"Just a Girl in the U.S. Army": Exploring Gender Norms, Behaviors, and Social Contexts that Shape the Experiences of Female Combat Veterans

Kacy L. Crowley
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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“JUST A GIRL IN THE U.S. ARMY”:
EXPLORING GENDER NORMS, BEHAVIORS, AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS THAT
SHAPE THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE COMBAT VETERANS

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Kacy Lea Crowley
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
December 2010
We hereby approve the thesis of

Kacy L. Crowley

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts

11/01/2010  

Signature on File
Melanie Hildebrandt, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Sociology, Advisor

11/01/2010  

Signature on File
Kay Snyder, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology

11/01/2010  

Signature on File
Valerie Gunter, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology

11/01/2010  

Signature on File
Melissa Swauger, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Sociology

ACCEPTED

Signature on File
Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Why study U.S. Army female combat veterans? (1) Women have always been a part of combat, (2) there are a substantial number of women in combat, (3) and that number is growing with women currently making up 15 percent of the U.S. Armed Forces. There is a lack of scholarly literature exploring the experiences of female soldiers in military combat roles and the sociological meanings attributed to these experiences. This lack of research is detrimental to understanding the role and experiences of female soldiers.

This study is an exploration of gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences of female combat veterans. It reports findings from a qualitative study based on face-to-face and phone interviews with 12 female U.S. Army combat veterans of the Iraq War. I studied how these women in the U.S. Army have dealt with being the only woman or one of very few women serving with a unit of male soldiers during the Iraq War. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and later analyzed using emergent coding techniques. The theoretical approaches that helped to shape the analysis are drawn from writings of Goffman (1959), West and Zimmerman (1987), Kanter (1993), and Smith (2005) to illuminate possible sociological implications of the study.

This study revealed the experiences and stories from various female combat veterans in the context of gender norms and behaviors associated with being a soldier in a military
combat environment. This study sought to understand how female combat veterans dealt with a pervasive culture of masculinity and the strategies they used to navigate this male-dominated environment.
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I would not have finished this thesis task if it weren’t for the individuals mentioned above and the dedication that they have shown. Again thank you all.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: U.S. ARMY FEMALE COMBAT VETERANS

In this study, I explored the gender norms surrounding female soldiers in combat environments. My purpose was to shed light on the social issues surrounding women in the military with the hope that my findings will serve to educate my peers and other soldiers, and contribute to the scholarly literature about females in the military. Female soldiers have to overcome numerous issues on a daily basis while working in the military such as sexual harassment, gender norm confusion (i.e., what is/is not acceptable behavior for a female soldier), and beliefs that females are physically inferior to males (Benedict, 2009; Sasson-Levy, 2003). In particular, my purpose was to examine women’s roles and gender performance in the contemporary context of combat exposure in the Iraq War. I chose to use combat soldiers for sampling convenience and consistency of experiences. My hope is that this study will help others to understand female soldiers’ unique experiences in male-dominated, combat environments.

Historical Background of Women in Combat

The roles played by female soldiers in the military have changed over time, with females currently making up 15 percent of the United States Armed Forces (Benedict, 2009). Females are performing the same dangerous jobs as their male counterparts. Benedict (2009) described how, as of May 2009, over 206,000 women have served in the Middle East since March 2003, most of them in Iraq. Over 600 of these females have been wounded and 104

1 See Highlights in Appendix A
have died in Iraq alone, according to the Department of Defense. In Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF),\(^2\) one in ten troops was a female (Benedict, 2009).

Historically, females have been stationed behind the front lines, performing duties such as cooking, cleaning, nursing, washing, and sewing. They supported the male troops during wars such as the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Women were not allowed to fight during these combats (Zenor-Lafond, 2008). Then, during World War I women were stationed closer to the front lines, where more than 400 women died in service, mostly due to the flu epidemic while performing nursing duties (Nathan, 2004). In World War II, women served with men and in some cases took over positions previously held by men, such as typists, clerks, and mail sorters, which freed up men to serve in combat. Women formed their own corps such as the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs), Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later the Women's Army Corps or WAC), and Women Accepted for Volunteer Military Services ( WAVES) (Benedict, 2008).

Ironically, the Korean War was considered to be too dangerous for women, so only 600 of the 7000 female military nurses were sent to Korea. During that time, female soldier enlistment declined, which many scholars believed was due to the discriminatory polices put in place following the end of World War II (Nathan, 2004). Female soldiers felt as if they had served their country in World War II, but did not receive much recognition for their service. In her role as Executive Director of the American Veterans Committee (AVC), June Willenz (1983) interviewed women veterans of World War II and summarized their lack of military visibility:

____________________

\(^2\) See List of Acronyms in Appendix B
Not only wasn’t there any academic research on this group, nor [sic] any government statistics available on them, but library research using the computer shows nothing. ... Not only were they forgotten: they were invisible. In books on veterans, women are not mentioned. (p. xi)

Things began to change with the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s and the push for the Equal Rights Amendment in the early 1970s. But many female soldiers still did not know their rights that were granted to them for being veterans. Unlike male soldiers, many female soldiers were not informed about the GI Bill that was signed into effect in 1944, so many did not receive the educational benefits awarded to male veterans (Willenz, 1983). Since they did not receive funding to attend post-secondary schooling many did not obtain the careers that would have been available had they received the proper education and skills for those careers. Willenz discussed the fact that ultimately, the lack of education and career choice placed many of these female veterans behind their male counterparts academically and financially.

With the end of the draft in 1973, the military needed women recruits to increase the enlistment numbers for the armed services, so 7500 women served towards the end of the Vietnam War (Zenor-Lafond, 2008). Women received more recognition as members of the Armed Forces than in previous wars, but still not equal to their male counterparts (Benedict, 2008).

The largest increase in female soldiers up to this time occurred during the Persian Gulf War in 1991, where over 40,000 females were deployed to Kuwait. Zenor-Lafond (2008) commented: “They served in combat zones, flew and maintained aircraft, drove or protected supply vehicles, and launched missiles” (p. 6).
Not many people realize the extent to which the Iraq War has represented a historic change for American women soldiers. More women have fought and died in Iraq than in all the wars since World War II put together (Benedict, 2009). Over 100,000 women have served in the Iraq operations, with many serving a double tour of duty in Afghanistan (Zenor-Lafond, 2008).

Currently, U.S. Army female soldiers are still banned from ground combat units, which is ironic since many female soldiers have been exposed and/or participated in combat situations. Women are not supposed to be officially employed in combat, but may be employed into a “combat support” unit, which will be exposed to combat situations. The Department of Defense refuses to allow females in direct combat units. This ban was reaffirmed in 2006 despite the military’s awareness that female soldiers are serving in combat all the time.

Benedict (2009), a news reporter for The Nation, interviewed several female combat veterans and researched the history of women in the military and how recent combat has affected them. As Benedict noted, during the interviews female veterans indicated that they had tolerated harassment and felt that they were being lumped into one of three categories: bitch, dyke, or slut. Benedict found that these arbitrary categories, which appear to be normative explanations that resemble stigmatizing labels applied to civilian women, were adopted by both males and females were based on rumors designed to destroy the credibility of women serving in the armed forces. Benedict wrote:

__________________________

3 For example in the Army: military police, transportation, medical, chemical, aviation, or military intelligence
4 I.e., Army: infantry, combat engineers, Special Forces, ground surveillance radar platoons, and air defense artillery.
5 Speculation is that President Obama may finally reverse this ban, but it still stands at the moment.
Because the US military is so short of troops and Iraq’s battlefields are towns and roads, women are frequently thrown into jobs indistinguishable from those of the all-male infantry, cavalry and armor divisions, often under the guise of ‘combat support’. They ‘man’ machine guns atop tanks and trucks, guard convoys, raid houses, search and arrest Iraqis, drive military vehicles along bomb-ridden roads, and are killing and being killed.

Yet even though more than 2,000 women who fought in Iraq or Afghanistan have been awarded Bronze Stars, several for bravery and valor in combat; more than 1,300 have earned the Combat Action Badge; and two have been awarded Silver Stars, the military's top honor for bravery in combat, the official ban continues. This makes it difficult for women to be taken seriously as soldiers or advance in their careers, let alone win respect.

(para. 7-8)

**Social Location/Personal Interest**

The subject matter and population being explored in this study is of personal as well as scholarly interest to me. I am a white, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) combat veteran, married to an OIF combat veteran, a mother, and a middle-class female who is currently a Master’s degree candidate in Sociology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am the second child of four daughters who grew-up in a two-parent, working class household. I lived most of my young adulthood in the small town of Berlin, PA. After graduating from high school, I entered the Army Reserves to pay for college. My college education was interrupted when I was called to duty, to serve my country, in Iraq during the OIF campaign...
in 2003. I was deployed for 19 months and was in Iraq “boots on ground” for 14 ½ months, which transitioned me into a new respected social identity of a combat veteran.

There was an extended period of time where I was the only female assigned to a military police platoon of about 35 males. I was ostracized in the platoon for being the only female where the norm was to act like and be one of the guys. As Aulette, Wittner, and Blakely (2009) commented, “Men in the military are under constant pressure to prove their manhood by being tough, adversarial, and aggressive” (p. 325). I was often singled out or targeted for being the only female in the room. In phony attempts to sound sensitive, male soldiers would make comments like, “Watch what you say,” because I was nearby. The male soldiers would discuss their sexual endeavors and objectify women, which made me feel uncomfortable and, in some ways, unsafe among my fellow soldiers.

As a woman trying to be one of the guys, I felt pressured to perform well, not only for myself, but on behalf all women. I was what Kanter (1993) identified as “the token female,” meaning I was often stereotyped because I was the only female. I wanted to be a “good soldier” and be tough, so at first I tried to outperform the male soldiers to prove that I was worthy of being a military police officer, too. I was conforming to the demand that even females must become “like men” and behave in a stereotypically masculine way in the military. Newspaper articles, editorial notes, and other non-peer-reviewed journals have documented that what I experienced was not unusual (see for example, Donaldson, 2005; Donnelly, 2005; George, 2005; Johnson, 2003; O’Beirne, 2003).

Training with my Army Reserve Company, back in the United States, was one social context because we only trained two days a month and it was a non-stressful atmosphere compared to the combat atmosphere of Iraq. While in the U.S., I was surrounded by more
female soldiers within the company and I was also with another female in my platoon. In
Iraq things changed; there was more stress and it became more difficult to maintain this
stereotypically masculine behavior on a daily basis in a more male-dominated environment.
I found myself acting a bit more stereotypically feminine, allowing myself to be nurturing,
kind, sympathetic, and compassionate. As a result, I was considered by my leaders and
fellow male soldiers to be “getting soft” and weak. I was told once by my squad leader to
“buck up and act more like…,” at which point I cut him off and said, “a man.” He responded
by saying “No, a soldier.” From my military experience, I believed that being a soldier
meant acting like a man, but I was having difficulty maintaining that performance.

I decided to continue to be more stereotypically feminine and act more nurturing
because it felt more comfortable for me. I was known among my company as a “hug-a-thug”
because, unlike many of the male soldiers, I cared how the prisoners were treated. Also, I
deliberately used what I felt were more feminine characteristics such as being compassionate
and soft-spoken, to manipulate the supply sergeant and the other supply personnel to make
sure the Iraqis in our prisoner camp were given proper supplies (soap, blankets, toothbrushes,
sandals, a jumpsuit, a Quran). Knowing how most male soldiers saw female soldiers, I used
my “girlie charm” (a term used in my unit to characterize stereotypically feminine qualities)
to make friends with the supply soldiers and acquire many supplies; i.e., I would flirt with the
supply sergeant to get the supplies I needed. For example, one time I went to the supply
building to see if there were any jumpsuits available for the inmates. As I walked into the
building there were four male supply personnel sitting around a table playing cards. When I
entered, they all turned to look and smiled at me (their smiles were not just a causal hello-
type smile, but more of a “hey, how are you doing baby” kind of smile). I got the feeling that
this environment was conducive to flirting, so I approached the table and smiled at the male supply soldiers, giggled at their jokes, and gave them come-hither looks when appropriate. When I was about to leave the supply building, I was promised the jumpsuits. Later that day the supply sergeant arrived at our prisoner camp in a large truck filled with supplies (jumpsuits, blankets, board games for the inmates, and extra goodies for all of us who were MP soldiers). The supply sergeant even stated to my platoon sergeant that he brought all those supplies because of my visit. Despite the fact that I had accomplished my task, all of these acts were deviant in the eyes of some male soldiers and I lost their respect. Essentially, members of my company started seeing me more as a woman and not as a fellow soldier. In my experience, there was a clear tension between being nurturing, flirtatious, and compassionate while also being a combat soldier. As a result of these experiences, I was interested in learning to what extent other female combat veterans had experienced this tension and how they handled it.

**Purpose of the Study**

As stated previously, this study is an exploration of gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences of female combat veterans. It reports the findings from a qualitative study based on face-to-face and phone interviews with 12 U.S. Army, female combat veterans of the Iraq War. I studied how these women in the U.S. Army have dealt with being the only woman or one of a very few women to experience combat while being in a male-dominated environment. Even though combat itself was not a variable directly studied, it was a context that I controlled for in this study and it was a criteria used to select respondents for interviews. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed using emergent coding techniques. The theoretical approaches that helped to shape
the analysis were drawn from writings of Goffman (1959), West and Zimmerman (1987), Kanter (1993), and Smith (2005) to illuminate possible sociological implications of this study.

**Research Questions**

In this study, I explored ways that female combat veterans juggled their performances as soldiers, an identity that is defined according to a male standard, while still being women, and therefore typically a minority in the military. Specific research questions addressed include: (1) In what ways did women combat veterans feel strain and/or develop strategies for dealing with gender related tensions and performances in a male-dominated environment? (2) Did becoming a soldier alter a woman’s perception of herself as a female or change her identity in any way, and if so, how? (3) What strategies did female soldiers develop in the context of combat and being surrounded by a disproportionate number of males? (4) What stories did female combat veterans share that could help enlighten others about the challenges facing women in combat or female combat veterans?

**Summary**

In this chapter, I briefly discussed the historical background of women in the military. Then, I provided an overview of my social location as the primary researcher and my personal interest in this study. I explained my purpose for conducting exploratory research on female combat veterans. The next chapter will provide an overview of literature related to this topic.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study is an exploration of gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences of a small sample of U.S. Army female combat veterans. In this chapter, I review the literature pertaining to women integrated into male-dominated environments including the military, sexual harassment in the military, and females in military who have experienced combat. The conceptual factors used to analyze this study are also discussed in order to identify practical implications and understanding for conclusions drawn throughout this study. This chapter also evaluates the theoretical approaches that were found useful for this study.

Conceptual Factors

Gender, Gender Norms & Performances, Doing Gender, and Sex

First and foremost, the distinction between gender and sex needs to be emphasized. Sociologists use the word gender to define social and cultural patterns associated with women and men (Andersen, 2006). Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological identity of a binary system within society of either females or males (Andersen; Doyle, 1985). It should also be noted that gender should be thought of as independent of a person’s sex (Doyle). For example, when a woman is acting manly by exhibiting behaviors that are stereotypically defined as masculine, such behavior does not change her sex. Instead, her behavior is evaluated as in the context of gender norms.

Gender norms are defined here as patterns of behavior that males and females perform based on the cultural expectations of their gender (Andersen, 2006); for example, females are expected to act like women, and women in dominant American culture are
generally expected to demonstrate feminine qualities, such as being soft-spoken, temperate, and compassionate. Women who deviate from these norms might be negatively labeled as aggressive, bitchy, or butch. *Gender performance*, unlike gender norms, is not the same for everyone. Gender performance refers to the way a person navigates the social expectations of gender in her life. For example, a female wears a skirt or make up as a way of signaling to the world that she is female, and therefore distinguishable from men.

*Doing gender* is a perspective that evolved from symbolic interactionism. It is a concept developed by West and Zimmerman (1987). This perspective focuses on the actions that a person takes that display particular configurations of gender (Andersen, 2006). Gender is “done” through social interactions with others on a daily basis. The doing gender perspective outlines how a person consciously and subconsciously engages in behaviors that are socially gendered. For example, when a female smiles at a male even though she does not like him, she is doing gender (Andersen).

**Stereotypical Femininity & Masculinity**

Through the socialization process a person is encouraged and discouraged about how to perform certain gender displays based on their sex. According to this gender socialization process, women are taught how to act *feminine* and men are taught how to act *masculine* (Andersen, 2006). Women are stereotyped to be gentle, nurturing, and affectionate (Doyle, 1985). A stereotypically feminine girl would play with dolls, wear pink, and be more dependent on others (Doyle). In many instances, females who deviate from these expected feminine roles are labeled as “tomboys” and unladylike (Andersen).

---

6 See “Stereotypical Feminine” below for definition
7 Doing gender is discussed more under West & Zimmerman’s theoretical approach.
On the other hand, a stereotypically masculine man would be strong, independent, and aggressive (Doyle, 1985). Men who act more feminine than masculine are labeled as “sissies,” and likewise have their sexuality questioned, because of the strong gender expectations associated with each sex (Andersen, 2006). Andersen explained how homophobia separates the “cultural roles of masculinity and femininity by discouraging men from showing so-called feminine traits, such as caring, nurturing, emotional expression, and gentleness (p. 34). The social sanction for deviating from norms around gender performance range from commentary or funny looks to ostracism or violence.

**Stereotypical Soldier**

At one time, sending soldiers off to war had been justified because it promoted and defended “manly virtue” in a nation (Andersen & Collins, 1995, p. 453). Presently, with both females and males now serving as soldiers, the question becomes: How do we understand what it means to behave like a soldier? Can a soldier have both feminine and masculine qualities, and still be the embodiment of a “good” soldier? According to a qualitative study conducted by Sasson-Levy (2003), female soldiers distance themselves from what they perceive as traditionally or stereotypically feminine behaviors because they identify with the “Army’s andocentric norms” and gender expectations of a soldier (p. 451). Therefore, being a stereotypical soldier requires that certain masculine gender displays be performed (Sasson-Levy). It is important to note that a phenomenon known as hypermasculinity is the expression of macho and overly manly behaviors, and these behaviors are associated with militaristic aggression (Andersen, 2006).

As a social institution, the military promotes these gender expectations not only in its ideology of how a soldier is supposed to behave, but in its rules and regulations. The culture
of the military is preserved by the gendered expectations of a masculine soldier. For example, in the U.S. Army female soldiers are not permitted under Army regulations 670-1 (February 2005) to wear a shaven head, but are to keep the appearance of a female by maintaining hair longer than their male counterparts. The social construction of gender serves to regulate behavior and the behaviors are reinforced by regulations. For female soldiers this created a duality that they must behave in a stereotypically masculine manner to perform the role of soldier while still being required to maintain some aspects of their female appearance and/or femininity.

**Women in Combat Research**

Now that the basic conceptual factors have been explained, the research and data collected for this study will be better understood. Historically, women in the military have been overlooked, even forgotten in some cases (Willenze, 1983). Since the end of the male draft in 1973, and the beginning of the all-volunteer force, the percentage of women in the U.S. Armed Forces has increased from 1.6% in 1973, to 8.5% in 1980, to 12% in 1993 (Rosen, Durand, & Halverson, 1996). Recently, women have increasingly joined the military to the point where 15% of the military is women. Since there are now more women in the Armed Forces than ever before, and they are experiencing combat due to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), there has been more journalistic/media coverage of women in the military. There are also many newspaper articles, opinion columnists, and editorial magazine articles about women in combat (see, for example, Donaldson, 2005; Donnelly, 2005; George, 2005; Johnson, 2003; O’Beirne, 2003). These journalists explored how female soldiers experienced combat, offering insights into
their gendered experiences as women and soldiers. However, they have not explored in-depth the social contexts that shape and influence female soldiers’ experiences.

Although women’s military experiences have been studied, the research that has been done with female combat veterans neglects the cultural norms, or patterns of gender specific behaviors, expected of females in the military and/or associated with women in the combat environment. There are not many studies on women in combat or how they experience being surrounded by men in an environment where there is little room for privacy or downtime. As mentioned previously, the lack of research exploring the various military-related contexts and the gender norms that develop within these contexts is detrimental to understanding the full impact of being female while serving in an overwhelmingly male-dominated military.

**Social Context: Women Integrated Into Male-Dominated Settings**

There has, however, been research on women working in male-dominated settings, including limited explorations of women in the military. All of these studies point to complexities that developed when females integrated into male-dominated settings. Rosen, Durand, Halverson and colleagues (1996) conducted surveys with 19 combat service support companies and found that as the number of females in a company/unit increased, the group cohesion and effectiveness decreased among male soldiers. In contrast, the increased number of female soldiers did not negatively affect female soldier group cohesion, effectiveness, or performance. Rosen, Durand, Halverson and colleagues suggested that the empirical evidence from their study supported the minority-proportion hypothesis and better explained the impact of gender ratio on unit cohesion than Kanter’s theory of tokenism (to be discussed later in this chapter). Their hypothesis describes how relative size of the minority affects the competitive nature within the entire group. The greater the minority group size, the more
discrimination that will be done against the minority members because of the competitive threat to the majority. This, ultimately, will make the minority members less competitive amongst themselves despite the increase in intergroup competition. In other words, the more women who enter into male-dominated settings, the more they will be harassed and challenged competitively by men and the more cohesive the women will be.

Several other studies dealing with women in male-dominated settings focused on the emotional and physical differences between women and men. Separate studies by Blankenship (2008), Nathan (2004), and Rothstein (1991) discussed how women must overcome many obstacles in a work setting that is predominately male. These articles reported the struggles, such as being seen as less capable than their male counterparts. However, these studies indicated that the competitive challenges and gender harassment that female soldiers overcame helped those women transition into civilian male-dominated settings.

The final article to discuss the social context of women integrating into male-dominated settings is one written by a sociologist and female veteran Melissa Herbert (1998) who conducted in-depth interviews with 14 female veterans and analyzed data from 285 questionnaires by veterans and active-duty soldiers. Herbert’s research addressed the military’s assumption that masculinity is inherent to soldiering, an assumption which helps to preserve the military as a predominantly male occupation. She argued that military women have to strike a careful balance between femininity and masculinity, and that they develop conscious strategies about how best to represent themselves. For example, by using make-

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8 This hypothesis is the opposite of Kanter’s theory of tokenism.
up, perfume, or wearing skirts instead of pants women were often able to express their
femininity in a masculine environment without sanctions. She found that some females
incurred penalties if they overacted and behaved in ways that were perceived as either too
feminine or too masculine. Clearly, in the military there are very strong boundaries between
genders that are maintained and constantly under negotiation.

Identity Practices and Experiences: How Men & Women Experience the Military

To deepen our understanding of gender practices within the U.S. Army and how the
women in the Army experience being soldiers in a male-dominated military, we turn to
research on the identity practices and experiences of female soldiers. The work of Sasson-
Levy (2003), who studied gender norms and practices in the Israeli military, described
theoretically and empirically how women who integrated into masculine practices tended to
suppress what they saw as their feminine identity by complying with the Army’s andocentric
norms. She described masculine practices in the military as exhibiting bravery, power,
strength, success, and sexual freedom. Through her study, she found that many female
soldiers, via the military’s gendered division of labor and its “chauvinist culture,” believed
and consented to the “hegemonic masculine ideology” (p. 452). Therefore, these female
soldiers identified with the dominant ideology and expressed anti-feminine attitudes; they
believed in the inferiority of traditional feminine behavior (Sasson-Levy, 2003). Sasson-
Levy described women’s masculine roles as soldiers’ behaviors as being “mini-men”, almost
“one of the guys” (p. 455). For example, the females from Sasson-Levy’s study perceived
women who cared about their external appearance, exhibited gentle and soft spoken
behavior as weak and submissive to men. As perceived by the female soldiers, these forms
of traditional and submissive feminine behavior were unacceptable for a soldier. They reported that the ideal image for a soldier was male.

Sasson-Levy’s (2003) qualitative work was based on in-depth interviews with Israeli women soldiers performing “masculine” roles. She analyzed the interaction between state institutions and identity construction. Her focus was on the citizenship of Israeli women who serve in the military. She argued that Israeli women soldiers in “masculine” roles “shaped their gender identities according to the hegemonic masculinity of the combat soldier through three interrelated practices: (1) mimicry of combat soldiers’ bodily and discursive practices; (2) distancing from ‘traditional femininity’; and (3) trivialization of sexual harassment” (p. 441).

Sasson-Levy’s (2003) work used the theoretical analysis developed by Judith Butler (1990) to aid in the gender distinctions conducted in the male-dominated setting of the military. Butler investigated the theoretical roots of gender identity to show political parameters. She questioned traditional femininity and the gender distinctions culture will make between males and females. She argued that the basic concepts in this discourse are themselves produced by relations of power. Her study’s emphasis is on the performative nature of gender. Butler (1990) described that through “stylized repetition of acts”, such as wearing dirty uniforms, lowering their tone of voice, and using foul language that women are performing masculinized gender (p. 140).

Another study that focused on the experiences of U.S. female soldiers was conducted by Ender (2009). Ender conducted qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to explain topics such as boredom, morale, preparation for war, day-to-day life in Iraq, attitudes, and women soldiers. His chapter on women in combat was based on interviews, since he was
able to talk to female soldiers directly about how they felt and what they experienced while at Camp Victory, Iraq in 2004. Based on surveys and interviews of male and female combat soldiers, Ender (2009) found that the experiences of female soldiers are similar to those of male soldiers with a few exceptions. Women at Camp Victory worked less and took more time off, and they seemed more inclined to work with foreign nationals compared to their male counterparts. Yet Ender’s (2009) research does not do justice to the valued experiences of female combat soldiers. Nor does he explore the duality of having to deal with being both a woman and a soldier at the same time.

**Sexual Harassment: Definition and Female Soldier Experiences**

Since integrating women into male-dominated settings increases the likelihood of sexual harassment, it is necessary to appropriately discuss the female soldier’s experiences with sexual harassment. The Army’s definition of sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination that involves unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical contact of sexual nature (see Appendix C). There are two types of sexual harassment, *quid pro quo* and *hostile environment* harassment. Quid pro quo refers to a condition placed upon a person’s career or terms of employment in return for sexual favors. The hostile environment sexual harassment occurs when a person is subjected to offensive, unwanted, and unsolicited comments and behaviors of a sexual nature that interfere with a person’s work performance or creates an intimidating or an offensive work environment (Army Regulation 600-20).

Firestone and Harris (199) conducted a study that focused on the potential harassment that could be prevalent in a male-dominated institution with a minority of females. They compared 1988 Department of Defense (DOD) surveys of sexual harassment to 1995
surveys. Firestone and Harris’s purpose of the surveys was to discover what elements of the active duty military population experienced sexual harassment and other gender-related experiences. The survey was also meant to define the context, location, and circumstances of such experiences to allow evaluation of the effectiveness on patterns of sexual harassment. The overall conclusion was that sexual harassment of all types and toward all targets, regardless of sex, rank, and branch of service, appeared to have declined between 1988 and 1995. Firestone and Harris argued that this decline reflected the military’s effort to identify harassment incidents and implement sexual harassment programs. Another result was that sexual harassment is still very prevalent within all branches of the military. Nearly 12 percent of men and over 59 percent of women reported some form of harassment within the previous 12 months of taking the survey.

Another sexual harassment study of a representative national sample was conducted on female Veterans Association (VA) patients in 2002. This independent study analyzed by the Veterans Health Initiative reported that 23 percent of female veterans experienced a sexual assault while serving in the military.9

March 2010, the *Stars and Stripes*, a newspaper circulated within the U.S. military, announced that between 2008 and 2009 the reported incidents of sexual assaults within the military rose 11 percent. According to the DOD’s head of sexual assault prevention efforts, it is expected that the number of reported incidents will continue to rise because it takes about 10 years to change behavior and the DOD’s prevention program has only been operating for 5 years. Also, the number of sexual assault incidents will continue to rise

9 See VA website for more details: http://vaww.sites.1rn.va.gov
because of the unchecked sexual harassment within the military (Schogol, 2010). With the threat of sexual harassment and sexual assault looming, female soldiers are in a precarious position in the U.S. military.

**Theoretical Approaches**

Given the conceptual factors, certain theoretical approaches provided a useful framework for understanding gender norms, the cultural contexts, and exploring the behavior of female veterans in this study. These theoretical approaches also help to understand the contextualizing of cultural norms or, in this instance, the patterns of gender specific behavior expected of females in the male-dominated military institution and in particular, those associated with women in the combat environment (Andersen, 2006). For example, female soldiers are expected, based on West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept of “doing gender,” to present themselves simultaneously as female/feminine (because of their gender identity as women) while at the same time performing their role as soldier in masculine ways. This tension could be attributed to the masculinist ideology and “chauvinist culture” of the military (Sasson-Levy, 2003, p. 452).

Drawing on the concepts of presentation of self, dramaturgical analysis, and self perception as articulated by Erving Goffman (1959) and the work by West & Zimmerman (1987) may provide a useful framework for my data. Likewise, feminist theorists’ such as Rosabeth Kanter (1993) and Dorothy Smith (2005) may shed light on the token female phenomenon and a women’s standpoint, respectively.

**Goffman’s (1959) Relevance to this Research**

How did female combat veterans deal with juggling gender tensions and performances in a male-dominated social environment? In order to understand and explore
this question, I turned to the work of Erving Goffman. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) theorized that all human social interaction is a form of dramaturgy. He argued that when an individual appears in the presence of others, this individual “actor” is motivated to mobilize his or her activity according to their particular interests to convey a purposeful “impression to others” (p. 4). He believed that the meanings behind the reactions of others influence how people will react. According to Goffman, individual performance tends to “incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact than he does his behavior as a whole” (p. 35). In other words, people will perform according to the cultural norms and the perception others have of them based on those cultural norms. The most important of Goffman’s findings for this study is that these gender displays affect the way that human beings behave, in a way that may be extremely detrimental to an individual’s experience. For instance, when a woman is socialized to be nurturing, but finds she is in a situation where she is not or cannot be nurturing, this dissonance can affect the way that she experiences the situation.

Goffman (1959) wrote about the public life of an individual being like a front stage show, while the private, personal thoughts of an individual are the back stage actions. He used the term front region, or frontstage, to refer to the place where performance is given, that is, any place social interaction occurs. According to Goffman, an actor must give the appearance that his or her activity in the front region maintains and embodies certain given standards. These terms are helpful to understand the different spaces occupied by female soldiers (e.g., this could be a possible explanation of how things might have changed once they were in a combat environment in relation to being on a less-stressful U.S. military base). These “two broad groupings of standards” are (1) *matters of politeness*, or the way the
performer treats the audience through talk and gestures, and (2) *decorum*, or the way the performer behaves while in visual range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them (p. 107). People react to what they perceive as others’ reactions to them.

Goffman used the term back region, or backstage, to refer to places where “a performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (p. 112). Very commonly, the back region of a performance is located at one end of the place where the performance is presented, cut off by a partition and guarded passageway. The backstage for women in combat could be interpreted as the ‘down-time’ when a soldier takes her uniform off and ‘lets her hair down.’ In the case of women in the military, there may not be a true physical backstage. However, she may potentially have a hidden backstage by herself or among other females. If a female soldier were completely isolated, for example, in sleeping quarters, then a physical *backstage* could be accomplished. However, this might not have been an option in certain combat situations, and could have led to tension and strain developing for the female soldiers because they could never really let themselves step out of character.

**West and Zimmerman’s Relevance to this Research**

To explore how female veterans juggled gender tensions in a male-dominated setting, I referred to “Doing Gender,” by Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman (1987), in which the authors explore the lived “reality” of gender. The authors define and explain what the term gender actually means and the implications that “doing gender” has on a person’s life and on society. They discussed that some groups of individuals seem to believe that gender is something that is innate and essential, and is determined by reproductive genitals. Some people believe the idea that individuals born with a penis are pre-determined to behave a
certain way and individuals born with a vagina are predetermined to act in a totally different way. West and Zimmerman have shown that does not adequately explain the differences between men and women.

This theory discussed by West and Zimmerman (1987) is a symbolic interactionist theory that states that gender is an ongoing, changing series of behaviors and roles that are created through social interactions with others. According to this theory, these behaviors and roles are situational, meaning that the role is played or not played, depending on the situation at hand. West and Zimmerman explore how gender might be exhibited or portrayed through interaction, which is performed every day. Gender display is something that happens within our culture when we, as human beings, recognize what is acceptable behavior for a male and what behavior is acceptable for a female. In the military, where every soldier is supposed to be the same (in terms of the military masculinist ideology) by wearing a common uniform, gender displays still may happen because they are engrained into our society as a cultural norm. Even though the military regulations distinguish between male and female soldiers by the length of their hair (e.g. females are to wear longer hair and males very short haircuts) and other outward appearances, the social interactions between males and females still portrays behaviors of gender being done.

Smith’s Concept of Women’s Standpoint

Referring back to the question of how did women combat veterans deal with juggling gender tensions and performances in a male-dominated social environment, I used Smith (2005) to understand how the military affected gender contexts. Smith (2005) wrote about women’s standpoint, “the notion that women’s experience has special authority” (p. 327). She described standpoint theory as a way for women to claim special privilege over their
lived experiences and the knowledge they gained from being women. She emphasized that the knowledge women have is based on the epistemological position they encompass by being members of an oppressed minority group. Since my research focused on the woman’s standpoint in role of combat veteran and how they saw themselves as women in those conditions, Smith’s concepts of standpoint and bifurcation of consciousness are useful.

Smith is concerned with the production and reproduction of gender ideology. When women learn to internalize the perspective of society, it is a male-centered perspective that they must relate to. In other words, Smith stated that women, like other subordinate groups in society, develop a bifurcated consciousness where they live with both the reality of actual experience and the reality of social expectations. Women are expected to look like women according to gender norms of the U.S. culture, but in the military, which is male-dominated and rewards/honors stereotypical masculine behaviors defined as masculine, female soldiers may find themselves being caught between being a man/soldier and their female identity. Female soldiers are expected to maintain a womanly appearance continue to behave in traditional feminine ways, but at the same time, act like men (the stereotypically masculine man).

Sasson-Levy (2003) borrowed Smith’s conceptualization of the bifurcated consciousness when she described the “power of hegemonic ideology,” which creates an agreement among more men and women alike about the status quo (p. 452). Sasson-Levy stated that the Israel Army, via its gendered division of labor, produces this hegemonic masculine ideology. In order to construct a positive perception of themselves, Israel military women felt the need to distance themselves from other women and what “they perceive as traditional, weak, and submissive femininity (as defined by the military)” (p. 452). If these patterns apply to U.S. military combat veterans, these women will present themselves in
opposition to other women and not want to identify with being a female. The tensions and bifurcation of consciousness will persist as long as women are a numerical minority in the military.

**Kanter’s Concept of the Token Female**

These contradictions can create resentment and confusion between male and female soldiers, and since female soldiers are a minority in the U.S. military, this could lead to tokenism of those singled-out females. Kanter (1993) believed that women needed to be in greater numbers in the workforce in order for there to be equality and for the stereotypical male behavior, which is defined by the patriarchal status quo, towards females to cease. She described the token effect as the social relationship of a small number of individuals in a larger differing group, i.e. the minority within a majority, or “those women who were few in number among male peers and often had ‘only woman’ status became tokens: symbols of how-women-can-do, stand-ins for all women” (p. 207). Kanter described how the corporation and the institutional structures within the corporation result in gender differences. If these patterns were applied to the U.S. military, then it would be exemplified through the military’s contradictions of itself with its regulations, adding to gender confusions and leading to reinforcements of gender distinctions. The military institution wants female soldiers to be recognizably female in comparison to male soldiers, which is a direct contradiction with what is engrained into a soldier during training that every soldier is the same—not male or female, but a soldier.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Army Regulations 670-1 (February 2005)
Summary

In the past, the military maintained a more strict and traditional gendered division of labor between male and female soldiers. For example, women were nurses and clerks. As women have moved into “combat support” roles the gendered division of labor is breaking down within the military. However, this division has not been completely eliminated; women are not allowed to shave their heads; they are not supposed to serve in front-line combat; and, they have fewer opportunities for promotion and rewards. As the gendered division of labor lessens, female soldiers are moved into an even more traditionally masculine social context, such as predominately male units (as opposed to, say, a group of nurses stationed at a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) unit). This shift in the division of labor and other contexts within the military helps to frame the experiences of female combat veterans.
Rationale for Qualitative Study

Based on the literature, there is a lack of information about female combat veterans. There is a lack especially in terms of their identity, perception of self, and the female veterans’ perception and performances towards being a woman and a soldier. Some research reported of basic information about soldiers (Ender, 2009; Rosen, Durand, & Halverson, 1996; Rothstein, 1991); however, very little focus has been placed on female soldiers. The quantitative research on soldiers focuses on mental health (Linstrom, et al., 2006) and the macro-level – lumping of all soldiers as one identity – within the institution of the military. Further, quantitative research as it stands today, does not account for cultural or social norms and attitudes of female combat veterans and their experiences at a micro-level because of the complexity of what it means to be an American female soldier.

A qualitative study using in-depth interviews and emergent coding techniques allows for exploration of gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences of female soldiers. This approach is a micro-level analysis of the firsthand experiences of female soldiers who have been in combat and know the behind-the-scenes issues. Given the small number of women in the military, it is extremely important to have these voices heard and know the experiences and issues they face being females and soldiers.

Study Design

This research consists of a qualitative study based on face-to-face and phone interviews with 12, U.S. Army, female combat veterans of the Iraq War. I studied how these women in the U.S. Army have experienced the male-dominated environment of the Iraq War.
Insider/Outsider Status

I continually wrestle with my own experiences as a female combat veteran, but I cannot be so arrogant as to believe that my experience has been the experience of all American female veterans. I cannot interpret the experiences of others as I have experienced them. My social location and status as a white, middle-class, female, combat veteran, graduate student has made me an insider and an outsider among the female combat veterans. Sharing the common characteristics/status of being a female and a combat veteran has aided me (as an insider) in understanding the language and meanings behind acronyms used and the terminology associated only with the military. As the interviewer, this knowledge of military jargon made it easier to communicate with respondents, and aided my understanding during the interviews for this study.

I also experienced the personal interactions of working closely with men in the military. I have experienced and witnessed sexual harassment within the ranks of the military institution. As mentioned in chapter 1, I have performed gender in a military context (see “social location/personal interest”). All of these experience and characteristics provided me with a productive and very valuable insider view.

The extent to which familiarity with the military culture and ideology aided the interviews process is best articulated by Ashley (a respondent in this study) as she explained why it was good that I was a combat veteran:

I have a best friend who is not in the military and like I find it hard to explain it to her, but my other best friend who had been deployed and been to Iraq; I have no problem explaining it [her combat experience] to her. Like you know, it’s one of those things that you have to experience.
Ashley explained how her friend who had experienced combat understood her military jargon and her body language when they would discuss combat experience. Ashley also looked to me during her explanation and said while reaching out her hand to me, “you understand...” because I had experienced combat too.

In only one instance did my insider status as a female combat veteran work to my disadvantage. One of female combat veterans I was going to interview felt that her experiences were not worth telling because she was aware of my combat experiences. I later called her and explained that her experiences were important contributions to the study; fortunately, she changed her mind and was a great participant in my study. I learned that even though it is important to be an insider, it is equally as important to maintain outsider qualities and not appear to know or have experienced more than the participant being studied.

With that being said, I am an outsider in terms of my educational status as a graduate student in sociology in the sense that I could not use sociological jargon or academic vocabulary during the interviews. Also, I was not a member of the platoon of the women I interviewed, which allowed me to think more critically about their unique experiences. I analyzed the context of their experiences academically and questioned the structure of the military, which soldiers are taught not to do.

Another status that posed a challenge was my whiteness. It was difficult for me to find women of color and unfortunately I was only able to find two non-white, female combat veterans to interview. I attribute some of my inability to find women of color to the snowball approach I used for recruitment. I also found it difficult to fully understand their racial experiences since my own race has given me the privilege to not think about race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Lipsitz, 2006). During this study, I did not directly address racial issues, but
during 2 of the 12 interviews the topic was raised. I used the knowledge I gained from being a graduate assistant for a couple years in racial and ethnic minority classes where I learned how to have conversations about race in non-threatening dialogues to try and probe for deeper responses when racial issues were addressed. Having this mix of insider and outsider statuses helped maintain a more neutral researcher stance and provided a check and balance system when conducting my data analysis.

**Inclusion Criteria**

I interviewed female combat veterans who were in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). I would have liked to have also interviewed female combat veterans from the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) campaign, but through the snowball approach I was unable to recruit any females from that campaign. The female soldiers that I interviewed had to have been in combat, which was determined by their eligibility for the Combat Action Badges (CAB). The CAB was created and approved May 2005 to provide special recognition to soldiers who personally engage or have been engaged by the enemy. Female soldiers have been earning the CAB at the same rate as their male counterparts, with more than 1300 earned (Benedict, May 2009).

I believed it was important to set these limited criteria in order to narrow the research data and to ensure that the female soldiers I interviewed were able to answer my explorative questions about the gender norms surrounding women in today’s combat environments. As mentioned previously, limiting the female veterans to OIF was for sampling convenience so the experience would be somewhat consistent. The CAB ensures that the female veterans

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11 typically refers to the war in Afghanistan
12 See Appendix D for details on CAB specifications
were definitely exposed to combat environments; the stress of combat and the relationship
between males and females change in combat environments as opposed to rear echelon
environments without exposures to enemy fire/engagement. There is more isolation from
other females soldiers resulting in more stress for female soldiers when in a combat setting,
which is why this inclusion criteria was set.

**Exclusion Criteria**

Since the study was about female soldiers’ experiences, males were excluded from
the research. Before beginning the interview, I asked the females that I interviewed if they
were being treated for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) related to their military
service. I wanted to exclude individuals who were being treated for PTSD, since discussing
this sensitive topic of their combat experience could have caused emotional harm to those
individuals. Only one of the females interviewed for this study indicated that she was being
treated for PTSD, which I was discuss later.

I also excluded all female combat veterans from other branches of the Armed Forces,
e.g. Navy, Air Force, and Marines. I chose to study the Army in order to understand one
branch of service well. I focused on the Army because of my personal familiarity with this
branch of service; the ratio of females to males in the Army is most consistent with the
overall ratio of the entire military. This decision was not an easy one, since as I progressed
through the interview process I was approached by eight female veterans from various
Armed Forces. I unfortunately, had to turn them down.

**Recruitment of Prospective Subjects**

Since I was only able to identify a small number of female combat veterans who met
the CAB requirements, the sampling group was difficult to reach and considered a
specialized population (Neuman, 2004; Maxwell, 2005). I used the best approach to recruit prospective subjects, which was sequential sampling. Sequential sampling is similar to purposive sampling (Neuman, 2004). As the researcher, this type of sampling allowed me to use my own judgment in selecting female veterans. My purpose was to have a relatively consistent sample of experiences, so I chose to interview combat veterans of the Iraq War. I spoke to 12 female veterans and found that there was little new information to be filled, so due to time constraints and a saturation point being reached I limited the sample size to 12.

Along with this sampling method, I used the snowball approach to find female combat soldiers who had earned the CAB. I knew five of the females; from these five, I was put into contact with other female combat veterans. Some of the females did not meet the criteria that I was using. For example, I had eight female combat veterans that I had to decline to interview because they were not in the Army. Some of the females who did not meet the sampling group requirements were able to put me in contact with their friends who did.

I found it difficult at times to rely on the snowball method. When I did find prospective respondents, some of them would agree to be interviewed and later, change their mind. I then turned to Facebook, which is a social networking website, to advertise that I was looking for Army female combat veterans who would be interested in being interviewed. I have over 200 friends on Facebook and each was given this notice. Through my Facebook friends, I was able to find, many recruits and some who were very interested in being interviewed. Unfortunately, several of these women did not meet the CAB requirements and could not be included in my study. Although I was able to find four respondents who met the combat criteria using Facebook, I felt terrible turning female veterans down from my study.
It felt as if I was saying to them that their contribution to our country was not as important as someone who had experienced combat. I explained to such women that their service was appreciated and just as important, but that my study had to be narrowed down. The women I turned down had varying reactions. Some of them understood and sounded completely satisfied with my explanation. On the other hand, a couple of the women displayed signs of being disappointed and sad; these women genuinely wanted to speak to someone about their experiences and I was sorry not to be able to include their stories. Their eagerness to be heard indicates that research on the female soldier’s experience is much needed and have value.

**Study Site**

Since this research consisted of interviews, there was no particular “study site.” The interviews took place in whatever location the female veterans found most convenient, which was typically their home, office, and other quiet, comfortable setting of their choice.

**Methods of Data Collection**

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of female combat veterans. I interviewed 12 Army female combat veterans in order to achieve this goal. First, the female veterans were contacted by phone and/or email about the study. I sent them all a consent form, which they filled-out and gave back to me. Once the female combat veteran had signed the consent form and clearly understood the voluntary nature of participation, she was asked a series of open-ended questions.

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13 See Appendix E  
14 See Appendix F and G
I asked respondents if they agreed to be tape-recorded; all of them consented. I transcribed a few of the interviews and I hired a transcriptionist for the rest.\textsuperscript{15} The transcriptionist has a Masters degree in sociology, which aided in her understanding of the gender concepts and research method used for this study. All tape recording, transcriptions, and interview notes were kept under lock and key in my home office. In order to maintain confidentiality, the names of the women interviewed were kept separate from the recordings, transcriptions, and notes. Participants created pseudonyms for themselves to further protect their identities. I maintained a file of contact information and all full names of participants, but this information was kept in a separate file from the pseudonyms; no information was released with subject identifiers. Every effort was made to identify the female combat veterans by general categories or pseudonyms so that their position, the company they served in, or the people who served with them in combat could not be identified.

Because of the consent form description and my initial meeting with them, the female combat veterans that I interviewed knew that the interview was about their combat experience. Each woman therefore had time to prepare and/or decline to be interviewed if she felt she would be emotionally distressed by discussing her experience. Because combat is such an emotionally powerful experience, I was prepared to terminate any interview if I saw signs of distress or discomfort coming from the respondent. I used my own personal experience as a combat veteran and the knowledge I had about sensitive issues pertaining to women and combat to guide me through the interviews. There was one interview where I learned the female combat veteran was being treated for PTSD, but it was not military

\textsuperscript{15} See Appendix H
related. When asked certain questions, this woman did appear to become emotionally upset. At that point, I stopped the interview and asked her if she wanted to continue. She took a few deep breaths and said yes, that she needed to continue and wanted to talk about her military experience. I avoided asking her anything about the topic relating to her PTSD. I provided each interviewed female combat veteran with a list of counseling facilities in their local area should they experience emotional stress.\textsuperscript{16} I also did a follow-up call or emailed the women to ensure that there was no emotional distress related to the interview. The responses I received back were good; in many cases, the women asked when I would be finished and when they could read the final product. They encouraged me to finish the study and seemed excited for the research.

\textbf{Methods of Analysis}

In this study, I explored ways that female combat veterans juggled their performances as women against the demands of being typical soldiers, which is usually associated with behaving in aggressive, emotionless, and violent ways. I explored the gender norms of female soldiers in a stressful combat environment. I used emergent coding to find themes throughout the interviews. During initial coding, I used a line-by-line approach, using in vivo coding (participants’ own wording to generate a code in order to preserve the nature of the statement) when appropriate (Neuman, 2004). Line-by-line coding allowed me to generate categories, which I called themes for my findings, discover unanticipated explanations and perceptions of the female combat veteran’s behavior and thoughts, and see subtle nuances between and within data (Neuman, 2004). Further coding line-by-line

\textsuperscript{16} See Appendix I for full list of facilities
allowed me to remove some of the preconceived notions I had about the data being collected. For example, one of the preconceived notions I had was that female soldiers who were the only female in a large number of males (1 out of 35 or more) would experience gender identity extremes. I learned that it did not matter how many males the females were surrounded by, since the ideology of the military institution and overall number of males in the military created the gendered experience.

I used the coding technique of schema analysis, which is using the same network of ideas and repetition of phrases, to develop the themes from the data (Bloomberg, 2008). For example, the word “tomboy” and/or the idea of being a tomboy were used by every participant; this developed into the theme Tomboy.

I maintained a journal to keep track of and refine ideas that developed as the study progressed. I used my journal notes in similar ways that grounded theorists use the memoing technique, which compares incidents to incidents and then concepts to concepts in the theories (Maxwell, 2005). Memoing works as an accumulation of written ideas into a bank of ideas about concepts and how they relate to each other. I listened to my digital journaling and read my hand-written journal sections after each interview session.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Validity Issue**

As in all qualitative studies, one main validity issue exists. Researcher bias, which is defined by Charmaz (2006) as “the selection of data that fit the researcher’s existing theory or preconceptions and the selection of data that ‘stand out’ to the researcher…both of these involving the subjectivity of the researcher” (p. 108). Remembering that the human factor is both the greatest strength and the fundamental weakness for validity within qualitative
studies, I understood that my own personal experiences had potential to intervene with this study. I researched literature pertaining to women in combat and followed the data that was from the scholarly literature. The themes that developed from this study’s data were constructed from scholarly literature and the journalistic interviews conducted by non-scholarly sources. In this way I have tried to limit my preconceptions.

I have a personal connection and biases about this topic, since I am a female combat veteran. By discussing my findings with faculty members, peers, family, and friends, I was able to be conscious of and therefore minimize my biases. I recognized that my experiences are not the same as those of all American female veterans, and the study data bore that out. For example, I did not experience the double isolation felt by the senior ranking officers, nor did I deal with the constant worry and stress of having a young child at home during my service overseas. I hope to have minimized the researcher bias in this study.

Journal notes and memos helped during this time, so I could reflect on what I was feeling during and after each interview. I used reflective ethnography, which I discuss in the “Social Location/Personal Interest” section of my thesis to help reduce and explain any possible biases within the research. When I began to feel overwhelmed by the stories of the participants, because they reminded me of my own combat experiences, I would speak into a digital recorder to relieve some of the stress. I also journaled about my feelings and reflected on why I was feeling stressed and overwhelmed. At times, I found that some of my feelings were simply because this research was my first major study. Only on a couple of occasions did I need to take a few days off from the research because of the constant memory flashbacks of Iraq; I had a couple dreams about being in Iraq and waking with an anxious and paranoid feeling. When I would wake with these dreams, I would take several deep breaths
and discuss my feelings with my husband, who is a combat veteran. My husband listened and helped to remind me that I have plenty of time to finish this study and that I had his support if I needed to take a little break from collecting data and doing research. At that point when I decided to take a short couple week break. I didn’t look at the data or listen to the transcripts until I believed I was back in a more objective, neutral research state-of-mind. I ensured that my biases did not lead my interviewee to answer questions in particular ways.

Once themes started developing after the first few interviews I started to make sure that the thematic categories I developed were accurately represented. In order to correctly represent their views and interpretations of women in the military, I would randomly ask throughout and after the interview if what they were saying fit a developed theme. I did follow the traditional form of member-checking by asking about the themes after the data was collected with most the interviews, but I was not consistent. For example, if a respondent started explaining about how she felt more comfortable with males than females, I would ask if she felt like she was a tomboy growing up. I observed the woman’s expressions and listened to the tone in their voice to determine if the categories were an accurate representation of their experiences if the participant didn’t appear to like the category, then I would conclude that the category did not fit the experience. When asked, most of the women simply stated how they agreed or disagreed with the category. Only one time was there a disagreement on a theme, which was with Cali when she did not feel she was a tomboy.

**Ethical Issues**

I assured the respondents that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. I provided an informed consent form (see Appendix E) stating that at any time they could
leave the interview and that the information they provided would not be used unless they gave permission to use it by signing the consent form. Transcripts were provided to participants upon request, and they could also ask to have any parts of their statements omitted from the transcript. It should be noted that no one asked for the transcripts, which may have been because the respondents were not reminded of their right to have access to the transcripts. Several of the respondents did request a copy of the final study when completed. Every respondent showed enthusiasm and support for this study. At the conclusion of each interview, they were reassured that the information collected for this study would remain confidential and anonymous.

I turned down a qualified participant because I had personal problems with her husband. I discussed this limitation with the chair of my research committee; we decided that it would be in the best interest of everyone that I did not interview the female veteran. I did not feel that I could be neutral asking her questions knowing her husband’s treatment of women in the military. It was also a concern of mine where the interview could have possibly taken place; I did not want to go to her home to be anywhere near her husband. This was an issue that bothered me for a long time. I am still slightly disappointed in myself for not being able to stay objective about interviewing her, but it was in the best, ethical interests of the study.

Another ethical issue that developed was the use of a transcriber. I had my transcriber fill out a confidentiality form to ensure that she knew the ethical issues involved in this study. As stated previously, she had a Master’s degree in sociology, so she was already aware of the ethical issues in doing research and maintaining confidentiality. She signed the form and returned it before beginning the transcribing of the interview data. She
was instructed to keep all research information in any form or format secure while it was in her possession. She returned all transcripts and any copies to me after transcriptions were completed. She also erased and destroyed all research information in any form or format that was not returnable to me (e.g., information stored on her computer hard drive and email) upon completion of the research tasks.

While the interviews were being transcribed, names of people were removed and some names of places were removed that could have identified the respondents. I also removed some demographic information from the findings chapter, so as not to identify any respondents.

Summary

In this chapter I have described the methods I used in this qualitative study. I conducted in-depth interviews with 12 female veterans who had experienced combat during the Iraq War. Emergent coding techniques were applied, in order to explore gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shaped the experiences of these 12 female veterans. The female veterans were recruited using the snowball approach and sequential sampling because of the specific criteria needed for the sampling group.

There were a few limitations to the study. The main validity issue of the study was addressed, which was researcher bias. The ethical issues were also addressed, which were confidentiality, the use of the transcriber, and a personal issue that I, as the researcher, had with a prospective interviewee’s husband.

Overall, this chapter laid the groundwork and the methodological tools used for this study. I have explained the process of collecting data, the recruitment of the female combat veterans, and explored an understanding of the participants’ experiences.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study is an exploration of gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences of a small sample of U.S. Army female combat veterans. In this chapter, I discuss the data and findings. I begin by explaining who the 12 participants were in relation to the study. I present the findings in sections under thematic headings. There were six key themes. These themes were derived from statements that were similar in content and some that were exact phrases used by each female combat veteran. There were numerous other similarities between the interviewees, but these were the underlying core themes that emerged based on my research questions and overall objective of exploring gender norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences of women veterans.

In this chapter, the emphasis is on letting the female combat veterans speak for themselves. Illustrative quotations taken from interview transcripts attempt to portray multiple female combat veteran experiences and capture some of the richness and complexity of the lives of women combat veterans.

Demographics

The 12 women I interviewed all served in the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) campaign. They all received or were eligible for the Combat Action Badge because of time spent in Iraq being exposed and/or reacting to enemy-fire. Four of the 12 female combat veterans were physically injured during combat; one was medically discharged from the Army due to her injuries. The majority (10 out of 12) racially identified themselves as white, while the other two were Asian or Pacific Islander. The majority (10 out of 12) of the interviewees served in the Army Reserves while on orders for OIF. Since the Active Guard
Reserve (AGR) works and deploys with Reserve Companies, I added one of the participants to the Reserve category, which made the Reserve category total ten and the Active Duty total two.

Respondents represented a variety of ranks, with more than half being Sergeants (E-5). There were also a variety of military occupational specialties (MOS) or jobs that the soldiers were trained to perform; five of the 12 were military police officers. Most of the women interviewed were single and had no children during their overseas deployment. I interviewed female combat veterans from six different states within the United States. At the time of the interview, their ages ranged from 22 to 32 years of age. When they served overseas during combat their age range was smaller, from 20 to 25 years of age. The difference between the age ranges when these women were interviewed and when they were overseas can be attributed to the seven year timeframe of OIF. The length of time that the women had been overseas and were now home in the United States varied from for one month to six years. The chart on the next page provides a graphic visual of the demographics of the participants who were discussed above:

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17 See Appendix J for military rank structure
Please note that the names used were pseudonyms chosen by the participants.

*Rachael did 2 deployments for OIF, but only one made her eligible for the CAB.

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**Figure 1**: Demographics.

W: White  E: Engaged
A: Asian   S: Single
PI: Pacific Islander  RES: Reserves
Rank: (See Appendix J)  AGR: Active Guard Reserves
M: Married  ACT: Active Duty
Data Themes

I identified several themes that helped to understand and explore the social contexts and behaviors of female combat veterans. The themes begin with the respondents referring back to their childhood *tomboy* identity. These themes range from the contextual factors of what I am calling the military’s *good ole boys’ system* and the *double standard/differential treatment* that developed within this institution, to the gendered norms and ideology of the military. The themes of good ole boys’ system and the double standard/differential treatment set the stage for understanding the institutional context of the U.S. Army. The other themes explored the ideas and norms experienced by the respondents within the structure of the U.S. Army. These other themes also explored ways respondents tried to cope with the double standards and differential treatment of women in the military. These themes then discuss the context of being a minority and therefore, the *token female* within this particular social institution. During the token female’s daily interactions in the Army, she experienced *sexual harassment*.

All of these social contexts help to understand the gendered identities, norms and practices that confront female soldiers daily when working/living in a predominately male setting. In order for female soldiers to cope with the *good ole boys’ system*, the *double standards/differential treatments*, being the *token female*, and *sexual harassment*, they find themselves faced with the duality of being a soldier (*doing military*) and being a woman (*doing gender*).

Tomboy

All of the female veterans identified as having tomboyish attributes, in some way or another, growing up. They related to males because they played with boys and acted like
their male friends when they were children. Many used the term tomboy when describing themselves and the image they had of themselves before entering into the military. They felt they could relate better to males and be a good soldier because of acting tomboyish as a child, and then later having more social relationships with males as young adults. The term tomboy refers to a girl who exhibits some characteristics of the gender role of a boy, which includes wearing of typically masculine-oriented types of clothes (baggy pants and loose fitted shirts) and engaging in games and activities (like climbing trees and wrestling) that are often physical in nature, and which are considered to be the domain of boys (Doyle, 1985).

In her research on Israeli soldiers Sasson-Levy (2003) argued that “mimicry of masculine practices seem to offer women a means for resistance, personal power, and pleasure with the repressive military organization” (p. 451). Drawing on her inner tomboy may be a female soldier’s best chance to survive in a male-dominated setting. These female veterans indicated that their childhood identity as a tomboy and later, as young adults, interacting more with males than females led them to believe that they would be openly accepted into the male-dominated environment of the military. They believed that physically and mentally they were similar to males, so it would not have been a large leap for them to join the military along with many of their male friends. My data supported Sasson-Levy’s conclusion, but further suggested that the ability to act feminine in backstage areas is also a source of resistance and empowerment for female soldiers. For example, the female soldiers, from this study, expressed that they felt they could be “themselves” and connect to who they were internally when in private areas where no one could see or judge them.

Indeed, the female soldiers in this study indicated that they felt they could perform as well as males. They said things like: “I knew I could do it; I was a tomboy and gung ho.”
Sissy stated straightforwardly that, “I got along better with the males than the females.”

Crissi, Lucy, and Mariah all described how they identified themselves as being tomboys. They felt more comfortable around males and were used to being around a large number of males because of how they were raised as children. An interesting irony emerged from Crissi’s comments however. She felt simultaneously empowered as a tomboy, while also reassured that men/boys would “look after” her. As Crissi explained,

I got along with males more that I got along with females ‘cause I was raised around boys. I’m pretty much a tomboy, tomgirl I should say, but you felt that comfort zone because you always had someone watching your back and it being a male. A male is going to look after a female so I felt comfortable with males.

Lucy shared a similar experience of being a tomboy by stating, “As far as being the only girl in my squad, I’m used to being around boys. I was a tomboy. I have five older brothers. I was the only girl.” Mariah too, said that she preferred to be around male soldiers rather than female soldiers. As she indicated,

I actually tended to get along with male soldiers better than female.

Sometimes, female soldiers just tend to be a little [catty]; not all females because males can do this [too]. But, sometimes, females just pick about little catty things.

Such comments suggest that respondents found working with men was less competitive and more rewarding than working with just women.

It should be noted that only one out of the twelve participants did not identify herself as a tomboy. Yet even Cali tended to have more male friends than female and she was more
comfortable being around males than females. She described how her friends and family were surprised when she joined the military, since the military is considered a masculine role and she was considered by her friends and family to be more traditionally feminine. But Cali’s childhood behaviors seemed to contradict those experienced by the other female soldiers in the study, because she did not participate in more stereotypical male behaviors. As Cali explained,

When people heard I joined the Army, they were shocked. I don’t like being outdoors and I don’t like getting dirty. I always tended to have more male friends ‘cause a lot of my experiences with my female friends we were in competitions to see who could be better and see who could get the guys. You don’t have that with male friends. You know, once you get over the initial, “Hey, we are not going to date,” then it’s a really cool, comfortable relationship ‘cause you are not competing for anything.

All of these female veterans I interviewed identified, in some way or another, growing up as a tomboy. They believed that they were capable of being soldiers in the U.S. Army because they behaved like boys as children and interacted more with males than females as young adults. Once they joined the Armed Forces, they discovered that this belief of being a tomboy, aiding in them in being good soldiers, was not necessarily accurate, which will be discussed in the next theme –the good ole boys’ system.

**Good Ole Boys’ System**

The good ole boys’ system is an unspoken “boys’ only club” that seems to purposely exclude women and perpetuate gender inequality. The women in this study felt like they could never be “one of the guys.” They were told by male soldiers within their company that
they did not belong in the Army. Sapphire was told, “You all can’t handle this [being in the Army] ‘because you are small, tiny and weak.” These remarks were made to female soldiers when they first entered the enlisted ranks of the Army by other enlisted male soldiers. This remark reveals a common perception of women as being more than simply physically different from men, but also inferior. In her study of *Camouflage Isn’t Only for Combat*, Melissa Herbert (1998) found similar data when she explained that women who behave in traditionally and stereotypically feminine ways are defined as weak and hence incompetent and thus face limited career opportunities. In my study, the female soldiers were not behaving in ways that were overly stereotypically feminine, yet they were still defined as weak and inferior.

This good ole boys’ system reflected a more general unease with women in the military. Studies conducted by the Department of Defense (DoD) in the late nineteen nineties showed that the presence of women did not decrease unit performance (Ender, 2009). However, Ender (2009) noted in his research that there is a general concern regarding the full integration of women into the military, which is that women will interfere with male bonding and unit cohesion. According to his study, the research conducted in these areas reported that when the number of females increased, the male bonding and unit cohesion seemed to decrease. The female soldiers in this study corroborated this statement. Respondents felt that male soldiers expected the female soldiers to fail. This could be related to the pervasive view that Sasson-Levy (2003) found in her study of the Israeli military that “men are the military” and that women are simply in the military (p. 447). Female combat veterans were intruders (per se) in an otherwise male institution and were made to feel unwelcome.
As a result, all the women I spoke with felt like they had to prove themselves constantly. Rachael and Sapphire explained how men in their platoons were opposed to women being in the military. These women explained how they felt like they had to prove physically and mentally that they were worthy of being in the “boys’ only club” of the military. As Rachael said,

I know there was [sic] certain men in our platoon\(^\text{18}\) and our detachment the first time that we deployed that were very much against women being in the military…situations like that I feel like I have to prove myself with them. They try to coddle you because you are a woman, and think that, “Oh, you can’t lift that heavy thing.” No, I’ll lift it myself.

Sapphire echoed Rachael’s sentiments by suggesting that she constantly felt she had to work extra hard to prove her worthiness as a soldier:

I know that when I got into my squad\(^\text{19}\) which was all males, they were waiting for me to screw up on something… I guess I felt like I had to prove them wrong…I’m a hard worker with everything I do…you have to bust your ass to get respect while if you’re a male you [can] just be a male.

Lucy had a similar, but perhaps more tragic, experience. She described how she broke her pelvis in basic training. She went from being in basic training to going to Iraq in a short amount of time, so short of a time that her pelvis was still broken when she served during the Iraq War. Lucy explained,

\(^{18}\) A platoon consists of about 35 soldiers within a company/unit.

\(^{19}\) A squad is a section of about 10 soldiers within a platoon.
In basic training …you’re put in there with guys and you’re doing the same exact thing. Guys are physically supposed to be stronger than females …I think that basic training is easier for guys. Women have to work a hell of a lot harder. I mean, especially being the short chick; I fractured my pelvis in basic [training]. I mean, I went to Iraq with a fractured pelvis.

G.I. Jane Doe was the first participant to use this term the good ole boys’ system. She discussed how on one of her assigned guard missions, she was confronted with another military police (MP) soldier who did not believe she should be an MP because she was female. The male soldier was belligerent to her and blatantly told her she did not belong there in the military. As she concluded, “It’s the good ole boys’ system…there is still a culture of women shouldn’t be there...that women are interfering with the mission. It’s sad, but it’s still practiced.” G.I. Jane Doe also explained how men were blatantly sexist toward her. She described being put on a duty assignment with a male soldier who told her, “You don’t fuckin’ belong here.” This sexist remark angered her, but she expressed how that this was simply how the military institution operated. These sexist remarks and the culture of the good ole boys’ system point to a profound contradiction related to women’s roles in the military. Women are not wanted and even shunned by their fellow soldiers, yet they are specifically recruited and strategically used for particular assignments. For example, female soldiers are assigned gender specific tasks like searching Iraqi women, whose culture prohibits males from touching them.

Mariah also experienced the good ole boys’ system. She described how male and female soldiers are theoretically supposed to be treated equally, but in her experience that is not the case. She discussed how female soldiers are sometimes given the worst jobs and duty
assignments because of the bias from male soldiers toward females. Mariah’s statements contradict Ender’s study (2009) that found female soldiers were working less than their male counterparts and male soldiers treat female soldiers equally. By contrast, Mariah stated:

Even though you are a female on base, you know male and female soldiers are supposed to be treated equally. You could come across where you won’t be...that the male might be treated better. You can come across them being biased because you are a female…giving you the worst jobs instead of the better jobs and duties.

**Double Standard/Differential Treatment**

All the female combat veterans I interviewed also expressed concerns that there seemed to be a double standard for male and female soldiers. Female veterans wanted respect and equality with their male counterparts, but some of the Army standards were different for males and females. For example, the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT) has two of its three events setup differently for males and females. Each event is worth a maximum of 100 points, for a composite score of up to 300 points. The APFT stated\(^\text{20}\) that for the 2-mile run, soldiers aged 22-26 years old and male must complete the run under 13 minutes in order to earn 100 points in that category. However, for the same age range, a female has to run under 15 minutes and 36 seconds in order for her to earn 100 points in the category of the 2-mile run. In the push-up category males, aged 22-26 years old, must perform 75 or more push-ups to earn full credit, while female soldiers are only required to perform 46. Women believe that they are being setup for failure, especially in combat

\(^{20}\) *Army Field Manual 21-20*
situations where they are expected to perform the same duties and carry the same heavy equipment as male soldiers, and yet they are not expected to train the same.

The third standard, which is the sit-up category, is the same for male and female soldiers. If the argument for having a different standard for the push-ups and the 2-mile run for males and females because of physiological reasons (i.e., males are physically stronger, so they should be required to run faster and perform more push-ups), then this third standard points out an irony in the APFT policy. Females physiologically have more abdominal muscles than males (Glenmark, et al., 2004; Volk, 2010), and therefore one could reason that they should have to perform more sit-ups than men. Yet, when there is an opportunity for women to out-perform men, the policy precludes it. Hence the double standard of physical training requirements is blatantly sexist and causes tension between male and female soldiers.

Double standards also existed in the hygiene requirements for females compared to those of males. It is an Army requirement for female soldiers when out in the field (not on a military base) to take a full shower every three days. On the other hand, a male soldier does not have this kind of hygiene requirement. This requirement was put into place to maintain the health of female soldiers, but in combat situations regular showering is not always possible. The hygiene requirement for females is not always enforced by individual companies, but when it is enforced, it can create resentment and hostility because it is a burden to the entire unit. The female soldiers are singled out for needing the required shower, which can be a luxury in a combat environment such as Iraq. On the other hand, their male counterparts may have to go without a shower or stop a mission to accommodate a
female soldier’s need to meet this hygiene requirement. The knowledge of this requirement, whether enforced or not, creates yet another division between male and female soldiers.

Sapphire expressed anger when she explained how she experienced double standards and differential treatment between males and females within the military. She told the story of how males in her unit were allowed to walk around without their shirts on, while female soldiers had to keep all articles of clothing on even inside their sleeping areas. These sleeping areas varied and changed regularly. For example, there were times when a female soldier was provided private sleeping corridors to herself, while other times she slept alongside 30 of her male counterparts in an open, bay-like area. Regardless, the restrictive clothing requirements were enforced for women.

Sapphire then went on to explain how it was difficult for female soldiers to conduct hygiene procedures, especially when males did not have to worry about where to clean themselves. Male soldiers could clean themselves anywhere, but a female soldier had to be aware of who might be offended or distracted by her partially exposed body. This regulation could have been intended to protect female soldiers from sexual harassment, but nonetheless, it felt like a hindrance for some of the female veterans in this study. Sapphire explained how these double standards added unnecessary extra stress to her and other female combat soldiers:

One of my problems is that when we were over there ...the males were allowed to walk around half naked all the time and the females were like, [changed her voice for dramatization] ‘Oh, females you have to stay all concealed, even inside, not just outside for the whole post.’ It’s harder for us to do hygiene … in a combat zone it’s hard to do that ‘cause there’s really
isn’t enough supplies for you to really conduct personal hygiene …we can’t just walk around and take off our shirt and start washing ourselves. It’s harder that way for us to find a place where we are able to like, you know, clean ourselves.

Mariah also experienced female soldiers having to keep themselves concealed, while male soldiers were allowed to expose their legs. She explained how during an Army race in Iraq the participating female soldiers had to wear long pants, so as to not offend the Iraqi nationals, while male soldiers were allowed to wear shorts and short-sleeved shirts during the race. This rule was based on the sensitivity of the Iraqi culture, but the unfairness of the situation felt like a double standard to Mariah who believed that all soldiers should be treated the same. Had she or other female soldiers felt more general support from their male counterparts, they might not have considered an issue of cultural sensitivity issue to be a double standard.

Cali discussed how she felt about having different standards for males and female soldiers who performed the same jobs. She believed that there should be a set standard for each particular job assignment and the gender of the soldier should not matter. If the soldier could perform the duty and meets the prerequisites for the task, then the soldier should be allowed to perform the task. When I asked her how she felt about the practice of using women in combat roles, she said:

I think when it comes to shooting somebody in a role of a combat unit or in combat in general, it shouldn’t be based off if you are male or a female. It should be based off your capabilities. If there is a woman in the infantry who can perform to the standards, that is [sic] needed to, she should be able to
perform in that position. Likewise if there is [sic] males who can’t, then they shouldn’t be able to become infantry or artillery just because they are a guy. The way the Army should have it setup is that certain jobs have certain requirements and you need to meet certain prerequisites to meet them and it shouldn’t matter if you are male or female; it should only matter if you are capable of accomplishing the mission.

Crissi is another veteran who believed that standards should be the same for males and females. Crissi discussed how she believed that the physical training (PT) standards should be the same because when the standards are different it allows for males to “look down on females.” She said, “I don’t think that males and females should have different standards. I think that the standards should be about the same and they are far from being about the same; a male has to do way more push-ups than we do.” When I asked her if she thought the military was setting women up for failure, she replied, “Yes, I think that they are setting you up for failure. They are setting it up so that a male can look down on female and say, ‘You are not as good as me.’ They are setting it for that to be said and for females to be treated that way.”

Cali explained another example of differential treatment for female soldiers. Cali discussed how every time she interacted with males, it was perceived that she was having a sexual relationship with that male. She expressed how she was extremely annoyed and disappointed in this double standard, since male soldiers could be seen with female soldiers and no sexually perceived relationship rumors were started about them. As Cali explained, Every guy that I talked to it was automatically assumed that I was having a relationship with them because I was a single female in Iraq. It made it really
hard to have any interacting with people in public affairs. I’d talk to and work with people in all different sections and all different units around the instillation, and I didn’t like the impression that just because I had a close working relationship with somebody that we are automatically involved in some way … There were no issues with our male soldiers hanging out all the females that they want.

Rumors seemed to be a deterrent for many female soldiers. The perception of having other soldiers think you were doing something overly feminine/female or by contrast, acting too masculine/male was enough to stop females from complaining about double standards and acting out against the double standards. The female soldiers seemed to straddle an imaginary and precarious gender line where their behavior could not fall too close to masculinity or femininity; the female soldiers had to stay within an instable gender boundary defined as “soldier.” This boundary was prescribed not only by formal military regulations, but by informal norms and behaviors. Arianna described how males were allowed to parade around the co-ed sleeping areas with only their underwear on, but there were no female soldiers who dared to do that. When asked if females were allowed to walk around in their bras and underwear, she stated that there was no actually spoken rule against it, but she believed that if a female would have done it that they would have been reprimanded with a counseling statement. Arianna knew what was appropriate behavior for a female soldier based on the norms of the Army and the unit she was assigned.

**Token Female**

The term *token female* is derived from Kanter’s (1993) work on women in male-dominated professions to describe the “token effect” as the social relationship of a small
number of individuals in a larger differing group. In other words, a “token” is a minority within a majority. Kanter notes that “those women who were few in number among male peers and often had ‘only woman’ status became tokens: symbols of how-women-can-do, stand-ins for all women” (p. 207). In this way, Kanter’s ideas helped shed light on how female combat veterans felt and the strategies that they used to overcome being the token female. Women consist of about 15 percent of the entire U.S. military. The Army female combat veterans I interviewed were on average outnumbered by males 1 to 20; some even as much as 1 to 50. When I asked them questions about what it was like working with so many males, the women responded by saying things like, “You have to watch what you do, ‘cause if you mess up, you mess up for all female soldiers.” Sometimes the pressure to live up to a difficult standard made female soldiers turn on themselves or each other. One respondent noted: “I hate the female soldiers that screw up; I mean the ones that are lazy and weak. They give us all a bad name, a bad reputation that makes it hard for the rest of us.”

Ashley, Miss Perfect, and Lucy all described how they believed that females need to remember to set the standard and maintain a good reputation because if they do something that could be perceived as negative, it will have a lasting effect for other female soldiers. For example, Lucy’s advice to other female soldiers was to “know that it’s not easy, there’s going to be stereotypes and you are just going to have to work harder than the males do.” Similarly, Ashley cautioned, “It still is a man’s Army; even though there are more females [now]. I think females, also, need to know that they do need to set the standard. They do need to represent other females because one female giving us a bad rep ruins it for the rest of us.” Finally, Miss Perfect also said that women should be aware that they have to work harder than men as soldiers. As she stated,
It’s irritating working with people who join the military for the wrong reasons, and especially women who join the military for the wrong reasons. It makes it hard on me trying to do my job when people have this perception of females that give it a bad rap, like females that are whining, females who don’t want to do this or do that, crying over something, [or] hooking up with all the men... I’m not that girl so don’t treat me like that. I’m here to do my job.

What is interesting in these comments is that women soldiers do not critically evaluate the standards themselves as intended to exclude or stigmatize women. Rather, they blame other women for setting a poor example of what women can do.

**Higher rank = isolation.** Female soldiers who held higher ranking positions felt double stress from being both a female and an officer. They felt more isolated than other female soldiers who were not in leader positions. For example, Cali described how she was the only female in her platoon and the officer in charge of the platoon; this combination of being the leadership and the only female made social relationships with any male extremely difficult and non-existent. If she were to be seen socially interacting with males from her platoon, it would be considered fraternization, which is a relationship between soldiers of different ranks. Fraternization is usually focused on different gender relationships, but it can also apply to same gender relationships. Sanctions for fraternization may include counseling, reprimand, order to cease, reassignment, or adverse action. Potential adverse action may include official reprimand, adverse evaluation report(s), non-judicial punishment, separation, bar to reenlistment, promotion denial, demotion, and in extreme cases courts martial.

When I asked Cali about her social relationships with male soldiers in her detachment and whether or not she found any alliances or had any difficulties with them, she replied,
It was an extremely difficult working relationship because as the most senior person in the unit you are expected to keep some sort of distance from your soldiers. When they are the only people you are working with and living with and interacting with on a daily basis, it’s hard to keep that separation. And my biggest gripe about that is that for some reason the military has this perception if you are male friends with a female or if you a female friends with a male, there is automatically something romantic or sexual going on.

Cali also explained that it was difficult for her to form friendships. As she explained, That made it almost impossible for me to have any working or social relationship with any male in my unit or outside my unit. Because if it was in my unit, it was fraternization; if it was outside my unit, everyone was curious about my business, what I was doing personally, which I don’t see why it is so interesting. I mean just because I go to chow with somebody doesn’t mean I am sleeping with them.

That was the most stressful part of it. I didn’t feel like I had anyone that I could confide in because everyone that I was close with were male and if I was constantly confiding in these people, then it was automatically perceived that there was a relationship involved. All they guys... do everything together and then there is me. Like when we were in Kuwait, they were all in their tent doing stuff together and I’m like in a tent forever away all by myself. I’m the only one in the tent. It was really isolating being the only female. I think that that might have been different if we’d of had [sic]
another girl in our unit. I think it might have been easier and not so polarizing.

When I asked Ashley, the other senior ranking female soldier, how being a female in charge of a whole platoon of males made her feel, her response was that it was intimidating at first, but then she gained the respect of the soldiers she was responsible for leading. She did describe how she was isolated from the other officers, who were all male, by the commander of the company and had a difficult time forming close relationships with anyone because of her leadership position and her status as a female. As Ashley explained,

At first, I was intimated because I took on an ordinance group. Since I’m air defense and I moved into an ordinance group, I had no clue what I was doing and I felt like they were going to look at me like a was an idiot, but after a while my guys really started looking out for me, so they were like my kids. They started calling me “Mom” when we were over in Iraq. At first, it was really uncomfortable and I was really nervous, but then after awhile I started loving my job ‘cause my guys were great.

Ashley went on to describe how she negotiated being called “Mom,” and felt that she gained soldiers’ respect:

All but three were older than me, but they still called me mom because I was the officer and the platoon leader, but as far as with my soldiers being the only female and the officer, I got the respect I needed. However, with my commander it was completely different; he treated me totally different that he treated the male officers.
It is interesting that the male soldiers referred to her as someone who provided nurturing and nourishment, love, and tenderness. It is very unlikely that if the gender roles were reversed that this situation would occur. It would seem that the male soldiers under her leadership had to neutralize her sexual appeal as a woman by calling her Mom, while also reconstituting their relationship with her.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Kanter (1993) believed that women needed to be in greater numbers in the workforce (or in this case, the military) in order for there to be equality and for women not to be stereotyped or for gendered behaviors towards females to cease. Especially since the combination of female soldiers being in leadership positions can lead to isolation, it would seem that social non-sexual relationships with males and females need to be encouraged not discouraged.

**Sexual Harassment**

All the female combat veterans in this study experienced or witnessed sexual harassment, and in some cases sexual assault. As mentioned previously, the U.S. Army’s definition of sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination that involves unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other sexually verbal or physical. Sexual harassment continues to be an important area of concern for women in the military, with over half of women in the Armed Forces self-reporting experiencing sexual harassment (Ender, 2009; Firestone & Harris, 1999; Sasson-Levy, 2003). Firestone and Harris (1999) discovered through a comparison of DOD sexual harassment surveys that sexual harassment is still very prevalent within the military. Herbert (1998) found from her in-depth interview data those female soldiers who were physically attractive, therefore acting feminine, were perceived as sexually available, leaving them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Firestone and Harris
explained that the fear of being blamed, either for seeming to invite the harassment or for filing charges against the perpetrator, can prevent many women from labeling behavior harassment and reporting the incident. Sasson-Levy (2003) study on Israeli female soldiers found that female soldiers often trivialized incidents of sexual harassment, which is what this study found was the case, too. This coping strategy may have been a reflection of their sense that they were essentially powerless to change the culture of the military, despite policies and rules against sexual harassment.

The female veterans from this study said things like: “You have to weigh the consequences...” for filing complaints; and “Guys are just naturally more aggressive,” meaning females are not and that “females can control themselves.” Most of the female veterans interviewed felt like the sexual harassment was just “boys being boys.” They seemed to normalize or naturalize the sexual harassment. They believed it was just part of being a female soldier; it was to be expected. Sometimes, they felt like they were sexual objects for the male soldiers, not soldiers themselves. Some of the respondents expressed anger when discussing sexual harassment. On the other hand, others seemed to be nonchalant about the issue, which refers to them normalizing the sexual harassment.

Miss Perfect described an incident that she experienced with a male soldier in her unit who would openly talk about sex and compliment her on her physical appearance. After she confronted the male soldier, asking him to stop, he made a mockery of her by taking a jar and announcing to everyone in the platoon that if they said anything sexual about her that they had to put money in the jar.
Sissy also experienced sexual harassment. Sissy explained how she knew many higher ranking officers who would sexually harass female soldiers and/or condone other male soldiers who were suspected of sexually harassing female soldiers.

Sexual harassment is part of the culture within the military institution, and yet there is a policy against it (this is another form of double standard). Firestone and Harris (1999) stated that “harassment in general is a part of the culture of the military and sexual harassment is sometimes a subset [of that culture]” (p. 617). As Sissy explained,

In general it’s so important to be able to stick up for yourself as a woman... you have to know that people are going to try and take advantage of you. Don’t be naïve and think that’s not going to happen...I know a lot of things that I talked about were about sexual things and that is so prevalent and that pisses me off, excuse my language, but it does that it’s not recognized more. Its people, especially the higher ups, act like it’s not happening or not going on and sometimes they’re the biggest culprits. I saw Colonels do things overseas that were despicable... it makes me furious because I’ve lived it. I’ve seen it and I’ve been in more than one unit, you know, so I know it’s there.

By virtue of being female, women soldiers were exposed to numerous challenges, not only to their soldiering skills and capabilities, but also to their very person and sense of integrity.

It is important to note that female combat soldiers do not just experience sexual harassment from other soldiers, but from local nationals too. When a soldier is overseas, she must deal with the culture of the country in which she is stationed. In this case, Iraqi nationals seemed to think that American women were sexually promiscuous, which is
another reason why female soldiers were required to dress differently, at times, than male soldiers.

Emily described how she was confronted about sex by an Iraqi interpreter with whom she had to work on a daily basis. Miss Perfect also experienced sexual harassment from Iraqi prisoners. The prisoners would, on a daily basis, ask her if she would have sex with them alluding to other sexual acts by asking her to shower with them. She said she would simply ignore them, but it was somewhat distracting to have these harassing comments made to her every day. Here Emily described the frequent uncomfortable and sexually charged conversations she had with the Iraqi interpreter:

I had this interpreter and he would be really weird around me; he would always make me feel uncomfortable. He had a lot of wives and he always would brag about how many wives he had. He had three and in their culture they can have four, so...one day he just randomly came up to me and he said, you know, ‘Are you a virgin?’ I was shocked. I could not believe this guy just asked me. He came up and apologized that he didn’t mean to offend me, but he knew many American women slept around and I said, ‘Have you ever been to America?’ and he said ‘No.’ Then I said, ‘Well then how could you classify American women like that?’ He said, ‘Well, I heard stories and I’ve seen your movies.’ I said, ‘You can’t judge all women like that.’ ... I had to work with him so I eventually just ignored him.

The female veterans from this study used various strategies to cope with sexual harassment. Some of them reported the sexual comments and physical advances that they experienced, but the reports filed had no results and caused the female soldiers to feel
powerless and angry. Some of them internalized the constant sexual harassment and normalized the behaviors as simply part of their military experience.

**Doing Military (Frontstage)**

Goffman’s concept of frontstage is useful in understanding how female soldiers present themselves in the presence of other soldiers or simply when they “do military.” Applying Goffman’s (1959) idea, when a female enters into the military she is not likely to be informed of all the informal ways to be a soldier. Using Goffman to interpret, a female soldier will be given the informal directions in bits and pieces throughout her own performances and experiences as a soldier; she will learn the norms of the military. When female soldiers “do military,” they follow Army regulations, such as pulling their hair back and wearing their uniform in order to maintain the appearance of a soldier. Goffman (1959) described this outward appearance of the frontstage as how an actor presents him/herself to an audience. Engaging with props and costumes, the actor performs a role signified by “insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like” (p. 24). This appearance included keeping a natural look by not wearing make-up and maintaining close-cut fingernails, and keeping their hair short or pulled back. Some women in this study discussed how they knew females who would shave their heads in order to overcome the obstacle of having longer hair or hair that needed to be constantly cut to maintain the military standard of a proper haircut length without being pulled back.

Women in the military also report taking on stereotypical masculine identity traits and performing a “masculinized gender” (Butler, 1990). For example, using Sasson-Levy’s (2003) study on Israeli female soldiers her data would indicate that the act of the shaven
head, as a woman adopting the masculine identity and collaborating with the “military andocentric norms” (p. 441). Herbert (1998) interpreted this behavior differently, explaining that any female soldier who went as far as shaving her head was being too masculine and would incur penalties from other soldiers. The women in the present study aligned more with Herbert’s interpretation in that they discussed how the female with a shaven head was ostracized by both male and female soldiers for being “too manly.” Clearly the gender line was always under negotiation.

Women also used tactics of hiding their breasts to avoid appearing too feminine. For example, some of the female soldiers in this study spoke about friends whom they knew who would wear two sports bras to prevent their breasts from “flopping” while in physical training uniforms; they referred to this as the “uniboob” because it was “less attractive.” Referring to the uniboob, one female stated, “Who wants to see that.” The two sports bras would flatten the breasts. The stopped movement of larger breasts was not only something that a female soldier wanted to do because floppy breasts were painful, but it prevented them from being a distraction for male soldiers.

Butler (1990) described how through “stylized repetition of acts,” such as wearing dirty uniforms, lowering their tone of voice, and using foul language, which were performed by the women in this study that they are performing masculinized gender (p. 140). Sissy described how she conducted fuel missions alongside male soldiers in her unit. She would go without showers, like the male soldiers, and sleep under the trucks alongside her male comrades. She saw herself as a soldier on those missions, not a woman. Emily also described how she believed women should have the right to serve their country just the same as males, but doing so requires females to be less emotional and maintain a military
(masculine) attitude and appearance. Ender (2009) described in his study, during his survey, similar responses from female and male soldiers in his survey; these soldiers believed that women should have the right to serve their country the same as males, but that females needed to remember that they are soldiers first. In my research, Emily explained how women were as capable as men in the military:

I think because Iraq for the first has put women on the front lines. I think it has proven that they absolutely can handle combat situations. I think that they’ve proven that they’re capable of keeping a level head in most situations and you know, they’re capable of the doing jobs that they’ve been given, that they’ve been allowed to do…I definitely think that every woman can fight right alongside men and handle it.

Arianna explained how she maintained her military appearance by dressing in uniform and looking “rough and tough,” yet still being seen as a woman by Iraqi nationals. She had to show that she was a soldier up front and not a woman, so she would ignore the nationals’ compliments of her physical appearance. Here Arianna explained how she negotiated the duality of being a soldier and a woman:

I was trying to be the soldier and … they’re like trying to play on the woman side of me…If I was there just as a woman I would have been like, thanks for the compliment. I had to be kind of like, push that out and be. I felt like I had to be hardened almost to the compliments.

In all of these social interactions, the female veterans expressed ways that they dealt with being a soldier in the presence of others, while still trying to maintain a sense of
personal dignity and self awareness. They performed acts that were considered masculine in order to uncover what it meant to be a soldier.

**Doing Gender (Backstage)**

As a way to reconnect with their female/more feminine sides, the women in this study often reported what West and Zimmerman (1987) described as “doing gender.” These behaviors were reserved for backstage areas where the women allowed themselves to take on more traditionally feminine characteristics. Goffman used the term back region, or backstage, to refer to places where “a performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (p. 112). As discussed previously, the backstage for women in combat could be interpreted as the ‘down-time’ when performance of masculine soldier is stopped and they can take their uniform off and literally ‘let their hair down.’ In such cases female soldier usually found herself negotiating the Army Regulations and in some cases breaking regulations, but no one knew about the disobedience because they were performing these feminine acts backstage. These included acts such as: painting toenails flashy colors, wearing thongs or lacy panties and bras, keeping legs and underarms shaven, curling eye lashes, having facial parties (“girls’ night”), and wearing “perfumy lotions” or body sprays. Backstage the female soldiers in this study participated in what Sasson-Levy (2003) described as symbolizing femininity through a “concern with beautifying themselves” (p. 452).

Many of the participants shared sentiments of wanting to take on more traditional feminine behaviors. For example, Crissi discussed how when she was in Iraq, she missed wearing her hair down and putting make-up on. She attributed having longer hair and French manicured nails to feeling more feminine. She enjoyed having “girl chats” with other female
soldiers and painting her toenails. She provided many examples of how she felt the need to perform certain rituals backstage, so that she could feel feminine in a male-dominated environment. As Crissi said,

In Iraq ... you are in uniform 24/7, boots, ACU pants, shirts, there’s [sic] days when you just want to say: ‘I want to let my hair down; I want to wear my hair down; I want to put make-up on the way I always put make-up on.’ You miss being a woman [her emphasis] and it does take away for that, and it does take away for you being a woman. You miss having your nails done and you miss having your hair down. I’ve always missed how I would get French manicures ... I missed that and just letting my hair down.

Did you do miss being a woman?21

Very much so. Yeah, me and my roommate... after we got off work ... we’d just do each other’s make-up in our room or paint each other’s toenails... it was nice to have girl-chat. I know that sounds weird ... but it’s nice to have another lady there to be a lady with. You can’t go outside the room with make-up like that or purple toes. But that was our way of keeping our little feminine about us.

Arianna also provided many examples of acts that she performed backstage in order for her to “feel normal” and more feminine. She would have her mother send her items such as loofah bars, lotions, toe-socks, soft toilet paper, and brightly colored nail polish. Arianna enjoyed painting her toenails electric blue. She had her own enclosed sleeping area, separate

21 When appropriate I inserted the question I asked, which will be distinguished by italicized font.
from male soldiers, to perform these rituals. She would find the time, while off-duty, to pamper herself. She liked wearing “girly lotions” when she was in off-duty in the comfort of her own room. I found it important to note that she attributed feeling “normal” to performing these kinds of rituals. She needed to have the time to be feminine, to be herself, in order to continue performing as a soldier. Arianna’s sentiments support Sasson-Levy’s (2003) research, which suggested that women do not fully identify with the “military’s gender regime which leads women soldiers to distance themselves from identities and practices they perceive as traditionally feminine” (p. 451). Arianna wanted to perform feminine acts, and she did so behind-the-scenes.

Cali’s strategy for feeling like a “woman” was wearing make-up. She did not paint her nails, but she explained how she would keep them looking decent, so that she could feel more feminine. She maintained the outside performance of a good soldier (i.e., keeping her hair within regulations and wearing the military uniform), but decided that, even though she was required to wear a uniform that she did not want her body to appear androgynous. After she lost some weight while in Iraq, she bought smaller fitting uniforms to remind herself that her shape was still that of a female.

Not all acts related to femininity reflected a woman’s concern for her appearance. Sissy explained how she enjoyed baking cheesecakes and watching movies, and how after cooking she felt comfortable and more at ease.

**Soldier = masculine.** Using West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept of “doing gender,” it can be precluded that due to society’s constraints placed on males and females, individuals are bound to gender roles. According to this theory, these roles are situational, meaning that the role is played or not played, depending on the situation that is at hand.
Gender display is something that happens within our culture when we, as human beings, recognize what is acceptable behavior for a male and what behavior is acceptable for a female. In the military, where every soldier is supposed to be the same and wear the same uniform, gender displays still happen because they are engrained into our society as a cultural norm.

Often the female soldiers in this study presented themselves in opposition of other women and did not want to identify with being a female. Female soldiers felt that they couldn’t be too emotional and they said things like, “You better not act girlie” and “no one wants a sissy soldier.” Arianna explained why she would paint her toenails and wear toe-socks, since it reminded her of the fun person she was before she deployed while not compromising her role performance. When I asked her if she felt like she could be herself as a soldier, she replied,

It wasn’t so much that, but being over there it was kind of like, it made me think about who I was because you know after being there for so long like you kind of well, who am I? And I needed something to remind me of that fun person this fun outgoing person that I was before I deployed.

Cali also resisted the expected masculine behaviors by wearing a smaller uniform, which served as a reminder to the males in her unit that she was a woman, not just a soldier. Rachael and Mariah also discussed how being a soldier means acting masculine. Rachael explained how women should be themselves and not over-compensate their actions because they think they need to simply because they are female. When Rachael and Mariah were asked how they thought women’s reactions in combat differed from those of men in their unit, they both discussed how women were essentially more sensitive than men and more
willing to discuss emotional issues related to combat. Mariah went so far as to provide an example of how women would be more sensitive to children in combat situations where a child may be used as a human bomb, which could ultimately compromise a soldier’s mission. Mariah was referring to the traditionally feminine female taking on the motherly role of caring/nurturing children more so than a traditionally masculine male (whom she attributed to male soldiers)

**Other Interesting Findings**

Not all women in the military experience being in a male-dominated and combat environment the same way. There were numerous differences between experiences based on race, chain of command, and senior ranking soldiers compared to lower enlisted female soldiers within the combat environment. I now discuss these differences as they emerged in the data.

Although, I was only able to interview two non-white females, the topic of racial differences in experiences did emerge. The two experiences described need to be further researched, since it is difficult to explore any hypotheses with such little data. But I find these women’s experiences relevant to include. One of the racial issues was with Iraqi nationals, and the other was how race affected a military unit’s cohesion among soldiers. Lucy self identified her race as Pacific Islander. She has a dark complexion, with dark hair and dark brown eye color. When she discussed with me the way Iraqi nationals treated her, it became evident that her experiences were very different from the white females I had interviewed, and from my own experience as a white female veteran. Lucy was permitted to sit at an Iraqi dinner table with the males, which was not a norm in 2003 when Iraqis were first being exposed to American females (Ender, 2009). She was not touched by Iraqi
women or children, like some of the white females I interviewed. She was never complimented on her hair or eye color, which for some of the women interviewed was an added stress because it was a daily occurrence of being noticed for their physical features, rather than for them being a soldier. Lucy indicated that in some instances, her gender and race enabled better relationships with prisoners. As she explained,

Actually, as far as the prison went, actually I think the prisoners treated the female soldiers a little better than the male soldiers as long as you gained their respect...I don’t know if they didn’t like white males, but they always treated minorities and females better than men, from what I experienced, than white males.

When I asked her to tell me about her experience being a female working side by side local national males while in Iraq who held sexist beliefs, she seemed to sympathize with the Iraqi women she encountered:

They can be talking about you and be really nice to your face, and I’m sure they’d just be talking Arabic and who knows what they were saying about you. I mean they treated me with respect as far as to my face, but you know I don’t know how it was otherwise. When I went over to their homes, I was allowed to eat with them, which was weird because their wives and daughters were not allowed to eat, so that was very strange.

Yeah, that’s probably a unique experience then because I mean, even whenever I went into homes, I was more pushed over to the females, like you know the mothers and daughters.

Really?
Yeah, different.

It depends on which home you’re in and depends on the person. I don’t know.

I was just this woman. I was just sitting around like I was one of the guys. I felt bad. I felt like ya’ll prepared the food and you’re just standing there.

On the other hand, Sissy was a white female, but she experienced racial issues among the Black males in her platoon. The intersection between race and gender became evident with Sissy’s story, but needs to be considered more in future research. Sissy described how the White male soldiers and Black male soldiers would segregate themselves. She described how the Black males would only associate with Black females. Sissy felt that this was not a gender issue but a racial issue:

I built a closer relationship with the males, like I said, they called me “Sissy” so I was like their little sister, even though I was older than some of them... They really looked out for me and took care of me. In fact, the only thing, and I hate to say this, but the only males I had some problems with that I didn’t connect with were some of the African American males in our platoons because they all kind of stuck together and they didn’t really associate with the white girls like they did the black girls. I don’t think that had anything to do with the males and females; I think it had to do with being closer to your race while being over there.

Further research might explore the intersectionality of race and gender in situations where there are more than just one or two females in a company.

When I asked the respondents what advice they would give an 18-year-old woman about to join the military their answers were pretty consistent among all 12 respondents. The
female combat veterans recommended that every woman should push herself, be true to herself, know herself, stay strong, and stand-up for herself. They said the Army will be difficult and women will be faced with males and females who think women are not worthy of being a soldier. G.I. Jane Doe and a couple of others recommended that women who want to serve wait before starting a family because they believed that the military environment is not family oriented. They all agreed, however, that the Army is a wonderful opportunity and great way to travel and experience the world. All the respondents felt it was necessary to speak about the token effect and how as a female in a male-dominated environment she must represent all other female soldiers, which means always being the good soldier. Cali spoke about never “playing the girl card” by using the female gender to try and get something a woman wants in the military. To these women, suppressing your gender performance is essential. The military is not gender neutral, but it is decidedly non-feminine.

G.I. Jane Doe summarized many of the positive sentiments expressed by the female soldiers that I interviewed:

There are a lot of wonderful opportunities available for you. It is not going to be the easiest decision of your life, but it can be a really good one. If you want an easy life, join the Air Force. Don’t be disillusioned, as there will be both men and women that will feel that you are not worthy. Prove them wrong. Don’t get married or have children while you are doing this; this is not a family-oriented career. But it is a wonderful way to see the world.

The final similarity that needs to be discussed is about the chains-of-command the female veterans experienced. The chain of command is the line of authority and responsibility along which orders are passed within the military. In general, military
personnel give orders only to those directly below them in the chain of command, and receive orders only from those directly above them. All decisions are expected to be made at the lowest level possible, but if required, can be taken all the way up the chain to the Commander in Chief i.e., the President of the United States.

If the female soldiers had a chain-of-command that cared about gender equality and the well-being of every soldier, then sexual harassment and other gender issues did not seem as prevalent. For example, Mariah had a good chain-of-command. She explained how the First Sergeant (1SG), who was in charge of her company, would ensure that every soldier was treated equally. First Sergeants handle the leadership and professional development of their Non-Commissioned officers, manage the promotable soldiers within the company, and handle the daily responsibilities of running the company/unit. The 1SG in charge of Mariah’s company would have each soldier perform the duty that the soldier was assigned to do, like a mechanic would perform mechanical work whether the soldier was male or female.

The interaction between gender performance and soldiering is a complex one and this chapter has merely scratched the surface but the similarities and differences discussed above point to areas where future research could turn up additional interesting findings.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the themes uncovered by the in-depth interviews of this study. I started by reporting the findings that have helped understand the male-dominated environment of the military i.e., the contextual factors. Then the thematic findings explored how female soldiers juggled their performance in particular contexts within the military setting. I also included some similarities and differences that presented themselves from the data, in order to recommend future research in chapter 5. As is typical of qualitative
research, extensive samples of quotations from the female combat veterans were included in the report. By using their own words, I aimed to accurately present the perceptions of the women studied. Many of the themes are intertwined and layered, further validating the commonality of the experiences of female veterans. The entire story of each female veteran’s experience is relevant and important to understanding the norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape women’s military experiences.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My purpose was to shed light on the gender issues surrounding women in the military, with the hope that my findings will serve to educate my peers, fellow soldiers, and contribute to the scholarly literature about female soldiers. Women have to overcome numerous issues on a daily basis while working in the military, such as sexual harassment, gender norm confusion, and beliefs that females are physically inferior to males. In particular, my rationale was to identify women’s roles and gender performance in the military. I connected symbolic interactionist, dramaturgy, and feminist theories to these issues and will provide possible recommendations for social and organizational changes for the many women in today’s military. My hope is that this study will help others to understand and support female soldiers who work in a male-dominated Army and in combat.

Presenting an analysis of the findings uncovered in this study warrants a degree of caution. First, the research sample was small, consisting of interview data from only 12 interviewees. Second, the recruitment of participants was only for Army female combat veterans who met the CAB requirements of having been exposed to enemy-fire. Thus, all other female veterans’ perceptions were not represented, which leaves out a variety of other experiences. For these reasons it must be stressed that the implications that can be drawn are specific to the experiences of the sample group under study. Ultimately, I am open to the possibility that others might have told a different story, but this study represents how these twelve female combat veterans have experienced being a soldier and a woman in today’s

22 i.e. what is/is not acceptable behavior for a female soldier
Army. Furthermore, this study is a representation of how I understand and make sense and meaning of the data I have collected from this specific sample group.

**Review Research Questions with Themes**

Research Question 1: Did women combat veterans feel strain and/or develop strategies for dealing with gender related tensions and performances in a male-dominated environment?

The first research question sought to understand and shed light on how women in the military negotiate the duality of being a woman in a hierarchical, male-dominated environment. I presented the theme *Doing Gender*, which was borrowed from West and Zimmerman’s (1987) concept, in the context of Goffman’s (1959) concept of backstage. Typically doing gender was a way of performing gender socially, signaling to others that one is adhering to certain social expectations about being male or female, masculine or feminine in society. However, in the military, the backstage is where female soldiers were able to maintain their own sense of femininity while still in the military. The female soldiers performed these acts privately to remind themselves that they were still women and at times try to remind the male soldiers of the same. They wanted to be seen as both a woman and a soldier without exposing themselves to unwanted sexual advances or hostility. As a result, the female soldiers usually found themselves negotiating the Army Regulations, and in some cases breaking regulations, but no one knew about the disobedience because they were performing what they defined as “feminine” acts in the backstage regions. These acts included a variety of grooming and self-care rituals, sometimes performed alone and other times, in some groups with other women. Such rituals performed in the backstage regions of
the combat zones seemed to be the only way women were able to reconnect with their whole selves.

The female soldiers I interviewed also felt trapped and cheated in certain ways because of the double standards for both males and female soldiers. The female combat veterans wanted respect and equality just like their male counterparts, but the Army standards were different for males and females. The different standards provided opportunities for male soldiers to look down on female soldiers for not being able to perform to the same standards, which in some cases created resentment and hostility among units with male and female soldiers.

The female soldiers coped with these double standards in different ways. Most of the women ignored and/or accepted the andocentric norms, while others expressed anger and tried to address the issues with their chains-of-command, but to no avail. The women, for the most part, accepted the andocentric norms of the male-dominated environment and expected themselves to fit into those norms in order to be part of the military. They responded angrily to the notion of double standards for men and women.

Based on my data, women in the Army appeared to feel strain while dealing with gender related tensions and performances while serving in Iraq. Doing a soldier’s duty meant suppressing their femininity. The women in this study felt the need to develop strategies to compensate for living in such a male-dominated environment, just so they could “feel normal” as a woman. When confronted with the ridicule of male soldiers, female soldiers experienced dissonance and felt the strain from being a woman and a soldier.

Research Question 2: Did becoming a soldier alter a woman’s perception of herself as a female or change her identity in any way?
The second research question sought to answer how a woman saw herself outside of being a soldier and how she navigated between being a woman and a soldier. According to the soldier = masculine theme, it would appear from the experiences of the twelve women interviewed that being a soldier meant performing their duties as a man would. The female combat soldiers in this study spoke about the duality of being a woman and a soldier. They felt that they could not be too emotional and act feminine since those characteristics were inconsistent with soldiering. They said things like: “you better not act girlie” and “No one wants a sissy soldier,” which are examples of what Sasson-Levy’s (2003) Israeli female soldier study that concluded military women are agreeing with the hegemonic ideology in which the military consists of masculine soldiers. Again, this is consistent with Smith’s (2005) idea of subordinate groups in society developing a bifurcated consciousness where they live with both the reality of actual experience (being female means acting on certain aspects of femininity) and the reality of social expectations (the military’s hegemonic masculine ideology).

Based on the data, I believe that as female soldiers wore their military uniform, they were forced to alter their performance of self. As children, these women interviewed behaved similarly to boys. These childhood behaviors and later, as young adults, their numerous interactions with male friends led them to believe that they would be physically and mentally able to survive in the military. Unfortunately, the women were not able to penetrate the “boys’ only club” of the good ole boys’ system engrained into the informal social structure of the military. The female soldiers could never stop being women; therefore, in the eyes and minds of their male counterparts, they would never truly be soldiers.
The female soldiers changed their identity to fit the social context of the military because they truly wanted to be accepted as soldiers, not women. They tried to maintain some perception of themselves by doing gender\textsuperscript{23} and performing feminine acts backstage (Goffman, 1958). This idea follows Goffman’s theory that individuals play multiple roles and serve different audiences in order to maintain sociability. There are some implications to having to alter one’s performance in such a dramatic fashion; the female veterans deal with additional stress (beyond combat stress), experience rejected and jaded feelings about the military and their male comrades, and require more backstage time to prepare themselves for their performance of being a soldier. The female soldiers are resentful; male soldiers seem to have it easier because their actions are never questioned, just accepted as the way a soldier is supposed to behave. For example, when a female soldier acts emotional or has simply a bad day she is labeled as doing or acting that way because she is a woman, not anything to do with being a soldier or simply a sensitive person.

Research Question 3: What strategies did female soldiers develop in the context of combat and being surrounded by a disproportionate number of males?

The third research question sought to understand the strategies that female soldiers used to overcome being heavily outnumbered by male soldiers in their units. Again, it is important to note that women comprise of about 15% of the entire U.S. military. The Army female combat veterans I interviewed were on average outnumbered by males 1 to 20, in some cases outnumbered even 1 to 50.

\textsuperscript{23} West & Zimmerman (1987) concept
When I asked the female veterans questions about what it was like working with so many males, they responded by saying things like: “You have to watch what you do, ‘cause if you mess up, you mess up for all female soldiers” and “I hate the female soldiers that screwed up, I mean the ones that are lazy and weak. They give us all a bad name, a bad reputation that makes it hard for the rest of us.” These women were constantly feeling the pressure of being the token female, of being seen as symbols or representatives of all women (Kanter, 1993), and they apply the critical, male-centered lens to themselves and each other.

Most of the female veterans I interviewed used the strategy of ignoring or denying the issue of being outnumbered by males. They would perform their military jobs as if they were not the only female. Many times this strategy would later cause aggravation and additional stress to the female veteran; she would feel the need to journal about her aggravations and/or vent about a day’s events with another female. The women expressed feeling hurt and a sense of belittlement when singled out negatively. They felt that it was necessary for them to participate in this study to have their voice heard and aid in the possible change of treatment of female soldiers.

Research Question 4: What stories did female combat veterans share that can help enlighten others about the challenges facing women in combat or female combat veterans?

The final research question sought to determine how these female combat veterans could help other women who are currently serving or thinking about joining the Army. Every experience that these women had is important; the paramount answer to this research question would be for women who are in or thinking about joining the military to simply sit down and talk to other women who have been there and done that. Since that is not always possible, it seems important to highlight the most prevalent experiences female soldiers may
encounter and offer synthesized advice from the female combat veterans interviewed for this study.

As mentioned previously, all the female combat veterans in this study experienced or witnessed sexual harassment and in some cases sexual assault. As I noted, the women in this study said things such as, “You have to weigh the consequences...” for filing complaints because it could reflect poorly on the female soldier’s career in the military and “guys are just naturally more aggressive.” They felt like the sexual harassment was just “boys being boys.” This is consistent with Sasson-Levy’s (2003) finding that Israeli female soldiers often trivialized incidents of sexual harassment. Sometimes, they felt like they were sexual objects for the male soldiers, not soldiers themselves. They expressed feeling powerless and resented sexual harassment reports that went up the chain of command with no result. They all seemed to normalize and internalize the sexism and sexual harassment. Solutions to such challenges would, no doubt, require considerable intervention, including efforts to resocialize every new recruit and their superiors on the dynamics of sexism and gender-based harassment. Accountability at all levels would need to be improved as well, and women in higher ranking positions throughout the armed forces might start to change the sexist culture.

**Strengths of the Study**

Since this qualitative study required a focused or narrowed sample of female soldiers, a strength of this study is its focus on the Army’s CAB award as a qualifying marker for participants. The CAB ensured that the female veterans were definitely exposed to combat environments; the stress of combat and the relationship between males and females change in combat environments as opposed to rear echelon environments without exposures to enemy fire/engagement. For example, Cali, one of the female veterans interviewed, expressed how
the combat environment made her feel isolated, which helped validate why I limited the study to combat veterans. Again, another reason I chose combat veterans was for consistency in experiences.

During the recruitment process of finding female veterans to interview, I used Facebook, which is a social networking website, to advertise that I was looking for Army female combat veterans who would be interested in being interviewed. I found this approach very useful in finding the sample set of women I needed, since the population of participants was difficult to locate. The use of a newly developed social network is an impressive strength to the study because it showed innovation and the desire from others (female veterans on Facebook) to be part of this study and later read the results.

**Recommendations**

Since the women in this study participated because they wanted to encourage positive changes within the Army to the benefit of female soldiers, the following sections will offer some recommendations for policy changes in the U.S. Army.

**U.S. Army**

The U.S. Army needs to first and foremost recruit and enlist more females into the military. If more females were in the military, then some of the issues of being a token female would not be causing extra stress on female soldiers. The Army needs to reevaluate the sexual harassment and sexual assault policies currently in place; there should be consistency among chains-of-command with how they handle sexual harassment reports. My final recommendation would be for the U.S. Army and the DOD to recognize that female soldiers are experiencing combat, which makes the current “females barred from combat”
irrelevant. Doing so will at least acknowledge the actual experiences of many female soldiers and create a consistency between policy and reality.

**Women in Army**

For the women who are currently serving our country, I first would like to commend and thank them for their service. In a perfect world I would recommend that women in the Army stand up for their rights as soldiers and never let sexual harassment, especially sexual assault, incidents go unpunished. But, I understand based on this study and my own experience that it may be challenging because of the fear of being ostracized and the possibility that reporting an incident could damage one’s military career. I believe that military women should tell someone about the harassment they have experienced or witnessed. Silence is always understood as acceptance, so collectively, women soldiers must speak up and advocate to justice to be done i.e., don’t trivialize sexual harassment incidents (Sasson-Levy, 2003).

Women in the military need to unite with each other; collective and persistent action are the only way to bring lasting change. I also feel that women need to stick together and find common likeness among their own gender rather than turning the sexism inward. In other words, women should not target other women soldiers because they want to gain acceptance from the men and “be one of the guys.” Perpetuating the stereotype that femininity and femaleness are inherently lazy, weak, and not worthy of being a soldier (Sasson-Levy, 2003) will only damage women and maintain the status quo. Military women should be mentors for other women wanting to join the Army. They should find the newly enlisted female soldiers and guide them, so they do not become another statistic for sexual harassment or become the token female.
Women Wanting to Join Army

I would recommend that women wanting to join the Army read this study. Women wanting to join the Army should remember to do their best and maintain their self perception, integrity, and identity. They should look for a female soldier who could be a good mentor, one who has been in the military and knows the informal and formal double standards and differential treatment that is part of the military.

It would also benefit these women wanting to join the Army to be comfortable with their own gender identity. They need to know that there may be times that they might have to perform womanly rituals behind-the-scenes in order to maintain normalcy in this male-dominated environment.

Synthesis of Findings

This chapter portrayed the experiences of 12 female combat veterans who served in the Iraq War. In summary, the prior discussion illustrates the connections between the research questions and the themes from the collected data. The discussion revealed the experiences and stories from various female combat veterans in the context of gender norms and behaviors associated with being a female in a male-dominated military environment. This study has sought to understand how women combat veterans have dealt with this social force of masculinity and what strategies they used.

The participants illustrated that for them and the men in their units, being a soldier means acting and being masculine. In U.S. culture, this soldier behavior of masculinity means being a macho male, which is aggressive, violent, authoritarian behavior (Andersen, 2006). The female combat soldiers in this study spoke about the duality of being a woman and a soldier. Smith (2005) stated that in other words, women, like other subordinate groups
in society, develop a bifurcated consciousness where they live with both the reality of actual experience and the reality of social expectations. Women are expected to look feminine or at least female as understood culturally and in accordance with social expectations of women. However, in the military, which is dominated by a male/masculine culture, female soldiers find themselves being caught straddling the gender line. They need to act like a man/soldier, but they need to find ways to preserve their female identity. Sasson-Levy (2003) followed this example of the bifurcated consciousness concept when she described the “power of hegemonic ideology,” which creates an agreement among men and women alike about what is the status quo (p. 452). Sasson-Levy (2003) stated that the Israeli Army (which I believe is comparable to the U.S. Army), by its gendered division of labor, produces this hegemonic masculine ideology, which women in order to construct a positive perception of themselves, feel the need to distance themselves from other women and what “they perceive as traditional, weak, and submissive femininity (as defined by the military)” (p. 452).

This study focused on the women’s standpoint of how the female combat veteran’s experience affected them and who they are as women. I explored ways that female combat veterans juggled their performances of being simultaneously soldiers and women in the male-dominated environment of the military. My purpose was to shed light on the social issues surrounding women in the military, with the hope that my findings will serve to educate my peers, soldiers, and contribute to the scholarly literature about female soldiers. The context of the military and the position of a small group of females provided a different view about military life and combat experiences that have not been discussed in public and/or history books. Smith’s (2005) statement about the women’s movement holds true to the relevance of my study; “how extraordinary were the transformations we experienced as we discovered
with other women how to speak with one another about such experiences and then how to bring them forward publicly which meant exposing them to men” (p. 326). The women in this study expressed the need for female veterans’ voices to be heard, so that their experiences are told. They want respect and acceptance as soldiers from a culture that seems to underestimate a woman’s capabilities as U.S. soldiers. This study is an exploration of norms, behaviors, and social contexts that shape the experiences 12 U.S. Army female combat veterans from their standpoint and using their voices. There are norms around straddling the gender line where women, more so than men, experience conflict around how to be a good soldier and a woman simultaneously. One of these norms is to preserve gender performance for the backstage or private realm. Female gendered behaviors include performing rituals around bathing, dress, or self care that serve to remind female soldiers that they are women, not simply androgynous soldiers. In the combat context, there are few private areas and even fewer sympathetic personnel with whom women can “let their hair down” and step out of character for a while. This reality causes tremendous strain for female soldiers and puts them at risk of harassment, assault or, at the very least, low morale.

Future Research

Not Just the Army

Future research should be conducted on all female combat veterans, not just Army. There could be comparability between the different branches of the military –Marines, Army, Navy, and Air Force, since the U.S. military is overall under the same chain-of-command with the DOD. In this way, we will gain greater understanding about the interactions between context, organizational culture, and gender relations as they shape women’s experiences and ability to perform effectively in the military.
Active vs. Reserves

Further research on whether or not there is a measurable difference between Active Duty and Reserves would be important or useful because this study only included two full-time Active Duty soldiers, while the others were trained as Reservists. For this study, it did not seem to matter whether the female veteran was on Active Duty or a Reserve, which may be because of the combat setting, which is all Active Duty status. Again, it should be noted that only two Active Duty females were interviewed, which limits the conclusions and comparisons that can be made. I would recommend interviewing more Active Duty females to have a more accurate conclusion about whether or not their military status is relevant.

Higher Rank = Isolation

More research needs to be conducted on female soldiers who are in senior ranking positions and are the only female or one of a few females in a unit serving overseas. They felt more isolated than other female soldiers who were not in leadership positions. Since being overseas in a combat environment creates more situations for stress and isolation, these women’s experiences deserve to be explored.

Racially Diverse

Another recommendation for future research would be to interview more female veterans from different races and ask more racially focused questions (questions that specifically ask about racially segregated or integrated social relationships among soldiers) pertaining to their combat experience. Doing so will illuminate the intersectionality of race, gender, and other factors as they impact soldiering and coping strategies for females in the military. It could also possibly benefit to research about women of color in the military and their experiences with Iraqi nationals. Since Lucy (the veteran whom identified as a Pacific
Islander from this study) expressed how she was able to interact with the Iraqi nationals differently than the white female veterans, it could be useful to the military to use women soldiers of color in more diplomatic ways with Iraqis.

**Women as Deviants in the Military**

As an interesting line of further study, the final recommendation would be to draw on Merton’s (1938) deviance theory in a future analysis of women in the military. In particular, the following question begs further exploration: 1) In what ways do the women interviewed embrace the goals of the military? and 2) To what extent do they reject these goals and the means to achieve them while serving in the military. The research could show how women have negotiated being soldiers and women. Throughout this study it seemed that the female veterans were being deviates in many ways, from backstage performances of femininity to discussing knowledge of women that used their sexuality to gain rank. These deviances should be further studied to contribute to the deviance literature about women.

Merton (1938) described deviance as behaviors of individuals that violate group norms, which produce negative responses from others. Merton developed a typology of deviance based on the roles and adaptations that individuals take. In the military, females have to deny themselves their own femininity because the military is considered a man’s world. Therefore, the goal and legitimate means of becoming a good soldier will always be blocked for females due to this structural strain. Merton noted that structural strain is created by anomie, which puts pressure on an individual to accept or reject cultural goals and the legitimate means available for achieving those goals.

In the case of my study, the cultural goal of the military would be to be a successful, honorable soldier (this is what I would label as a “good soldier”). The institutionalized
means to achieving this goal would be to follow the military regulations, maintain physical and mental soldier readiness, and obey orders without questioning authority (this is what I coined as “doing military”). Further research would need to be developed on Merton’s five types of deviance using the data from in-depth interviews of female veterans.

**Conclusion**

This study has expanded the current literature by illustrating the connection between themes developed from interviews and sociological theorists. The themes illuminated how the 12 female combat veterans interviewed experienced being in the U.S. Army. Then the use of Goffman (1959), West and Zimmerman (1987), Kanter (1993), and Smith (2005) have helped to understand how U.S. Army female combat veterans negotiate being soldiers and females in the military.

There are a few suggestions that this study has shown to be relevant. One being that there should be training equality specifically for gender capabilities (sit-ups more for females) or specifications/qualifications for certain military expectations especially in combat situations where all soldiers are utilized and expected to perform the same duties. The female veterans could have benefited from participating in women’s support groups; many of them expressed how refreshing it felt to discuss their experiences, especially with me being a female combat veteran too.

I believe it is important to note that women do not need to suppress their femininity in all aspects of their daily life as a soldier. There should be an acceptance of femininity and women in the U.S. Army, especially in combat experienced situations. There is much that still needs research pertaining to women in the military and their experiences in this male-dominated environment. This study is a good start to the future research that is needed for
understanding the important role that women have in the U.S. Army and other branches of our Armed Forces.
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APPENDIX A:  
Highlights of American Women Serving in the Armed Forces

- **1775 Revolutionary War Began**
- **1779** (Oct) Sally St Clair wore men’s clothing to fight alongside her lover. She was only discovered when killed by enemy fire.
- **1782** (May) Deborah Sampson = Robert Shurtiff. Served in the 4th MA Infantry Regiment. She was not discovered until Oct 1783.
- **1783 Revolutionary War Ends**
- **1812** Lucy Brewer = George Baker. 1st women to serve in the Marine Corps. She served abroad “Old Ironsides” battleship. Women were not allowed to serve in the military at this time, so she disguised herself as a man.
- **1846-1848** Elizabeth Newcom enlists in Company D of the Missouri Volunteer Infantry as Bill Newcom. She marches 600 miles from Missouri to winter camp at Pueblo, Colorado, before she is discovered to be a woman and discharged.
- **1861 During the Civil War,** Dorothea Dix organized 1st women’s corps with over 3,000 women nurses and 18,000 women paid Army volunteers
- **1865 Civil War Ends**
- **1881** Clara Barton “Angel of the Battlefield” Founded the American Red Cross. She treated the wounded on Antietam and Fredericksburg battlefield.
- **1898-1899** Typhoid fever epidemics during **Spanish-American War.** Ellen May Tower, Army nurse, died of typhoid and the 1st woman to receive military funeral in MI
- **1901** Army Nurse Corps is established
  - o Army’s 1st female acting assistant surgeon
- **1917-1918** WWI
- **1923** Veterans homes and hospitals open to women who served in WWI
- **1941** WWII Began
- **1942** Sixty-seven Army women nurses captured and held as POWs in the Philippines for 2 ½ years
  - o Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps established (WAAC)
Women’s Air Force Service Pilots established (WASP)

- **1943** Eleven more nurses captured in Philippines and held as POWs for 37 months. Five more Navy nurses captured by Japanese and held as POWs for 5 months

- **1945 WWII Ends**

- **1950-1953 Korean War**
  - Servicewomen who had joined the reserves following WWII were involuntarily activated to serve in war

- **1965 Vietnam War Begins**

- **1967** Legal provisions placing a 2% cap on the number of women serving in military

- **1970** 1st woman to be promoted to brigadier general (1 star) Anna May Hayes. Literally minutes later Colonel Elizabeth P. Hoisington, Women’s Army Corps Director, received her new star.

- **1972** The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was opened to Army and Navy Women

- **1973** The end of the draft and the establishment of the All Volunteer Force opened the door for expanding servicewomen’s roles and numbers in the military
  - 1st women promoted to major general (2 star) Jeanne M. Holm, the first Director of the WAF - Women in the Air Force
  - Navy accepted its 1st women chaplain
  - The Supreme Court ruled that military women’s dependents could receive benefits equal to male soldiers. Previously, women dependents were not authorized housing nor were their dependents eligible for benefits and privileges afforded to male counterparts, such as medical, dental, post commissary, etc.

- **1975 Vietnam War Ends**

- **1977** Military veterans status granted to WASPs who flew during WWII

- **1978** The Women’s Army Corps was disestablished and its members integrated into the Regular Army

- **1980** 1st women graduated from military service academies

- **1989** 770 women deployed to Panama in operation Just cause
• 1990-1991 War in Persian Gulf
  o 40,000 women deployed during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.
  o 2 women taken prisoners by Iraqis
• 1993 Congress repealed the law banning women from duty on combat ships. Women deploy with the USS Fox
  o The Marine Corps opened pilots positions to women
• 1994 Sixty-three women permanently assigned to carrier USS Eisenhower
• 1996 1st women to be promoted to lieutenant general (3 star) Carol A. Mutter from the Marine Corps
• 2001 The U.S. Army Women’s Museum opens at Ft. Lee, Virginia
  o Terrorists attacked World Trade Center and the Pentagon
  o War on Terrorism Began
• 2003 Iraqi War begins under Operation Iraqi Freedom
  o 3 women became some of the first POWs of the war in Iraq
• 2004 By year’s end, 19 servicewomen killed as a result of hostile fire (the most women to die of hostile fire in any war)
• 2005 1st woman awarded the Silver Star for combat action, one of 14 women in U.S. history to receive medal.
• 2007 1st woman in U.S. Navy took command of a fighter squadron
  o Last woman veteran from WWI dies
• 2008 1st woman promoted to 4 star Ann Dunwoody
  o The Pentagon indicated that more than 193,400 women have deployed in support of U.S. operations since September 11, 2001
• 2010 Women permitted to serve on submarines. Four female officers scheduled to be assigned to submarine in 2012.

Sources:

APPENDIX B: List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGR</td>
<td>Active Guard Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVC</td>
<td>American Veterans Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAB</td>
<td>Combat Action Badge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Combat Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPW</td>
<td>Enemy Prisoner of War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI</td>
<td>Government Issue, which describes members of the Armed Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAG</td>
<td>Judge Advocate General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Military Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Military Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRE</td>
<td>Meal Ready to Eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEF</td>
<td>Operation Enduring Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIF</td>
<td>Operation Iraqi Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Physical Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAAC/WAC</td>
<td>Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later the Women's Army Corps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASP</td>
<td>Women Air Force Service Pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAVES</td>
<td>Women Accepted for Volunteer Military Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XO</td>
<td>Company Commander</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: Sexual Harassment Definition

Army Regulation 600-20

Sexual assault and sexual harassment are not the same, although they are related to each other.

- **Sexual harassment** is a form of gender discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. For more information on sexual harassment, see Army Regulation 600-20, Chapter 7. (14 kb)

There are two types of sexual harassment:

  - **Quid Pro Quo** sexual harassment refers to conditions placed on a person's career or terms of employment in return for sexual favors. It involves threats of adverse actions if the victim does not submit or promises of favorable actions if the person does submit
  
  - **Hostile Environment** sexual harassment occurs when a person is subjected to offensive, unwanted, and unsolicited comments and behavior of a sexual nature that have the interferes with that person's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

- Sexual assault refers specifically to rape, forcible sodomy, indecent assault, or carnal knowledge as defined by the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

- Sexual assault must involve physical contact. While sexual harassment can involve physical contact, it can also refer to verbal or other forms of gender discrimination of a sexual nature. Sexual assault is a crime punishable by the Uniform Code of Military Justice.
APPENDIX D: CAB Award

The Combat Action Badge (CAB) may be awarded by any commander delegated authority by the Secretary of the Army during wartime or the CG, U.S. Army Human Resources Command and will be announced in permanent orders.

1. The requirements for award of the CAB are Branch and MOS immaterial.

   Assignment to a Combat Arms unit or a unit organized to conduct close or offensive combat operations, or performing offensive combat operations is not required to qualify for the CAB. However, it is not intended to award all soldiers who serve in a combat zone or imminent danger area.

2. Specific Eligibility Requirements:
   a. May be awarded to any soldier.
   b. Soldier must be performing assigned duties in an area where hostile fire pay or imminent danger pay is authorized.
   c. Soldier must be personally present and actively engaging or being engaged by the enemy, and performing satisfactorily in accordance with the prescribed rules of engagement.
   d. Soldier must not be assigned/attached to a unit that would qualify the soldier for the CIB/CMB.

3. May be awarded to members from the other U.S. Armed Forces and foreign soldiers assigned to a U.S. Army unit, provided they meet the above criteria.

4. Award of the CAB is authorized from 18 September 2001 to a date to be determined. Award for qualifying service in any previous conflict is not authorized.

5. Subsequent awards:
   a. Only one CAB may be awarded during a qualifying period.
b. Second and third awards of the CAB for subsequent qualifying periods will be indicated by superimposing one and two stars respectively, centered at the top of the badge between the points of the oak wreath.

6. Retroactive awards for the CAB are not authorized prior to 18 September 2001, applications (to include supporting documentation) for retroactive awards of the CAB will be forwarded through the first two star general in the chain of command to CG, U.S. Army Human Resources Command, ATTN: AHRC-PDO-PA, Alexandria, VA 22332-0471.

7. Wear policy is contained in Army Regulation 670-1.

8. Soldiers may be awarded the CIB, CMB and CAB for the same qualifying period, provided the criterion for each badge is met. However, subsequent awards of the same badge within the same qualifying period are not authorized.

(http://www.army.mil/symbols/combatbadges/action.html)
APPENDIX E: Informed Consent Form for

“Just a Girl in the Army”: Exploring Gender Norms, Behaviors, and Social Contexts

that Shape the Experiences of Women in Combat

Dear ____________________,

Involvement: You are invited to participate in a research study on exploring gender differences in the military. You have been selected to participate in this study because you have been identified as someone who is either involved in, or has personal knowledge about this topic. The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

This study will explore how gender may or may not have shaped your experience while serving in the military. The interview should between 60-90 minutes. You may stop the interview if the time exceeds your planned schedule. I would like to tape record the interview, if that is acceptable to you.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you agree to participate in the interview but change your mind once the interview in progress, you are free to stop the interview at any time. You may also chose not to answer particular questions during the interview. Maintaining your confidentiality is a priority and every practical precaution will be taken to disguise your identity. There will not be any identifying information on audiotapes or transcripts of this interview. I will not allow anyone other than the research advisor to hear any audiotape of your voice or review a transcript of this interview. You responses will never be shared with other people interviewed for this study. Your name will not be used. A pseudonym will be used to replace your name and in certain common themed responses you will be referred to in broad categories such as
“females”, “combat veterans” or “soldiers”, so that individuals may not be identified by the position they hold or their company, commanders, etc..

There are low to moderate risks involved with participation in this study. Do not hesitate to stop the interview if you are feeling overwhelmed or emotionally stressed when discussing your combat experience. I have provided a list of counselors/centers for your reference.

I anticipate that many people involved in combat situations will find participating in this study beneficial. Women have come a long way since the women’s movement where we learned to express ourselves and stand-up for rights equal to out male counterparts. But there are still institutions that suppress and oppress women – the military being one. Dorothy Smith’s (2005), a prominent feminist, statement about the women’s movement holds true the relevance of my study; “how extraordinary were the transformations we experienced as we discovered with other women how to speak with one another about such experiences and then how to bring them forward publicly which meant exposing them to men.”

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

If you have any questions about this study, either today or in the future, feel free to contact me, or my thesis advisor.

Kacy Crowley
18 Staff Street
Heilwood, PA 15745
(724-464-0586) email: PHTK@iup.edu

Thesis advisor: Dr. Melanie Hildebrandt
Department of Sociology, IUP
112F McElhaney
441 North Walk
Indiana, PA 15705
(724-357-7655) email: melanieh@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Phone: 724-357-7730). You may keep this page for your records.
VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT) __________________________________________________

Signature__________________________________

Date_____________________________________

Phone number or location where you can be reached_________________________________

Email Address___________________________________________________________

Best days and times to reach you__________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

I ______ do agree OR _______do NOT agree to having interview tape recorded.

________________________________________________________________________

Please do not write below this line, for Primary Researcher’s use only)

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date___________             Primary Researcher’s signature_______________________
APPENDIX F: Interview Questions

The first 18 questions asked were demographic and rapport questions:

1. Have you ever or are you now being treating for PTSD?
2. What pseudonym would you like to use to replace your real name?
3. What is you mailing address?
4. What was your rank while you served overseas?
5. What is your current status in the Army?
6. What is your date of birth?
7. What are your years of service in the military?
8. What were the dates that you were in Iraq and/or Afghanistan?
9. What was your marital status when you served in the Army?
10. Did you have children while serving overseas?
11. What is your racial identification?
12. Did you receive any physical injuries while being in combat?
13. Why did you join the military?
14. Tell me about your job (MOS) in the Army
15. How many men were in your

   Battalion _____________
   Company _____________
   Platoon _____________
   Squad _____________
   Team _____________
16. How many women were in your

   Battalion _____________
   Company _____________
   Platoon _____________
   Squad _____________
17. Where were you stationed overseas?

18. Tell me about the place(s) you experienced combat

The next sets of questions were asked in order of comfortable to possible discomforting questions (see Appendix G). Below is a breakdown of the research questions and the interview questions.

In this study, I explored ways that female combat veterans juggle their performances as women against the demands of being typical soldiers, which is usually associated with behaving in aggressive, emotionless, and violent ways. (1) Did women combat veterans feel strain and/or develop strategies for dealing with gender related tensions and performances in a male dominated environment?

- What were your duties and responsibilities?
- What was an average day being a combat soldier in Iraq (or Afghanistan) like for you?
- What was your social relationship with the male soldiers in your platoon, i.e. did you form any alliances?
- How did you feel about yourself after alliances and/or difficulties?
- Tell me about how the combat environment made you feel? Why do you think you felt that way?
- How do you feel about the practice of using women in combat roles?
- How has your service affected your family?
• (For women with children) How has your time away from home affected your relationship with your child?
• How did you feel as a mother in combat?
• How did you feel being a wife away from your husband?

(2) Does becoming a soldier alter a woman’s perception of herself as a female or change her identity in any way?

• How do you think your reactions in combat as a woman differ from those of men?
• Do you think there was a difference in the way you were treated by authorities, by fellow soldiers, and/or by the enemy compared to male soldiers? If so how? How did you react when you felt you were being treated differently?
• What was it like being a female combat soldier?
• What were some of the more difficult things you faced as a woman over there?
• Were there any advantages to being a female in those situations?

(3) What strategies do female soldiers develop in the context of combat and being surrounded by a disproportionate number of males?

• (Read sexual harassment definition. See Appendix H.) What is your experience with sexual harassment in the military?
• In your experience is the Army’s sexual harassment policy working effectively?

• What was it like working with so few women around? Did you ever connect with other women?

• Can you provide examples of times you witnessed sexual harassment? Did you ever consider filing a complaint?

• How did you experience being a female sleeping in a barracks full of males?

• Tell me about being a female working side-by-side with local national males in a country (Iraq or Afghanistan) who may have held sexist beliefs?

• How do you think women and men differ in coping mechanisms during and after experiencing combat?

• What examples can you provide of the coping mechanism or strategies you used while serving in Iraq/Afghanistan?

(4) What stories can women in combat today share that can help to enlighten others about the challenges facing female combat veterans?

• Tell me how you feel about women being officers and leaders. Why do you think you feel that way?

• What surprised you about your time in Iraq or Afghanistan?

• What would your advice be to an 18-year-old woman entering the military?

• Is there anything else you would like to tell me?
APPENDIX G: Interview questions in format asked during interview

1. Are you being treated for PTSD?
2. What pseudonym would you like to use to replace your real name?
3. What is you mailing address?
4. What was your rank while you served overseas?
5. What is your current status in the Army?
6. What is your date of birth?
7. What are your years of service in the military?
8. What were the dates that you were in Iraq and/or Afghanistan?
9. What was your marital status when you served in the Army?
10. Did you have children while serving overseas?
11. What is your racial identification?
12. Did you receive any physical injuries while being in combat?
13. Why did you join the military?
14. Tell me about your job (MOS) in the Army
15. How many men were in your
   Battalion ______________
   Company_______________
   Platoon ______________
   Squad ________________
   Team _________________
16. How many women were in your
   Battalion ______________
   Company_______________
   Platoon ______________
   Squad ________________
   Team _________________
17. Where were you stationed overseas?
18. Tell me about the place(s) you experienced combat.
19. What was an average day being a combat soldier in Iraq (or Afghanistan) like for you?

20. What were your duties and responsibilities?

21. Tell me about how the combat environment made you feel? Why do you think you felt that way?
22. How do you feel about the practice of using women in combat roles?
23. What was your social relationship with the male soldiers in your platoon, i.e. did you form any alliances and/or have difficulties?
24. How did you feel about yourself after the alliances and/or difficulties?
25. What was it like being a female combat soldier? What were some of the more difficult things you faced as a woman over there? Were there any advantages to being female in those situations?
26. Do you think there was a difference in the way you were treated by authorities, by fellow soldiers, and/or by the enemy compared to male soldiers? If so how? How did you react when you felt you were being treated differently?
27. How do you think your reactions in combat as a woman differ from those of the men in your unit?
28. What was it like working with so few women around? Did you ever connect with other women?
29. How did you experience being a female sleeping in a barracks full of males?
30. Tell me about being a female working side-by-side with local national males in a country (Iraq or Afghanistan) who may have held sexist beliefs?
31. How do you think women and men differ in coping mechanisms during and after experiencing combat? How did you deal?
32. What examples can you provide the coping mechanism or strategies you used while serving in Iraq/Afghanistan?
33. Tell me how you feel about women being officers and leaders. Why do you think you feel that way?
34. What surprised you about your time in Iraq or Afghanistan?
35. What would your advice be to an 18-year-old woman entering the military?
36. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

If time permits:

1. How has your service affected your family?
2. Were there particular relationships that you missed?
3. (For women with children) How has your time away from home affected your relationship with your child?
4. How did you feel as a mother being in combat?
5. How did you feel being a wife away from your husband?

If timing is right:

1. I’m interested in knowing how you would describe sexual harassment?
2. Are you familiar with the Army’s definition (See Appendix H)?
3. In your experience is the Army’s sexual harassment policy working effectively?
4. Can you provide examples of times you witnessed sexual harassment? Did you ever consider filing a complaint?
APPENDIX H:
TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Title of Study: “Just a Girl in the Army”: Exploring Gender Norms, Behaviors, and Social Contexts that Shape the Experiences of Women in Combat

I, Ashley Chateau, agree to transcribe data for this study. I agree that I will:

1. hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents

2. keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., digital recordings, disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than Kacy Crowley, the primary researcher of this study;

3. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., digital recordings, disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
   - using closed headphones when transcribing audio-taped interviews;
   - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
   - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
   - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet; and
   - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;

4. give all research information in any form or format (e.g., digital recordings, disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary researcher when I have completed the research tasks;
5. E
erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable
to the primary researcher (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon
completion of the research tasks.

I am aware that by signing below I am indicting my willingness to follow these procedures.

_________________________________________           __________
Signature of transcriber                      Date

_________________________________________           __________
Signature of researcher                      Date
APPENDIX I: List of Counseling Centers

Should you experience any distress after the interview, please consult this list of Counseling Centers

1. VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (130-U)
   POC: Debbie Michum
   Women Veterans Program Specialist
   University Drive C
   Pittsburgh, PA 15240
   (412)688-6000

2. DuBois Vet Center
   POC: Michaelene Hawley, LCSW
   100 Meadow Lane, Suite 8
   DuBois, PA 15801
   (824)940-6511

   Both facilities listed above (1 & 2) are free and have been contacted to know about this study. I have made contact with Debbie and Michaelene, so please feel free to mention my name if you would like someone to talk to about your feelings after this interview. These facilities (1 & 2) can also be used as directory sources to other local veteran counseling centers and other points of contact that will be able to assist you.

   The facilities listed below are also free, but they do not have knowledge of this study, so you would need to explain to them your desire for counseling.

3. Harrisburg Vet Center
   1500 N. Second Street Suite 2
   Harrisburg, PA 17102
   (717)782-3954

4. Scranton Vet Center
   1002 Pittston Ave.
   Scranton, PA 18505
   (570)344-2676
5. **Baltimore Vet Center**  
1777 Reisterstown Road Suite 199  
Baltimore, MD 21208  
(410)764-9400

6. **Readjustment Counseling Service, Mid-Atlantic Region**  
305 W. Chesapeake Ave., Suite 300  
Towson, MD 21204  
(410)828-6619

7. **Alexandria Vet Center**  
6940 South Kings Highway #204  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
(703)360-8633

8. **Richmond Vet Center**  
4902 Fitzhugh Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23230  
(804)353-8958

9. **Martinburg Vet Center**  
900 Winchester Avenue  
Martinburg, WV 25401  
(304)263-6776

10. **University of Maryland Counseling Center**  
4th Floor Susquehanna Hall and 3125 South Campus Dining Hall  
301 Braddock Rd, Frostburg, MD  
(301)314-7651

11. **Howard University (PhD)**  
2400 Sixth Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20059  
(202)806-6100
APPENDIX J: Army Rank Structure