomfort or embarrassment. You are not required to answer any question.

#### Potential benefits

There are no direct benefits to you.

#### Protection of confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be confidential, that is, only the principal and co-investigator will be aware of your identity. Any presented or published results of the study will not include personally identifiable information.

#### Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

#### Contact information



If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Kristal Gray at (507) 351-2002 and/or [Kristal.gray@mnsu.edu](mailto:Kristal.gray@mnsu.edu). This research project is being directed by Dr. Jocelyn Stitt. You can contact Dr. Stitt at 507-389-5026 or [Jocelyn.stitt@mnsu.edu](mailto:Jocelyn.stitt@mnsu.edu) about any concerns you have about this project. You also may contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 389-2321 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu) with any questions about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

#### Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this consent form was given to you.

#### **Appendix C: Recruitment Email**

Hello Participant's name,

I am a graduate student at MSU, Mankato and a veteran of the Army. I am interviewing female soldiers about their experiences as women in the military. I am currently doing interviews for my thesis in the Gender and Women's Studies Department.

Would you or any female veteran you know be interested in doing an interview with me? I am more than happy to meet you on campus, do a phone interview or Skype at any time that is convenient for you. The interview will take approximately one hour and your identity will remain anonymous.

Please text or call me at (507)351-2002 or email at [kristal.gray@mnsu.edu](mailto:kristal.gray@mnsu.edu) or find me on Facebook. As a fellow female veteran I would like to thank you for your service and assistance in my research.

Respectfully,

Kristal Gray

Graduate Student  
 Gender and Women's Studies  
 Minnesota State University, Mankato

### Appendix D: Demographics

| Participant | Job   | orientation                 | fraternized |
|-------------|---|-----------------------------|-------------|
| AM          | ARNG 31B (Military Police)                    | straight                    | no          |
| AM2         | ARNG, 42A(human resources)                    | straight                    | no          |
| AA          | ARNG, 25B, computer technician                | straight, was a gay<br>male | yes -2      |
| BJ          | ARMY, Aviations Operations Spc                | straight                    | no          |
| AJW         | Navy, hospital corpsman, ARNG MWR coordinator | lesbian                     | yes -8      |
| AW          | Marine  | bisexual                    | yes -15     |
| LE          | Marine, driver, search, wrecker operator      | straight                    | yes -2      |
| RA*         | Marine, mortar transport operator             | straight                    | yes         |
| LO          | Chem  | straight                    | yes -2      |
| KG          | Chem  | bisexual                    | no          |
| FR          | AF weapons                                    | straight                    | yes -4      |
| JS          | Army, mechanic                                | bisexual                    | yes         |

| Participant | feminist | safe    | protected | close | joined |
|-------------|----------|---------|-----------|-------|--------|
| AM          | depends  | neutral | neutral   | yes   | 2004   |
| AM2         | no       | neutral | neutral   | yes   | 2004   |
| AA          | yes      | yes     | no        | no    | 2005   |
| BJ          | yes      | yes     | yes       | yes   | 2012   |
| AJW         | no       | yes     | neutral   | yes   | 2002   |
| AW          | yes      | yes     | yes       | yes   | 2005   |
| LE          | yes      | yes     | yes       | yes   | 2006   |
| RA*         | no       | yes     | yes       | yes   | 2009   |
| LO          | yes      | yes     | yes       | yes   | 2003   |
| KG          | yes      | neutral | yes       | yes   | 2003   |
| FR          | yes      | yes     | some      | yes   | 2009   |
| JS          | equalist | yes     | yes       | yes   | 2003   |