

“WOMEN ARE VETERANS TOO!”: EXPLORING GENDER AND IDENTITY  
AMONG FEMALE VETERANS

by

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to the service members who participated in this study. Without your stories this research would not have been possible. And to women service members and veterans, I cannot thank you enough for your service.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

June 12, 2018 was the first official Women Veterans Day in Texas, established by Texas state senate bill 805 (SB805). The day is intended to acknowledge the women veterans who have served, and in some cases given their lives for the United States of America. The Texas bill also requires a report on women veterans that must identify “...the obstacles for women veterans and identify potential solutions to the unique problems women veterans continue to face.”

The passing of this bill and celebration of Women Veterans Day highlights a growing understanding that women veterans are an important minority in our Armed Forces who may have a unique experience to their male counterparts. While this study has no association with SB805, the bill inspired this study as a current and relevant example of women in non-traditional occupations.

The goal of this study is to explore women veterans’ unique experiences in the military, including how gender was embodied and policed during their service and how their identity as women shaped their unit cohesion. My main research questions were as follows: What were the experiences of women veterans before, during and after their service? What boundaries existed for these service women and how did they overcome them? In what ways do they negotiate the different aspects of their identities?

### **History of Women in the Military**

To understand some of the experiences of women veterans and military members, it is important to understand the evolution of attitudes and policies that governed women’s participation in military organizations. This will help elucidate the military’s efforts towards equality and the struggles they still face. Chapter two of *Implications of*

*Integrating Women into the Marine Corps Infantry* (2015), a book published by the RAND Corporation, outlines the complicated history of including women into all areas of the military.

Prior to World War II, women were only able to occupy limited, volunteer roles in the military, despite being present on the battlefields throughout U.S. history (“Women in the United States Army.”). During the Revolutionary War, for example, women were present as cooks, seamstresses and nurses. Some even women followed their husbands into combat, dressed as men to fight on the frontlines, or served as spies for the cause (“Women in the Army”).

During World War II, an unprecedented 35,000 women volunteered to assist in the war effort by occupying auxiliary roles so men could engage in combat. In 1942, the establishment of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) marked the first efforts to officially allow women to volunteer for the army, even if only temporarily and in segregated, all-women units. Over the course of the war, WAAC underwent several variations with differing restrictions (RAND, 2015).

These restrictions largely maintained that women’s services were temporary or emergency status until June 12, 1948 when the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act formally established regular and reserve status for women. Though this act mandated that women were to formally integrate into the military, it also maintained several stipulations for their participation. These stipulations held that women could not account for more than 2 percent military personnel, excluded them from flag ranks (General and Admiral), and prevented them from being assigned to ships or aircraft that engaged in combat (RAND, 2015).

Things remained largely the same until 1967 when many of these demographic and promotional stipulations were removed due to the military's desire to recruit and retain women service members. This desire was prompted by the downward trend in recruitment for women after the Korean War. Though women could be promoted to any position and could represent a larger portion of the military population, women still served as an auxiliary—a segregated and unequal component (RAND, 2015).

This continued until the military eliminated the draft in favor of the all-volunteer force (AVF) on June 30, 1973. The AVF created occupational vacancies where drafted soldiers used to work before they decided to cease their service. In 1978, after years of careful examination and deliberation, President Jimmy Carter signed Public Law 95-485 which integrated all-women units into the regular Army and allowed women aboard noncombat ships in the Navy (RAND, 2015).

Since the desegregation of units by gender, women have been working towards full equality in the military. Steadily, barriers to entry have been removed in favor of equal opportunity and access for women. The last of these barriers was the ban on women in ground combat roles, which was lifted in January of 2013.

Despite the rapid legal progress and inclusion, women are still working to procure equal acknowledgement in the military. Since the ban on women in combat roles was lifted, women have been applying for, and earning, positions that military personnel thought were out of reach for female bodies including the 12 women who graduated from Army Ranger School since 2015 (Swick and Moore, 2018; Tortorello, 2010). These structural changes were an important new frontier for women, equality, and the military.

While women were achieving these successes groups of male soldiers were

sharing illicit photos of servicewomen via social media (“US Military Nude Photo Sharing Scandal Widens beyond Marines,” 2015). These scandals are an example of male soldiers singling out, subjecting women to stereotypes, and harassing their fellow servicemembers. Women veteran organizations have responded by using social media forums to discuss the actions of male soldiers directed at women veterans, including harassment at the Veterans Affairs office itself (Steinhauer, 2019; Katzenberg, 2019).

These scandals highlight an aspect of the military, and broader US society, that does not always readily adjust to structural changes: culture. Though significant strides have been made for women’s equal treatment in the military since WAAC, some soldiers still maintain negative attitudes about women and the service today (Trobraugh, 2015; Matthews et al. 2009; Tortorello, 2010; Young and Nauta, 2015; Cohn, 2000; MacKenzie, 2015).

These examples are just a few of the ways cultural attitudes and ideals about women have taken more time to adjust to the changing structure than the associated legal elements. This study worked to identify the lingering, negative attitudes about women in the military and how they are still experienced by women today.

### **Identity and Inclusion Studies**

To explore in what ways participants were impacted by negative attitudes about women, I focused on two types of experiences, identity and cohesion. Using the topic of identity allowed me to explore the ways women internalize and perceive their service. Focusing on cohesion allowed me to explore how participants perceived themselves in relation to their fellow servicemembers.

***Identity.*** In this study, I consider the formation and uses of identity, both individually and

in the group setting. Social groups develop concepts of acceptable identities and rules about their group composition (Butler, 2006; Douglas, 1994). Much of the multidisciplinary work aimed at tackling this complex topic focuses on the perception of individual and group identity as a product of various factors. A person's identity is who they are. Identity is both constructed by the individual and influenced by culturally ascribed categories. Minority status, sexual orientation, gender, and military occupational specialty (MOS) are cited as being contributors to identity in the military setting (Goldman, 1973; Sherman, 1990; Zimmerman, 1999; Brown and Ayres, 2004; Estes, 2007; Silva, 2008; Woodward and Jenkins, 2011; Szaya et. al, 2015; Schaefer et. al, 2015; Doan and Portillo, 2017, Williams, 1989).

In *Ask and Tell* (2007), for example, Steve Estes outlines the history of "Don't ask, Don't tell" (DADT). DADT was a formal military policy that theoretically lifted the ban on homosexual service members in the military. The policy was instated in 1993 and declared that gay and lesbian service members could participate in the military provided that they did not openly discuss their sexuality and did not engage in any sexual acts. Officers and leaders could not question soldiers about their sexuality. DADT was repealed in 2011 after the Pentagon released a study suggesting repealing the discriminatory policy would pose minimal threats to military preparedness (Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2018).

In chapter five of *Ask and Tell* (2007), Estes discusses the experiences of lesbian service members before and after the repeal of DADT. Estes uses one on one interviews with three high ranking women whose personal lives were used in the legislative reform of DADT to highlight the complicated creation of identity as a woman in the armed

forces. Through these interviews, he expresses the changes to identity these women felt when they were finally able to be open about their sexual orientation (Estes, 2007). His research demonstrated the effects of structural changes, the repeal of DADT, on group identity and identity expression. After DADT was repealed, these women described experiences of feeling more cohesion with the military and being able to express aspects of their identity which were previously conceived of as pollution to the military (Estes, 2007).

Additionally, some studies suggest individual identity changes depending on context, and may be mission or job specific (Woodward and Jenkins, 2011; Doan and Portillo, 2017). In their study titled, “Not a Woman, but a Soldier: Exploring Identity through Translocational Positionality” (2017), Alesha Doan and Shannon Portillo examine the ways individual identity changes as women navigate different social settings. They found that women experience more fluidity in their gender expression than men, both performed and perceived by others. The authors suggest that female identity depends on location, interactions and composition of the group they are interacting with. Nonmilitary group members did not perceive women soldiers as strictly women because their gender expression was not the expected feminine expression. Rather, women soldiers were perceived as a “third gender” that did not meet expectations for either male or female. Additionally, male colleagues remained oblivious to the fluidity of women’s gender as perceived by nonmilitary group members, thus male soldiers maintained their authority in reinforcing the boundaries of gender in the military context (Doan and Portillo, 2017). This research demonstrates the power of policing gender expression and the positional fluidity of this expression.

Another important study regarding the experiences of women in the military uses discourse analysis. Rebecca Hannagan's paper, "I Believe We Are the Fewer, The Prouder": Women's Meaning-Making After Military Sexual Assault" (2016) explores the dominant discourses surrounding women in the military, focusing on the portrayal of women after they experience military sexual assault (MSA). Hannagan suggests that the discourse surrounding MSA positions or portrays women as victims. This portrayal is often, more or less, permanent in terms of the perception of women as a group. As a result, women who experience sexual assault are not able to move past their victimization.

This is particularly devastating for women in the military because it undermines their success and the strides that women have historically and individually made. Further, the discourse that positions women as victims also positions women as threats to male counterparts and superiors. Hannagan believes the reputation that undermines the successes of women and portrays women as threats is the result of commandeering the narratives from women and using the narrative to emphasize the disproportionate rate at which women experience MSA. In other words, research that emphasizes the disproportionate rate of MSA for women soldiers takes the narrative from women and fixes it within a context that is difficult, if not impossible, to transcend. Further, this fixed position is interpreted as threatening to the success of men soldiers. Hannagan's emphasis on these pitfalls to this discourse are important when conducting research with women veterans, as I will describe in the coming chapters.

Some researchers, such as Doan, Portillo and Hannagan, have started to focus on the experiences of women as told in their own words. However, this paradigm is still only

beginning to uncover the barriers that women face in the military. This study hopes to expand on this growing body of literature and contribute to a holistic perspective regarding the lives of military women.

***Cohesion.*** Another aspect of identity that I explored was the participant's perceptions of themselves as members of a society. Cohesion is the act or fact of forming a united whole. When considering whether to integrate historically excluded service members, the military has focused its attention on researching the impacts of a changing composition on unit cohesion (National Defense Research Institute, 2010; RAND, 2015).

In the past, the threat to cohesion was a major factor when considering whether to make organizational changes to include women and other historically excluded service members. Cohesion became a focus for military training after World War II when German and American scholars highlighted the importance of social cohesion on military effectiveness and combat preparedness (National Defense Research Institute, 2010: 137). Since then, scholars in various fields have attempted to understand the influences of cohesion, how it relates to performance, and how changes in group composition impacted cohesion (Szaya et. al, 2016: 67). Research showed that cohesive groups—groups that hold strong affiliations with tasks or group identity, tend to perform better on tasks, are more combat prepared and effective and are at a decreased risk for mental health complications (National Defense Research Institute, 2010; 141).

However, defining cohesion with a single, unified meaning across disciplines has proved problematic because cohesion is multifaceted and influenced by many factors including interpersonal bonds, hierarchy, and types of tasks. Additionally, these factors can be situational and context specific, as in the case of the military where group

members may be shifting between positions and working conditions. Thus, most studies recognize that some aspects of cohesion may be unmeasurable (National Defense Research Institute 2010: 138).

Though a singular definition of cohesion is elusive, most scholars recognize a distinction between task and social cohesion (Griffith, 1988; Siebold and Kelly, 1988, Salo and Siebold, 2005; Siebold, 2007; Salo, 2011; Salo and Sinkko, 2012; Szaya et. al, 2016:69-72). Social cohesion encompasses the interpersonal relationships, positive feelings toward one another and emotional closeness between group members. Some studies limit this definition to interpersonal attraction. However, in more recent studies scholars use trust, openness, a desire to spend time together and personal enjoyment as measures of social cohesion (Szaya et. al, 2015: 78-79). For the military, social cohesion is important because socially cohesive groups are more effective and perform better on tasks (Salo, 2011: 174).

Interpersonal relationships play a key role in cohesion (Griffith, 1988; National Defense Research Institute, 2010: 137). However, cohesion is not solely the product of all individuals in a group promoting membership positively. Some groups form cohesive bonds to accomplish goals, with little or no positive interpersonal relationships. Cohesion built on shared goals is defined as task cohesion (National Defense Research Institute, 2010: 139).

The literature also discusses two broad levels of cohesion associated specifically with hierarchical organizations: primary and secondary (Siebold and Kelly, 1988; Salo and Siebold, 2005; Siebold, 2007; Salo, 2011; Salo and Sinkko, 2012; Szayna et. al, 2016). Cohesion focusing on the interpersonal relationships between members in a

hierarchical environment is primary cohesion. Primary cohesion focuses on small groups that train together and have direct relationships with one another (Salo and Siebold, 2005). In the military, primary cohesion exists vertically and horizontally between groups small enough to interact personally (Szayna et al. 2016; 71). Horizontal cohesion occurs between members of a team, squad or unit with the same rank. Vertical cohesion occurs between leaders and subordinates of differing ranks (Griffith, 1988; Siebold and Kelly, 1988; Szaya et. al, 2016:69-72).

Secondary cohesion extends beyond the individual or personal levels (Griffith, 1988; Seibold and Kelly, 1988; Siebold and Salo, 2005; Salo and Sinkko, 2012; Salo, 2011: 35-39). Members of the military come from a variety of backgrounds, are moved from base to base, and are promoted frequently. Thus, maintaining a level of cohesion that extends to the institution or organization is imperative.

While secondary cohesion has relatively few personal bonds, it constructs a commitment to the hierarchical and structural assignments, tasks and missions. A focus on secondary cohesion promotes the shared commitment of all members coming from diverse backgrounds. (Szayna et al. 2016, 70-71). When secondary cohesion is strong, members maintain their commitment to the organizations and institutions despite frequent shifting (Griffith, 1988; Seibold and Kelly, 1988; Siebold and Salo, 2005; Salo and Sinkko, 2012; Salo, 2011: 35-39). Strong secondary cohesion was important for this study because it demonstrated how participants identify with the military institution.

This study uses feelings regarding cohesion to identify areas where integrating women in the military is still strained. I use the various levels of cohesion discussed here to pinpoint where women servicemembers still felt resistance to their presence. I also

explore how feelings of cohesiveness impact participants' feelings about their service and experiences.

## **Theory**

***Group Boundaries.*** Things that prevented cohesion were categorized as boundaries. For this study, I focused on the boundaries tied to identity and specifically gender. In order to understand the gender boundaries women face, I rely on Mary Douglas's (1994) concepts of group boundaries. Societal structure, or the distinctive, stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in a society interact and live together ("Social Structure"), dictates who can do what to whom and when. Within a group or society, ideas about what is culturally accepted function to maintain the societal structure. Boundaries are the ideals and behaviors that dictate and reinforce the societal structure. Understanding the maintenance of boundaries is essential for understanding the resistance to women's inclusion in the military.

Douglas provides a framework for identifying culturally constructed external boundaries. In *Purity and Danger* (1994), Douglas describes resistance to changing societal structures as the reinforcement of cultural boundaries. Culturally constructed boundaries can manifest themselves either through formal rules within the structure, or via concepts about what is acceptable within a society. Douglas examines the ways individuals reinforce or oppose these constructed boundaries in her work. In some instances, the formal rules may be expressly written, such as legal documents or rules. Other times, culturally normative behaviors reinforce those boundaries (Douglas, 1994).

Scholars interested in the topic of female integration into the Marines, such as Christine Williams in *Gender Differences at Work* (1989), use Douglas's concepts of

external boundaries to understand the experiences of women and men in nontraditional occupations. Williams describes the breaching of a “gender-pure” group boundary in American societies by observing conformity to the opposite gendered norms, backlash and stereotypes from the public, and renegotiating gender identity. The military legally denying women access to combat roles highlighted the formal and informal boundaries and how they might be expressed. Both the formal law and the cultural concepts served to maintain the occupational boundary for women.

Resistance occurs when something challenges the group boundaries, such as lifting the ban on women in ground combat roles. Because the boundary for women in the military has been maintained so strongly and enforced for so long, any deviation from the cultural boundary causes tension in the society. Tension resulting from the change to the boundary highlights the social boundaries. Negative attitudes about women in the military or other protests to their presence, for example, are seen as tension resulting from the integration of women. In this research, I highlight some of the ways participants felt these boundaries expressed themselves and the tension they experienced.

The strength and methods of boundary maintenance are seen as being societal specific. I use Mary Douglas’s four typological societies to identify in what ways the boundaries may have presented themselves for participants and the reason for their existence today. In *Natural Symbols* (1974), Douglas outlines the tendencies of societies to operate along two independent axes: grid and group. Group is the degree of group ties in a society. In strong group societies, the tendency is to prioritize close-knit bonds between members of groups.

An example of high group is a religious organization because they emphasize

group solidarity and identity. In weak group societies, individuals may have little or no ties to conventional groups or group identities. A prison, for example, would be a low group society because prisoners may not feel any conventional solidarity to the prison.

Operating independently from group is grid. Grid is the degree to which societal conventions control the individual. In strong grid societies, the obligation of the individual to conform to societal conventions is great. Continuing with the above examples, a prison is strong grid society because it has many structured rules and an expectation for the prisoners to follow them. These rules are strongly enforced and may be formal or socially constructed. In a weak grid society, individuals express little concern for societal conventions or bureaucracies. An example of low grid is a suburban neighborhood that operates individualistically and does not constrain individuals with societal duties or obligations.

Douglas identifies four major typological societies according to the degrees of convention and emphasis on group solidarity. Disorder occurs when properties from opposing societies attempt to amalgamate because this appears to threaten culturally constructed boundaries. The military is a high grid/high group society because it emphasizes group cohesion from the institutional level to the team level and requires that all members follow strict and uniform rules. The strong emphasis on cohesion in the military suggests members are encouraged to identify with conventional, group identities. Thus, the military is a strong group society. Because the military emphasizes structures and obligations, exercising substantial amounts of control on the individual, it is also a strong grid society.

The military emphasizes group cohesion and conformity to conventions because

of the high stress, high risk environment (Szayna et. al, 2015). The military values cohesion because it is perceived as further protection from the dangers of combat (Szayna et. al, 2015: 68). Thus, anything that threatens the strong grid/group is perceived as dangerous. I identified the military as a society with a strong group/strong grid structure with a tendency to favor group cohesion and culturally constructed conventions. Through this lens, I explore how this structure and identity impacted female U.S. veterans during their service.

It was important for me to acknowledge the tension that occurs when individuals in a high grid/high group society attempt to breach constructed boundaries, such as the boundary for women in the military. The tension from these efforts to transcend or transform the boundary signifies that there was a constructed boundary to begin with. I used Douglas's concepts of group boundaries to identify areas where participants faced resistance in certain scenarios and explore the ways they were impacted by these barriers.

I used the history of women in the military to explore what the formal and informal boundaries for women have historically been. This allowed me to explore which ideas and behaviors have withstood the military's efforts to integrate women, and the problems that women still face today. This research uses the lens of cultural boundaries to explore how changes to social structure, such as integrating women into ground combat roles, impacted women veterans during their service. Concepts such as identity and cohesion were used to determine how participants internalized their experience and perceived themselves individual and in their units.

## **II. RESEARCH POPULATION AND METHODS**

Research was conducted among women veterans living in Texas in the summer of 2018. This included women veterans from all branches, occupational specialties, military generation, and deployment experiences.

### **Military Population**

Military generations describe the conflict that participants served through. They are as follows, Vietnam War (1962-1973), Persian Gulf War (1991), peacetime pre-9/11 (1991- 2001), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF; October, 2001 – December, 2014), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF; March 2003 - November 2011), Operation New Dawn (OND; September 2010 - December 2011) (“Veterans Employment Toolkit”, 2015).

After the draft ended in 1973, women represented 2 percent of the total military population. In 2016 they were reported to be 8 percent of the total military population. By branch, the Army was composed of 18% women officers and 14% enlisted. The Navy was 18% women officers and 19% enlisted. The Marines were 7.5% women officers and 8% enlisted. And, the Airforce was 21% women officers and 19% enlisted (Reynolds and Shendruk, 2018).

The military categorizes race into five groups, white, black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. They also recognize two categories for ethnicity, Hispanic or Latino or not Hispanic or Latino. The military’s women population is more demographically diverse than the civilian population and the male servicemember population. “Among enlisted recruits, 43 percent of men and 56 percent of women are Hispanic or a racial minority. Female recruits are

consistently more diverse than the civilian population; they are also more diverse than male recruits.” (Reynolds and Shendruk, 2018).

In 2017, racial minorities made up 30.6% of the overall military population. 25.2% of the military’s women were classified as a racial minority. By branch and gender, the Army was 56.16% white, 36.87% African American, 4.89% Asian, .93% Alaskan Indian or Native American, .47% Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander. The Navy was 54.95% white, 26.36% African American, 5.20% Asian, 1.15% Alaskan Indian or Native American, 1.19% Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander. The Marines were 77.01% white, 13.55% African American, 3.26% Asian, .95% Alaskan Indian or Native American, 1.04% Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander. The Airforce was 71.15% white, 18.62% African American, 4.09% Asian, .78% Alaskan Indian or Native American, 1.01% Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander. By ethnicity, branch and gender, Hispanic women were 22.3% of the Army, 18.69% of the Navy, 33.82% of the Marines and 19.62% of the Airforce (“Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2017 Summary Report”, 2017).

### **The Sample**

My sample for observation and interviews was demographically diverse. I talked to women ages 25 to 70, of different branches, MOS and ethnicities. I was unable to obtain demographic information for the events I attended. For my interviews, 4 women were white, 5 women were African American, 1 woman was Hispanic (ethnicity), and 1 identified as other. Five participants were Army veterans, 3 were Army National Guard veterans, one was a Navy veteran, one was a Marine veteran and one was Army Military Police.

As a result of keeping participation restrictions limited, the military generation for observation participants ranged from the Vietnam veterans to those still in active duty. All interview participants served during either the OIF or OEF generation. One interview participant served in peacetime pre 9/11, OIF, OEF and OND.

### **Methods**

To recruit women veterans, I reached out to organizations supporting women veterans. These included The Camouflage Sisters, The Pink Berets, Women Veterans of San Antonio, and the Veterans Alliance of Texas State. These organizations organize and conduct, often collectively, large events geared toward supporting and celebrating women veterans.

Many of the events scheduled for the summer of 2018 revolved around celebrating the first annual Women Veterans Day. The events included a block party, a celebratory march to the capitol, and two symposiums. The block party and one symposia focused on the experiences of women veterans were held in Houston, Texas. The march and one symposium regarding the history and experiences of women veterans were held in Austin, Texas. Other events included a barbeque, three hiking trips, and an organization meeting in San Antonio, Texas. During these events I spoke with women veterans as part of participant observation. At large events, a location and time was designated for additional questions regarding the study. Participants for interviews were also recruited during participant observation using flyers during the events. Careful notes were taken during the participant observations and later transcribed afterwards.

Initially, women veterans aged 25-40 were recruited for this study. This age range was chosen because it facilitated a focus on recent military experiences and transitions

out of the military. This age bracket was difficult to recruit because many of the women between these ages are still active duty and do not identify as veterans. Women who did not openly and readily identify as veterans could not be recruited because the research focused on the experiences of women in and out of the military are relied used a self-selecting population. The age range was expanded to include women veterans of any age. However, many of the individuals in the organizations explained that they still referred to the original flyers for information about the study and did not reach out to me. They explained this at later observation events, but still decided not to participate in interviews.

In total there were 11 semi-structured interviews conducted. During the interviews an open-ended guide was used which comprised of 18 questions. These questions asked participants to describe their experiences with the military starting from their recruitment to retirement. Unit cohesion and perceived differences between men and women, themselves and others, were covered to uncover aspects of the military boundaries participants experienced and how they understand their experiences. The interviews lasted between one and two hours. Every interview was audio recorded.

Questions were organized using three different stages of military duty: before, during and after. Asking questions about their experiences with and concepts of the military prior, during and after their service was useful for examining how their concepts of soldiering changed over time. Questions about basic training, deployment, military occupational specialty (MOS), and working in small units allowed for exploration into how their intersectional identities as women and soldiers were experienced during their service. Lastly, questions about their experiences as veterans and how it impacts their identities allowed for exploration into how participants still experience identity

boundaries outside of the military.

Findings during participant observation were heavily relied on to illustrate how women veterans experience their service outside of the military, and how their identities are impacted after their transitions out of the military. During the interviews and observations careful examination of their concepts of the military and identity were considered to see what women veterans feel or think about their experiences after working in a historically hyper-masculine institution. This helped to identify the gender-based institutional boundaries that are created and enforced by the military even after their gendered bans have been lifted.

Interviews were coded after each transcription. The coding process involved carefully read through each interview and looked for answers to my main research questions. The answers were then organized into themes that encompassed the nuances and meaning. Reoccurring topics or areas that participants felt were important were noted to establish themes. After establishing emerging themes from the interviews, a list of codes was created that could be used to analyze the participant observations.

### **III. IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE**

#### **Lack of Consideration for Male Ideology**

In the beginning of every interview, I asked participants to describe their start with the military. At first, I asked an open ended, broad questions with a few prompts such as, “Tell me about your start with the military. When did you enlist? Where did you enlist? What branch were you in? How long were you enlisted? And why did you join?” I used the open-ended format to see which concepts naturally came to my interlocutors’ minds. Usually, I would restate the final question, “Why did you join?”, if participants forgot this prompt, or I wanted more information. Participants then described their motivation for joining the military. Though the imagery in the latest Army recruitment videos suggests that pride and patriotism is a significant call to action (“Warriors Wanted”, 2018), only one woman I spoke with mentioned pride and patriotism in response to the initial question of why she joined the military.

Most participants recalled more practical reasons as a motivation for joining. Ten of the eleven interview participants specified the benefits offered to soldiers after their initial contract as their motivation for joining. Sue served seven years in the Army National Guard. She was originally an all-wheel vehicle mechanic (63B) and later reclassified as a human intelligence collector (35M). She expressed a sense of urgency when she described the prospects of escaping the small, rural town of her childhood. Sue did not see a way out other than joining the military. She felt that the benefits provided to enlisted soldiers would not only get her out but provide a way to improve her situation. She stated:

I grew up in a small town in east Texas and there are very limited avenues out and I wanted one. One of them was military, so when I turned 18, I enlisted. I knew it would give me lots of opportunities, professional and academic opportunities and really, like, I have no other way. So, this was a perfect opportunity... It's one of those small towns where every girl either gets pregnant or married by 19 and that's not me. I had aspirations that were too big for that town, some say I still have aspirations that are too big... I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do, but I knew I didn't want to do what everyone else did... I knew I wanted to get my degree. I knew I needed a way to pay for it. I knew that I needed some kind of foot in the door professionally. And, I knew the military offered all those options. [ANG, OEF, Sergeant, 7 years, 63B/35M]

Sue was not the only participant to express an interest in the educational and professional opportunities the military offered. Bethany, an Army veteran who served nine years as a strategic analyst (98C), realized she needed access to the resources the military offered their enlisted after a conversation with her mother. The specific resources offered by the Army heavily influenced her decision to join that branch. She recalls:

Well, it all started when my mother came to me and said, 'We can pay for the first year of college, but you need to find some financial aid for the other three. So, two days later I said 'Mom, I'm joining the army!'... Because I looked at the Army and the Airforce. And the Army guaranteed me a bonus, a job and college money. Like *guaranteed* all of that. The only thing the Airforce would guarantee me was putting me into basic training. They wouldn't guarantee me a job, I mean, time off if I needed it to go to school while I was in, but the only thing they would guarantee me was putting me in basic training. Not... I want a bigger guarantee if I'm going to do this. [Army, OEF/OIF, 9 years, E6, 98C]

Abigail, a Jamaican immigrant and pilot, also stated that she was drawn to the benefit of college and professional opportunities. She enlisted out of New York and saw this as an opportunity to pay for a degree and finish her pilot training. She served four years in the Navy doing aviation structural mechanics (AM). When asked about her

reasons for joining, she recalled her experiences as:

Upon migrating to the United States, I wanted to finish school. Um, the military seemed like a reasonable option to me. And then I kind of wanted to finish pilot training, within the military, too. So, that's the reason I joined... Yeah, I joined because I wanted to finish school and be a pilot. [Navy, 2010-2014, 4 years, missing final rank, AM]

These reasons for joining are an interesting contrast to the recruiting campaign material, but what stands out regarding gender and identity construction is the participants' lack of acknowledgement of historical gendered expectations in the military. The military was, and is, predominantly male. However, participants seem to focus on the benefits provided by the military. Even when specifically asked whether they initially believed their gender would influence their experiences, many participants rejected the belief that gendered expectations of the military were a deterrent for joining.

After I asked, "Why did you join?", I looked for indications of participants' considerations for gender expectations in the military. None of my interlocutors initially addressed concerns or thoughts about gender in the military. So, I used the follow up question, "How did you think being a woman would impact you?" Two interview participants said it had crossed their minds, but they felt the benefits were more important than any possible pushback due to their gender. Two other interview participants suggested that women in other male dominated industries face the same gendered expectations and that it did not deter them from joining the military. The other interview participants simply acknowledged the gender expectations but said they did not consider the expectations significant enough obstacles for joining the military.

The lack of consideration for maleness in the military is surprising considering the imagery that the military uses for recruitment videos. The most recent recruitment effort

for the Army, for example, was a series of eight videos depicting life as an Army soldier. Just as many of the Army advertisements do, these videos portrayed soldiers driving tanks, submerging submarines, parachuting from airplanes and firing an array of weapons. Most of the videos showed groups of soldiers in full combat uniforms making their gender difficult or impossible to distinguish. However, some videos showed individual or identifiable soldiers receiving awards, giving commands, and operating machinery. Of the dozens of identifiable soldiers in the eight videos, only one was female. Additionally, all videos were narrated by a man (“Warriors Wanted”, 2018). Thus, the imagery of men far exceeds the imagery of women for the Army’s recruitment videos.

The aspects of the military’s recruitment strategy listed above may display an important boundary in the military’s high grid/high group society. This boundary was originally a formal boundary reinforced by legal restriction on women but may now still be informally reinforced through ideas, behaviors and concepts about group membership. The Army’s slogan of “Do you have what it takes?” coupled with the lack of female representation in the recruitment videos may subtly suggest that the gender-based boundary in the military still exists and may perpetuate the belief that women may not actually have what it takes.

So, it may be that participants didn’t know the military was composed of predominantly male soldiers. Or maybe they never considered the gender expectations of the military. Instead, they just focused instead on the military as an avenue towards a different future. For participants, they didn’t see the military’s expectations for what comprises a soldier as *so* gendered that they couldn’t participate in the military because

they were women. In other words, the gender-based boundary did not appear to be a significant enough obstacle for participants. In this way, the organizational identity of the military they initially constructed from their perspectives may not have been focused on gender.

### **Construction of “Cutesy” Feminine**

Though participants did not focus on the gender expectations when asked about their motivations for joining the military, they did describe different types of feminine categories they encountered during their service. In this study, I use interview participants’ descriptions of female behavior to identify and define two different gendered categories. These categories represent two gender-based identities that my interlocutors may have used to understand the position of women in the military and to negotiate and police their own gender-based identity boundaries.

In the beginning of the interviews, nine of eleven interview participants made an effort to distinguish themselves from other woman service members. This typically took the form of statements such as, “I don’t know how useful this information [her personal experiences] will be because I was a little different from other women.” However, many of the qualities they claim made them different from other women, in fact, made them similar to other women. In reviewing their responses, it is evident they were all different in similar ways.

Sylvia, who served 22 years in the Army, described the way in which she felt she was different when I asked her, “Did you feel that there was a difference with you being a woman and how you were treated either stateside or deployed?” She described an experience where she felt her competency was tested and explained:

Because, when we first got to Iraq... it depends on the female. Because we had those cutesy females that didn't want to pull their weight. And again, I'm not that female. I'm that female that is going to pull their weight just to prove a point. [Army, 22 years, SFC, pre9/11-OIF-OEF-OND, 63G]

Sylvia's identification of "cutesy females" describes a category identified by my other interlocutors as well. They almost always initially described themselves as not being "cutesy females." For this reason, I use cutesy feminine as one of the categories participants used to construct their identity boundaries. When describing the cutesy female, participants identified behaviors such as painting their nails, wearing make-up and ruffles, and participating in sexually promiscuous behaviors with male soldiers.

However, women with whom I spoke also admitted that in some situations they themselves were a cutesy female. One participant joked about wearing ruffles, make-up, and nail polish during the interview, but then reaffirmed that she was good at her job and therefore different from other women. Distinctions like this one, and Sylvia's statement about pulling her weight, are important because they elucidate where the nucleus of the identity boundary exists: competency.

### **Construction of Competent Feminine**

Participants used the idea of competency to position themselves as an entirely different type of female from the "cutesy female". For them, the claim of competency aligned them with the institutional expectations for all soldiers. As expected from a high grid/high group society, the military has a heavily regimented set of qualifications and standards for soldiers. These core values and standards differ between branches, but they all include similar beliefs.

The seven Army core values, for example, are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Additionally, they include the standards

necessary to pass the physical and occupational tests. All soldiers are expected to meet or exceed these standards to participate in military life. These standards are essential to the construction of the “competent female” category that emerged as a theme in these interviews.

In the same interview that I quoted above, Sylvia positioned herself as a competent female when she said:

So, males who were the same rank as me would be like ‘here, let me grab your bags for you.’ Why? I went through the same training you went through. I know how to carry my rucksack and my duffle bag. Just like you. I packed it myself, just like you. But in the same sense, you have those cutesy females that were like “oh this is so heavy, can you carry it for me?” I’m like, but you went through the same training he went through. [Army, 22 years, SFC, pre9/11-OIF-OEF-OND, 63G]

This quote highlights the aspects of “competent female” that construct the separation between participants’ identities and the cutesy female. The qualifications for competency may include passing the military standards and meeting the expectations for soldiers. In addition to physical competence and meeting the same standards as men, five of my interlocutors, including Sylvia, claim to have emotional strength and ability to support male soldiers. They understood this as part of the competent feminine.

When women did not display competent feminine behavior, other aspects of their behavior were deemed cutesy and were criticized. In the response to the same question Sylvia continued to separate herself from cutesy, while now targeting the expression of gender in cutesy feminine as she continued saying:

No! I can carry my own bags because I have been through the same training as you. You know? So, that did cause some friction with those cutesy females that were in the military, and have the same uniform that I have on, that say, “Can you carry this? It’s too heavy.” Or, we’re in Iraq, it’s 120 degrees and they are putting pounds of make-up on. And I’m like, why? [Army, 22 years, SFC, pre9/11-OIF-OEF-OND, 63G]

This interview demonstrates the ways women in this study constructed their own idea of what it means to be a woman soldier, and how they policed that identity. This may be explained, in part, from the unique history of women in the military and the obstacles they continue to face.

### **Attitudes About Women**

Military personnel still hold gendered boundaries regarding participation that are obstacles for women, despite their strides towards equality. Though military boundaries for women are no longer formally enforced by legislation, women soldiers are still combatting negative beliefs and attitudes about women (Trobaugh, 2016; Matthews et al. 2009; Young and Nauta, 2015). Studies surveying the attitudes about women in the military (Trobaugh, 2016; Young and Nauta, 2015), and in specific occupational roles (Matthews et al. 2009), described the negative attitudes regarding their presence that women continue to face. These studies consistently showed that men and women differ in their acceptance of women in the military, with women generally having positive attitudes and men having comparatively negative attitudes.

Elizabeth Trobaugh (2016), for example, explored stereotypes and gender bias regarding women performing and training for *warrior-type tasks*. Warrior-type tasks were defined as the skills and tasks necessary to be successful on the battlefield and frontlines, such as basic rifle marksmanship.

Trobaugh conducted two rounds of surveys, one with exclusively women and one with women and men. In the surveys, she asked respondents to describe their experiences training for and with women in warrior-type tasks, rank the perceived obstacles to success for women, the reasons respondents' felt women did not succeed in warrior-type

tasks, and what they believed would result from integrating women into ground combat roles. Trobaugh found differences between the perceived obstacles for success and fears about integrating women into ground combat roles (Trobaugh, 2016).

In Elizabeth Trobaugh's study (2016), men and women had similar experiences training women and training with women in warrior-type tasks. Respondents reported men and women experience the same training, and that women were generally capable of success in their training. Both genders reported that lack of familiarity with the task was the prominent reason for women's failure to meet task standards. However, women reported lack of motivation as the second most prominent obstacle for women. Men reported women's physical strength as the second most prominent obstacle.

When asked about their attitudes regarding integration of women into ground combat roles, men and women reported significant differences. Men enlisted soldiers in combat arms and noncombat arms jobs reported physical strength as the most prominent obstacle for women's success. Women, regardless of rank, and male officers reported attitudes about women in combat roles as the biggest obstacle for women's success.

However, among men of all ranks and job demographics negative effects of female integration were ranked highest in the list of possible outcomes for allowing women into combat roles. In other words, men perceived the integration of women into all combat roles as having a negative outcome.

Increased combat readiness was the highest ranked effect of integrating women into combat roles according to women respondents (Trobaugh, 2016). Meaning, women perceived the integration as having a positive effect on the military.

Elizabeth Trobaugh's and others' research suggests that the attitudes about

military women and their capabilities are still a significant obstacle for women. Every interview participant in my study described confronting that obstacle. Using the same interview response from Sylvia, she continued to express her frustration with “cutesy females” and said:

So, that was frustrating for me because, to me, my whole career I’ve had to prove myself as a female. Because when I went to PLDC (primary leadership school) before you get promoted to e5, um, there were males there that didn’t think females should be there. Point blank. I mean, me and this guy almost got kicked out because we got into it during PLDC. He said I shouldn’t even be here. Why not? I made cut off score, just like you did. I take a PT test, just like you did. I don’t—why shouldn’t I be here? ‘Well, females just shouldn’t be here. You shouldn’t be in the military you shouldn’t be here.’ Again, this was the early 90’s... So, that was my first experience with the whole “You’re a female, you shouldn’t be here” thing. But throughout my career, it comes and goes. Regardless of rank, um, and I think it’s just... I don’t know. It could be the way people are raised. Again, you have some people that think women should just be in the house and cook and clean and do that thing and not join the military. You have members of congress that believe women shouldn’t be in combat. I don’t see the difference. [Army, 22 years, SFC, pre9/11-OIF-OEF-OND, 63G]

This suggests that women soldiers are still striving to gain equal acknowledgement. My interlocutors believed, and often stated, that part of this equal acknowledgement is recognizing women as equally in competence to their male counterparts.

Sylvia demonstrated the ways women work to display their competency to facilitate equal acknowledgement. Behaviors from women that undermined the perception that women are equally competent to men may have been discouraged by being labeled “cutesy.” The boundary of competent versus cutesy was heavily policed by women soldiers because they may have viewed “cutesy” behavior as undermining the competent efforts of women in the military.

## Expression of Gender

Though the punishment of being labeled cutesy extended to the behaviors of wearing make-up, nail polish and ruffles, it was targeted at the competency of the woman in question, or lack thereof.

Sue, a veteran of the Army National Guard, believed she displayed the level of competency that gained her equal acknowledgement in the military. Thus, she admitted to participating in cutesy behaviors. However, she elaborated by saying:

And it's not that I'm not feminine. I wear dresses all the time. I have ruffles on my shirt, c'mon. But even my husband is like... I can switch gears really fast is what I'm saying. Like, I was never scared to get my hands dirty if I needed to... The military, it just reinforced that I can do anything I wanted and that I wasn't mentally or physically inferior to anybody, especially not a man. And men validated that. I had a medic, who just died. He told me, we were really close too, he said, "I don't think women should be in the military. But you have changed my mind" and I guess that validated all those things about myself. And other men said that, too. Saying, "I don't think women should be here unless they are women like you." Which, if you are going to be a woman in the military then you should expect to do all these things. [ANG, OEF, Sergeant, 7 years, 63B/35M]

Here, Sue believes she is exempt from the label of cutesy because she has proven herself as equal to men. Further, she believed that men validated her beliefs about her competency. This may have led Sue to believe that her expression of competency allowed her to wear dresses, ruffles, nail polish and makeup at the interview while still critiquing the actions of cutesy women.

Judith Butler describes gender as performative and performed (Butler, 1988). She explains that what it means to be a certain gender is encoded in the act or expression of that gender. The expression of gender is dictated by culturally constructed ideas of what a gender means and how it is performed. Individuals embody gender when they perform

gender according to, or not according to, the culturally constructed and acceptable expressions of gender.

According to Butler (1988), the concepts of gender are embodied in individuals but determined by groups. Groups create limitations for specific gender expression to reinforce the concepts of gender. Individuals who perform gender according to the culturally constructed expressions of gender solidify the concept that a gender exists. Those that fail to perform gender according acceptable standards are punished (Butler, 1988).

Participants in this study may have constructed ideas of what it means to be a woman soldier and attempted to embody them. They may have constructed an idea that women soldiers are competent and uphold the military standards. When women do not perform this identity according to their beliefs about what constitutes competency, their punishment is being labeled cutesy. This punishment may have extended to other expressions of gender, such as wearing make-up.

While my interlocutors openly critiqued the expression of the cutesy female, they themselves engaged in the behaviors they labeled “cutesy” in others. This suggests that being able to wear make-up, ruffles and nail polish without the threat of being labeled cutesy only extended to those women with a history of being competent. Those that did not have a history of conforming to the competent standard may not have been able to partake in these behaviors without being punished.

This also suggests that women construct an identity boundary based on competency, and police this boundary in the military setting. The construction of these identity boundaries may have been the participants’ reaction to negative attitudes

regarding women and their abilities (Trobaugh, 2016; Young and Nauta, 2015; Matthews et al. 2009).

## IV. THREATS TO COHESION

### All Green

Though combat effectiveness and preparedness has historically been the primary reason for focusing on cohesion in the integration literature, in this study I use cohesion to indicate a different phenomenon. Here, cohesion is used to indicate successful transcending of gender boundaries.

When describing feeling of cohesion in their units, or perceptions that they gained equal acknowledgement to men, participants would refer to “all green”. “All green” was described by participants as a term in the military that means everyone in the military is the same, regardless of background or demographic features. On the surface, it means that everyone on the field looks the same in green uniforms.

Beyond this, it was an idea that suggested that everyone in the military who meets the standards is a cohesive part of the larger military society. This term was used eight times in eleven interviews, predominantly by white participants. It was used to describe the ways women felt they were perceived as cohesive members of the military. It indicated that gender was not acknowledged in some circumstances, or that they did not believe the military as an organization did not perceive them as women specifically.

The term all green was usually described early in the interviews when asked whether they believed women were different from men in the military. I asked Bethany, an OIF and OEF veteran who served nine years in the Army, about her experiences in basic training. She suggested that at that point in her military career demographic differences did not impact women’s experiences. Instead, the shared goal of success in basic training overshadowed any bias or negative feelings regarding women.

When I asked, “So did you feel that there was... that women were any different?”,

Bethany responded:

No. I wouldn't say so. Um at that point we are all green and we are all the same color. So, it's like race didn't matter, gender didn't matter. We were all just trying to survive. [Army, OEF/OIF, 9 years, E6, 98C]

In another interview with Karen, an OEF veteran who served six years in the Army Military Police, we discussed attitudes and treatment towards her during her deployment. Though the conversation was initially focused on her treatment by Afghan mayors and leaders, we also discussed the military's attitudes and beliefs about women.

She explained that attitudes during deployment may differ due to the high stress environment, but that she felt gender did not matter in a deployment setting. When I asked, “How did members of your team and your unit respond to other's not taking you seriously because you were a woman?” Karen said:

I think the U.S. Army—we are very much a diverse culture. And so, when you go down range, it doesn't matter whether you are male or female. It doesn't matter, like, anything because we are all green. And so, I know a lot of people had a big issue when “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” was repealed. But the fact of the matter is, like, even your sexual orientation doesn't matter. It doesn't matter when you are boots on the ground, down range and you have bullets flying at you. I don't care what you like. Just get me the hell out of dodge. So, at least for the people that I worked with, we were a very cohesive group. And so, everybody just had the same goals in mind, the same understanding that this was the mission and what needed to be done and we would execute. [Army MP, OEF, CPT, 6 years, MP]

Karen did feel that these demographic characteristics mattered more when she was not in combat situations.

To clarify, I said, “So, you didn't feel that those characteristics mattered in combat. Did they matter when you were stateside?”

Karen said that she did feel there was more tension or acknowledgement of

demographic differences when she was stateside. She said:

There was more conflict when you are in garrison just because of the fact—but even in garrison... Well, with the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, I had a lot of soldiers who said, ‘I won’t room with someone who’s gay.’ And it just meant more when we were on the home front versus downrange. [Army MP, OEF, CPT, 6 years, MP]

These comments about being “all green” suggest that participants may have felt more cohesive feelings when they believed all members of their unit were more focused on the shared goal than demographic differences between unit members. Though these comments about being “all green” came from white participants, African American participants eluded to similar feelings without using the term “all green”.

I focused on cohesion as it pertains to the perception of shared military identity. I also focused on the participants’ desire to receive acknowledgement equal to that given to men. This allowed me to explore the ways military service members reinforced identity boundaries and promoted or prevented cohesion.

This chapter will explore the ways participants felt the “all green” mentality in their groups was threatened, diminished or prevented. Threatening the “all green” mentality means that women felt singled out as women and diminished their shared military identity, even temporarily. Collectively, I call these threats to cohesion. These threats include military sexual assault (MSA), harassment, reputations about women, and political efforts to stifle upward mobility.

### **MSA**

All women I spoke with either experienced MST or knew someone close to them who had. Five of the 11 interview participants stated they had experienced some form of MSA during their service. Of those interview participants that described experiencing

assault, four were Army veterans and one was a Marine veteran.

Of the participants that did not experience assault, all reported knowing someone who had experienced assault during their service. Two interview participants explicitly asked that I address this topic in my study because of how deleterious they believed assault was to their service experiences. Because this topic is an especially private matter, and the information I have been trusted with is sensitive, I will not name any women from the study. Instead, I will describe some participant's experiences and discuss how MSA functions as a threat to participants' feelings of cohesion.

Participants who experienced MSA reported the attack was not expected, despite knowing the high rates of MSA for women servicemembers in the military. Until the MSA, they believed that earning their membership in the military society through achievements, and the perception that they had earned equal acknowledgment to men, protected them from assault.

When MSA and diminished feelings of cohesion came up in interviews, some participants explained they were still working through the mental health complications resulting from their assault. One group with which I conducted participant observation helps women cope with the "invisible scars" from their assault, meaning their military sexual trauma (MST).

These experiences were never specifically asked about in the interview. Instead, they came up naturally when asked "Do you think men and women experience the military differently?" Participants explained that they felt the threat of assault was much higher for women. The threat of assault made one participant feel as though she had to constantly protect herself from her fellow soldiers. This participant described strategies

for avoiding assault, such as walking with at least one other person and carrying a knife at all times. She explained that while she did feel cohesive with some of her unit members, she also felt that they were a significant threat to her safety.

My interlocutor recalled feeling constantly aware of the threat of assault. She described an incident during her deployment where one of her fellow soldiers followed her into the shower, turned off the lights and began walking toward her. She felt she needed to threaten this fellow soldier with her knife to prevent an attack. She described her disappointment and disbelief that men soldiers could continue to pose a threat to their women counterparts despite their close working relationship. She said:

But that is something I always thought was sad about the military. I train with you, I fight with you, but I always have to worry about you assaulting me. And that was just the saddest part. That I can train with you, fight with you, go to war with you, but I still have to look at you with a side eye like is he going to try something?

This participant, who was not assaulted herself, described using her position of power to prevent sexual misconduct from other leaders numerous times. She explained that some male leaders she worked with would pressure her subordinate enlisted soldiers to meet in private after their trainings, an act that she said was never appropriate. Several accusations of sexual assault were brought against this male leader, and my participant explained that his behavior was not rare in her experiences with the Army.

Another interview participant in the Army described her inability to accept her experiences to date. She explained that she did not talk about her attack and had not told her husband who was in the other room. She shook her hands downward as if she was flinging water off her body, indicating a visceral response to the topic, and asked to avoid the topic.

She later explained that after the assault she felt it difficult to connect with her unit. The attack led to an amalgamation of factors that diminished her feelings of cohesion in her unit and made it difficult for her to maintain interpersonal bonds with some of her fellow soldiers. This and other factors eventually resulted in her leaving the military.

MSA may have functioned as a sudden event that women felt diminished or collapsed their ability to feel like a cohesive member of their units. Prior to the attacks, participants felt they had successfully transcended the gender identity boundary and were accepted as an equal member of their groups, or believed they were cohesive members. Some participants may have felt their status as a cohesive member protected them from an assault.

However, the attack reversed their cohesive feelings and made them question their status as cohesive group members. The reversal was sudden and significant to the point that some women decided to leave the military as a result.

The threat of assault and diminished cohesion also came up in participant observation. During the Woman Veterans symposium in Houston, many women spoke about their emotional experiences with MSA and trauma. An example from the symposium was recounted by one attendee. After the speakers had finished, this participant and several of her fellow Camouflage Sisters members stood in a semi-circle outside a lecture hall. She expressed her surprise at the assault she experienced during basic training, despite her roommate's assault just a month prior. She said she initially felt bad for her roommate, but believed the assault was a result of her roommate's cutesy behaviors.

This participant explained that her assault led to her feeling disconnected from her unit. She felt further disconnected from her entire cohort when she missed her first deployment because of a pregnancy resulting from her assault. She continued to serve for another eight years and overcame the body dysmorphia she felt after her assault. But she described it as a grueling process that involved disconnecting with the military identity.

The conversation continued as women explained how they felt disconnected from their bodies, their units and the military after their assault. Eventually one of the symposium organizers brought up her violent assault that resulted in a hysterectomy. She explained that she felt similarly to the other women, and they all described how they disconnected from some of the more toxic aspects of their military identities. The symposium organizer said:

They make you feel like it's your fault. And the whole time you were thinking, 'this can't happen to me. I'm a Marine. This doesn't happen to Marines.' So, you're just kind of so confused because it only happens to people who ask for it. So, yeah, I just had to really work that out of me. Because they beat it into you, but it's not right. And, so that makes you feel really disconnected from everyone.

These participants felt the physical assault forced a disconnection from their bodies and caused them to reevaluate the connection to the military identity.

Today, both women identify as veterans. They actively use their experiences to help other women who experienced MSA to cope with the attack by organizing symposiums and support groups and have pride in their service. These women may have adapted their understanding of what it means to be a woman veteran or servicemember. Part of this adaptation may acknowledge the gendered identity boundaries that exist in the military for women. Their adaptations suggest that MSA and the resulting trauma may have functioned as a sudden threat to their feelings of cohesion in their units.

## Harassment

Harassment may have functioned in a slightly different way. Rather than being a sudden event that diminished participants' perception of their cohesive status in their units, harassment was subtle, reoccurring, and accepted to the point of almost going unperceived. Harassment was not always considered a problem. Participants initially, and sometimes presently, saw this as a behavior designed to build solidarity between soldiers.

All participants in interviews and observations described harassment as a normal part of being in the military. They often described the type of harassment that built solidarity between soldiers as a joking behavior.

However, sometimes harassment would go beyond building solidarity and was no longer accepted as a joke by participants. When it was taken too far, participants felt harassment undermined their status as a cohesive member of the unit. In other words, women felt that accepting or participating in harassment sometimes made them feel like accepted members of their units. But, when joking harassment was taken too far or created a context that undermined the professional relationships in the group, women felt harassment undermined their equal acknowledgement and group membership.

Problematic harassment was loosely outlined by participants as unnecessary or unwanted sexual comments, touching or embarrassing interactions. I call this form of harassment *relentless harassment* because it did not stop despite their efforts to end the behavior. For the women I spoke with, relentless harassment was a problem because it undermined the professional standards they worked to maintain.

Jess, an interview participant [Army, OEF, CPT, 6.5 years, 65B], described her complications with relentless harassment and how she came to notice it as a problem. In

reference to general harassment she said, “it’s just constant. And, like, you don’t even notice it anymore. Until it’s a problem. Then you have to address it.” Often, when asked about addressing relentless harassment, participants felt they needed to be firm to get the behavior to stop.

Jess described having to yell at a fellow soldier for promoting and suggesting sexual interactions between her and a patient of a subordinate rank. She explained that she addressed this issue multiple times to no avail. The male soldier finally stopped after Jess threatened him with official reprimand. She expressed frustration with the situation and felt it was common for many women.

Then Jess explained that she didn’t realize this behavior was a problem until she left the Army. When she started working in the civilian world, she found that her coworkers believed this behavior was unacceptable. In one example provided by Jess, her coworkers were upset about the travel arrangement her boss made for a required conference. Her boss was unfairly requiring all the women attending the conference to stay in one room, while he allowed the men attending to have their own rooms.

Jess did not see this as a problem until her female coworkers explained how differential treatment was unacceptable to them. This made Jess question some of her service experiences, including the example proved earlier in this section. Jess said her new perspective on respect for equal treatment helped her realize how problematic relentless harassment had been for her while she was serving. She said, “But like, why should I have to threaten you? Are we doing a job? Would you do this at another job? No. So why do I have to threaten you?” [Army, OEF, CPT, 6.5 years, 65B]

Another example comes from Sue [ANG, OEF, Sergeant, 7 years, 63B/35M]. In

an interview, Sue also described her frustration with relentless harassment and her perception that it was a constant obstacle for women. She explained that no matter how hard she tried, she had to fight her team members to make it stop.

She and two other participants independently suggested that some men were aware of this struggle for women and worked on their behalf to make other male soldiers stop. However, Sue described her realization that the relentless harassment meant she was not equal to the men in her group because she alone could not make the behavior stop. It required a male colleague to finally stop the unwanted behavior.

Other participants believed harassment was a problem for women regardless of the solidarity it built because it undermined the professional standards they worked to maintain and highlighted their status as different from men. Sexual comments or comments about their bodies made women feel uncomfortable and as if the “all green” mentality did not apply.

Relentless harassment made them question the “all-green” concept because it drew attention to their differences from their male counterparts. In this way, relentless harassment served as a more subtle reminder of the gender identity boundary that existed in the military.

### **Reputations About Women**

Another participant-perceived threat to feeling cohesiveness was the reputations that followed women. Participants discussed the retaliation and reputational damage resulting from assault more often than the assault themselves. This appeared to be an additional challenge to overcome when working through the confusion of an assault and was often a reason for the lost feelings of cohesion to their units.

The reputational issues that concerned my interlocutors centered on the idea that an accusation of assault would be a career ending event for the accused men. Thus, women were threats to the success of men. Women described disbelief and confusion regarding the behaviors of their fellow soldiers and leaders, particularly with how their accusations impacted their perceived identity within the unit.

All interview participants initially described the feelings of cohesion in their units as strong in the beginning of the interview, usually referencing “all green.” However, when I asked them about the differences between men and women’s experiences later in the interviews, participants described the threat of assault and harassment as more apparent for women.

Further, those that reported MSA and relentless harassment believed their accusation caused their identity to change within their units. This change was generally negative and led to retaliation against them. In some cases, retaliation was in the form of unsupportive behaviors from leaders. Some participants eventually reached a place where they were unable to continue working in an environment that was retaliatory or unsupportive.

Bethany described a typical experience of retaliation. She said that women have a hard time recuperating from the retaliation that follows their accusation. Bethany’s superiors opted to change her assignment and location, rather than those of the man she accused of sexual misconduct. They moved Bethany to a position where she did not interact with others often and gave her “busy work”. She described her leader’s motivation for doing so as trying to make her leave by her own choice. In other words, she believed the changes to her job and assignment were a guise for retaliation. She said:

You kind of become a pariah... They'll get out because you can't— with that kind of perception, and that kind of story hanging over you, you can't effectively do your job anymore. I've heard of women getting chaptered out [left] because of situations like that... They will find whatever... if the military really wants to get rid of you, they will get rid of you. They will... You are all of a sudden assigned to a different area that you've never been to before in a place where you don't interact with a lot of people. And you just kind of sit there until you decide to get out. [Army, OEF/OIF, 9 years, E6, 98C]

The reactions from her fellow soldiers and leaders demonstrates how soldiers reinforced the identity boundaries through retaliation.

Bethany said that the man she accused of sexual misconduct was not reprimanded as a result of her accusation. Her leader simply removed Bethany from the unit. She believed his motivation for doing so was because her presence in the unit was perceived as a threat regardless of what happened with the accusation. Importantly, Bethany was not the only participant to describe experiences like this. Two other interviewees and many women from participant observation described similar situations.

Women who had experienced MSA and continued to serve also described difficulties overcoming the reputations that followed them when they were transferred to new units. One interview participant explained the reputation that followed her after her MSA and how she believed her assault, not accusation, impacted her unit cohesion. She explained:

Nobody wants to associate with you because they don't want to be associated with that girl who accused Sergeant so and so. Or, that girl who took down General whoever. They don't want to be associated with and they don't want their names anywhere near that situation. And the situations that I have seen... a lot of women end up leaving the military because of that perception of that "oh, you're the bad guy. You did this. You're not worth it anymore. Why are you still here?"

This participant felt that the reputation was a significant reason that women do not report

their assaults. Further, she elaborated by saying:

“women are afraid to report anything like that. Because it’s that, oh you asked for it. It’s... the news stories are true. Women are afraid to report it because they are scared of how they are going to be perceived.”

This is an example of how my interlocuters believed the reputation of women-as-a-threat-to-the-success-of-men follows women after their assaults, and how women experienced the loss of cohesion with their units because of this reputation.

The three participants who did not report their experiences explained the feelings associated with trying to recover quietly as forging a resentment towards the problem of MSA in general. All participants felt that more needed to be done to prevent assault. When asked about the effects of the equal opportunity and harassment trainings, they generally scoffed. Many felt these efforts were generally unsuccessful. Instead, they felt that their male counterparts acted as a stronger deterrent from relentless harassment and MSA.

Six other interview participants directly echoed the frustration of working with leaders and soldiers that were leery of women. Other participants felt that their fellow soldiers also held the belief that women were trying to frame men for sexual misconduct, and that my interlocuters had to prove that they were not a threat.

Many of my interlocuters initially said the reputations and stigmas of women were a problem, but some felt the need to defend the suspicions of men. They would offer examples justifying the fear by describing experiences where woman soldiers had unjustly accused leaders or soldiers of sexual misconduct, leading to disastrous consequences for the male soldier. When Jess described the differences between male and female leaders, she discussed the fear of wrongful accusations. She said:

And there is, depending on the situation and the person, this rhetoric of—and depending on... the female and her behaviors and her reputation, this victim blaming thing. And I think, just too many times, you would see a male leader be accused of sexual misconduct and not be punished for it. [prompt from her husband in the room reminding her that it does exist] I mean, there were instances of it... So, and then on the flip side... my husband's ex-wife walked into the CID one day because she was mad at him and said that he raped her. And it's on his record until they can get it expunged. So, even though he was never convicted—because she said something happened and wrote a sworn statement \*shrug\*. [Army, OEF, CPT, 6.5 years, 65B]

Here, Jess begins to describe the complex dynamic between co-ed leadership and the history of the reputation that follows women when dealing with male leaders. She stopped her explanation to provide an example of when a woman wrongfully accused someone before turning to a larger discussion of MST and the legal process involved in accusing leaders. Though she momentarily defended the fear men have of women soldiers, she concluded that the reputation that follows women leads to less cohesion between leaders, and men and women soldiers.

In a similar vein, there seemed to be a frustration working with leaders who feared women, or whose efforts to include women only highlighted their status as different from other soldiers. In other words, when leaders tried to diminish the probability of harassment or unequal treatment for women in their units, it highlighted that they could be subject to this treatment. Thus, this highlighted their differences from men.

During participant observation I often heard comments about this that were presented as jokes about the military's efforts to stop harassment and assault. Women felt that these efforts were not substantial, and leaders that misunderstood the training and concerns of women created an additional problem. Though they joked through this

frustration, they did believe it was a real concern for women's equal treatment in the military.

Caroline, an interviewee working in military intelligence, said that she was one of very few women in her MOS, and the only woman in her unit. She provided an example of this joking frustration and the additional problems for women. She described her experiences as mostly positive but found it difficult to work with her leaders at times. Jokingly, she described her leader as never having worked with women before.

Caroline did not feel that her leader was excluding her. Instead, his efforts to be gender-inclusive drew attention to her status as a different from the men soldiers. She described her leader's efforts as misguided when she said:

He would say things like, 'ok, you guys... and [Caroline]... please don't report me.' Which was like... I mean, thanks for trying to include me, but really that's not what I wanted... Honestly, it made me more uncomfortable because he was trying so hard to include me. [ANG, OEF, missing final rank, 4 years active-2 reserve, 35F

Caroline said that the way her leadership "tip-toed" around her made her fellow soldiers wary of her, ultimately diminishing trust between them. This weakened her unit cohesion initially, but she was able to talk directly with her commanding officer to make a smoother transition toward equal acknowledgement.

### **Political Efforts to Stifle Upward Mobility**

In addition to the above conflicts, participants named "political efforts" to thwart their upward mobility as a problem for vertical cohesion. These efforts were not actual political campaigns, but a reference to the military's use of personal relationships to promote or demote some soldiers.

My interlocutors continually referred to the military as a political environment.

According to them, this meant that personal relationships were just as important as maintaining military standards and merits for receiving promotions. Participants described efforts to prevent upward mobility and opportunity as “political” in nature, suggesting that they were not based on merits, physical scores or abilities. Rather, they were based on interpersonal relationships. These political efforts came in the form of preventing promotions and preventing participation.

Preventing promotions was a recurring theme throughout interviews. Interlocutors felt that they could not trust leaders who prevented or sabotaged their efforts for promotions. Leaders prevented promotions in several ways. Usually, they would help male soldiers, and not woman soldiers, study for their promotional tests or provide opportunities for male soldiers instead of women soldiers with similar merits.

One example comes from Bethany. She addressed the disparity between the ideal and typical career path for soldiers when asked whether she believed there was an “ideal” soldier. She explained that the “ideal” of a soldier closely aligns with the beliefs her recruiters presented, such as all jobs being similar to infantry jobs and she would have the ability to move up to any rank. She said that they typical experience was dissimilar to this. Namely, she emphasized the importance of interpersonal bonds on promotional opportunities.

When asked to expand on what she meant by interpersonal bonds being important, Bethany described situations where she believed her leader spoke against her at an NCO of the month board. This is a board that tests the general Army knowledge and achievements of competing soldiers. Bethany described winning NCO of the month as a necessary award for those looking to be promoted.

She explained that she did not feel her NCO fostered a supportive environment for her upward mobility. She believed he restricted her time for study and did not help her study for the exam. She explained she would not have perceived this as a problem, but he was willing to help another male soldier in her unit. She perceived this as unequal acknowledgment. Further, her NCO spoke negatively about her at the promotional boards. She said:

Well your NCO goes into the conference room first to, you know, they talk about you before you walk in, the introduction...I heard later—on more than one occasion because I went to more than two NCO of the month boards trying to get promoted— I heard later that when my NCO walked in there and they were asking questions about me he would straight up be like “Oh she’s going to fail.” [Army, OEF/OIF, 9 years, E6, 98C]

This made Bethany feel that she was “on [her] own”. Efforts like this from leaders were perceived by participants as destroying the cohesion the military seemingly promoted (“Warriors Wanted”, 2018).

Additionally, participants believed leaders could diminish cohesion by restricting access to various opportunities. Sue provided an example of a political effort against her when she described her leader’s insistence that she not leave the compound during a deployment. Sue had volunteered to go on missions that involved leaving the compound to scout for improvised explosive devices (IED) and other threats to safety. She had gone on several missions before her leader prevented her from leaving again.

Sue said her leader required other male soldiers, soldiers who had not volunteered for the missions, to go outside the compound. She felt disappointed and frustrated that her leader was unwilling to let her participate stating, “He, like, saw me as his daughter or something” [ANG, OEF, Sergeant, 7 years, 63B/35M]. She felt singled out as a woman during this experience and said other soldiers noticed the exclusion.

Sue believed this was unequal acknowledgement that undermined her capabilities and made some male soldiers question her relationship with her leader. This was perceived as a form of special treatment that caused negative feelings about her from other soldiers on the compound. She was so convinced that the situation occurred because she was a woman, and that the situation was a clear example of differential treatment for women, that she called one of the male soldiers on the compound to verify the events during the interview.

Sue felt that the behavior from her leader undermined her desire to be an equal member of her unit. Overall, efforts to stifle promotions and opportunities diminished the cohesion participants felt with their units. Five interview participants felt their leaders in some way prevented promotions or opportunities because they were women. Those participants who did not directly experience these efforts noted they knew friends or acquaintances who had.

MSA brought a sudden and abrupt end to the cohesiveness participants felt in their units. MSA and trauma made it difficult for women to feel like equal and valued members of their units. Attacks caused some participants to disassociate from the military identity while they coped with the mental health complications associated with MSA.

Harassment was a more subtle, accepted form of reinforcing the identity boundary. When harassment reached an unwanted level and participants requested that it stop, it became relentless harassment. Relentless harassment caused a breakdown of cohesion when male unit members did not respect the wishes of women soldiers, instead taking instructions to stop from male soldiers. The dismissal of their wishes made participants feel as though they had not transcended the identity boundary and, thus were

not equal members of the group.

Reputations followed women who accused men of sexual misconduct. These reputations focused on women as threats to the success of men. Women who had experienced MSA believed their cohort members and leaders retaliated against them for their accusations. The reputations, and the lack of support from their units, made it difficult for my interlocuters to do their jobs. This led some participants to leave the military.

Others found it frustrating to work with male leaders who did not understand how misguided attempts to include women actually highlighted women's differences from men, or how leaders' fear of women resulted in poor leadership.

Lastly, the perception that leaders' made efforts to deny participation or promotions also strained or threatened participants' feelings of cohesion. Participants felt they could not trust leaders that worked against their upward mobility or inclusion.

Mary Douglas describes the boundaries in society as being maintained by ideas and behaviors dictating group membership (Douglas, 1966). I propose that groups and their members experience cohesion when all members successfully transcend the identity boundaries and form a united whole. This requires that all members are equally acknowledged and accepted as part of the structure of that society. The threats to cohesion I have described in this chapter are important because they highlight how the gender identity boundary is reinforced by accepted members of the military society, male soldiers. These behaviors towards and ideas about women work to maintain the boundary that prevents women from becoming cohesive members of their units.

## **V. STRATEGIES FOR TRANSCENDING IDENTITY BOUNDARIES**

I propose that women worked to overcome the resistance to their group membership in two ways. The first is by adopting a social resilience attitude. The second is by projecting their successful transcendence of the gender boundary in the military to other service members and outsiders. These methods are ways that my interlocuters rejected ideas about their services being different or less than those of men service members. In rejecting the idea that their experiences were different from their male counterparts, women soldiers reinforced their idea that they earned their membership with the same qualifications and merits as men and believed their service should be considered equal to men.

### **Social Resilience Attitude**

The social resilience attitude was the attitude that women service members can and will overcome the identity boundary by proving their abilities as equal to men. This is founded on the idea that group membership can be earned through merit, and women can earn their membership. The attitude was usually a response to someone saying they can't do something. This person could be someone in or out of the military, and the something could be a physical test: enlisting, completing basic training, or any other military task. When a person suggested that they would not be able to complete a task, participants responded with a firm attitude about successfully completing the task.

For three participants, proving that they could successfully join the military was a reason for enlisting. Their responses were a reaction to an initial belief from their families that they could not successfully join the military society. This belief from their families suggests that the boundary for women in the military does not strictly exist in the military

setting. The public, specifically participants' families, may have held negative beliefs about the presence of women in the military.

Sylvia, an interview participant who served 22 years in the Army, stated that part of the reason she joined was to prove a point to her father. Her father, also an Army veteran, said she would not make it in the military because of her attitude, which he called a "tendency."

She recalls, "So, I have a mouth and a 'tendency', and my dad said I wouldn't be able to make it with my mouth and my attitude." Though Sylvia's father supported her throughout her career and is proud of her achievements, she did feel that she had a point to prove when she enlisted. Sylvia's experiences demonstrate the ways the identity boundary is reinforced by individuals outside of the military and her insistence on joining demonstrated how she overcame that boundary.

Another interview participant, Bethany, also developed this attitude in response to reactions from her family. Bethany's family members pushed back against her enlistment in many ways including tears, name calling, and a disbelief that she could withstand the environment. Bethany's mother cried and refused to speak to her. Her grandmother called her names like, "low class trash" for wanting to join the Army.

Bethany said she used that resistance from her family as "fuel" to overcome the challenges in basic training. Bethany used the backlash to her enlistment, specifically the belief that she would not succeed, as a reason to prove her abilities. She later stated that her desire to prove herself moved away from proving anything to those in basic training specifically, and towards proving that she was capable to everyone who felt she wasn't going to be successful in the Army.

When I asked whether she felt the doubts about her success had anything to do with her gender, Bethany teetered on her willingness to accept this idea. Instead, she focused on the fact that she felt she needed to prove herself more than other soldiers, with no regard for others' reasoning. When I asked about how she felt about the successes of other women, she said:

But I guess a lot of it... just making it through it was that I had a point to prove. I was like, ok... not necessarily that I was a girl, but I had people, including my grandmother, telling me that 'OH you're not going to make it.' And it was like, 'Why because I'm a girl or because I don't like people telling me what to do?' which is true. I almost quit, but you know, I'm not going to do that. I guess just that... I mean, maybe because I'm a girl, people didn't expect me to make it. Because of the physical or whatever... Umm... but it was... there is something that comes from somewhere that... you get to a certain point in basic training and it is no longer about... proving yourself to anyone else in basic training, it's proving to all the people that said you weren't good enough. And I reached that point about three weeks in. So, it's 'you're not good enough!' Well I got this. Watch me. [Army, OEF/OIF, 9 years, E6, 98C]

While the social resilience attitude may have existed for these women prior to their enlistment, the attitude also appeared to be a necessary tool to combat the idea that women are not meant for military work. To better understand the social resilience attitude, I turn to the work of Frank Tortorello, an anthropologist using Practice Theory to understand resilience in Marines.

In his article "I Don't Think I Would Have Recovered": A Personal and Sociocultural Study of Resilience among US Marines" (2014), Tortorello describes the cultural origins of personal resilience in the Marines. He highlights the ways Marines construct an ideal standard of resilience based on actions and narratives.

Tortorello posits that Marines strive for, expect, and achieve the ideal standard for resilience despite being under extreme stress and in lethal environments. What constructs

the expected or ideal level of resilience is dependent on the environment. In one of the 26 interviews Tortorello conducted, a new recruit describes quitting and the value-based standard of reliance in basic training. This private suggested that quitting was not an option because Marines valued responsibility and their mission.

In this environment, the ideal standard of resilience is pushing through the desire to quit. Individuals who quit cannot be considered Marines because they have not upheld the obligations and standards of the Marines. In this way, admission into the Marine Corps society is based on upholding the standard of not quitting. Though never-quitting is, in reality, impossible, Tortorello describes the idea as something foreign to Marines, and all together civilian. He states:

For these Marines, civilians allow themselves to quit. Marines do not quit because they value being responsible to and for each other and the mission... They developed new ways of being, including strategies on how not to quit—how to be resilient—when values were challenged ranging from dragging an exhausted fellow Marine through a drill to not engaging in self-talk that included quitting.

Just as the Marines in Tortorello's study described their strategies for not quitting, the women in this study also illustrated the ways they kept from quitting. The Marines in Tortorello's study used the ideology that Marine's never quit as a resilience to compulsions to give up or ideas about their inadequacy. My interlocuters used a similar ideology about their abilities to prove themselves as equal to men as a resilience to the gender boundary in the military.

Once participants passed their basic training, they were faced with another boundary. This boundary was from some of their male counterparts who did not believe women should be in the military or serving in the same MOS as men. This resistance to women's presence was what I expected to hear from participants during this study.

Though all participants talked about the men that confronted them with the idea that women were less capable or did not belong in the military, most participants dismissed the concerns of these men. They believe that there is still a hurdle, or boundary, for women in the military because these men continue to perpetuate negative ideas about women service members. However, they believed the social resilience attitude they adopted helped them prove those men wrong and they remain hopeful that the boundary can be overcome.

Sarah, an expecting mother and Army veteran, described her feelings after completing basic training as “You try so hard and you wake up and you're so prideful. Like I said getting out of basic, you have that like fresh, like I'm ready to be a soldier and take on the world attitude.” She described her experiences after basic training as disappointing because she felt she wasn't being utilized to her full potential. Her disappointment was exacerbated when she felt she had to prove her group membership and abilities to men soldiers. She explained:

And it blows your mind. But I think the only kind of unfairness is like... when I got back [from deployment] I would be hanging out at local bars or something. And you know military people when you see them out. Especially when you're military yourself. You know. And we would all talk and conversate about our time in and a lot of guys who were specifically infantry would always talk to me and my best friend, who was a female. And, um, they would always have these negative comments to say, like— because we would just be meeting them, and they would be like “Oh you guys just got back from deployment? Oh, well you're women. So, what?” and I would be like. “Well, have you deployed yet?” and they would be like “no.” and I would be like, “well then you don't even know what that means.” Just because I'm a woman, you have no idea what I did. Or what I've done. So, that is very discouraging. Especially when it's your fellow members saying that to you again. [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

The comments from the male soldiers demonstrates how male soldiers perpetuate the gender identity boundary using the idea that women are not equal to men even if they

have equal qualifications and achievements. This demonstrates that a gender boundary still exists in the military.

Some participants may have felt that their achievements would ensure their full acceptance into the group. They used the social resilience attitude to help them succeed in their efforts to earn merits. When participants realized their achievements did not guarantee them equal treatment, they were forced to approach the boundary with continued social resilience or leave. Sarah elaborated on how the comments impacted her and others during her service. She recalled:

Sarah: And you constantly feel like you have to prove yourself. And for me, it affected me a lot more than I think it did [her best friend]. She took it a lot better. And maybe she just showed that she took it a lot better. But for me, it always really affected me because, again, I knew what I was doing and that I was leaving and going on these convoys and putting myself in that much more danger. Of course, not by choice but by mission! You have to! So, it is very upsetting. It's like, I know what I went through and it is upsetting that I feel I have to come back and justify myself to someone who is my fellow soldier. Like, it's \*grasping for words\* a feeling you can't even really explain because it's so upsetting. [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

Jordan: Like you have been robbed of that experience?

Sarah: Yeah, exactly! Exactly. Again, you come back and it's one of those things where you get out of basic and you're so prideful, and then you get knocked back down. You come back from deployment, you're like "uh! I love it. I love the Army again. I know why I loved it." And then, you remember why you don't. Because you get knocked back down again... Of course, I'm proud. But I'm just like... I think it's because I was told so many times by other soldiers, especially men—or always men! It was never a woman. That, you know, either your service isn't as justified, or like, it's not as great. It's kind of led me to, even now that I'm a civilian I just don't talk about it. I mean, it's because somewhere, I think... I mean, maybe they are right somewhere. Which is unfair because it is stripping me of my experience and something that I have done and earned. [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

Though her “green” status was tested during her service, Sarah maintains pride in

her successes. She feels that the group boundary she faced will eventually dissolve. In reference to men who contested her presence and merits as a soldier, Sarah stated:

and I think that some men know, you know, some men do ~~you~~ see that. And you can talk to men that I've served with and I can have conversations with them, and they'll be like "Yeah, I can completely understand where you're coming from." Whereas other men, they're still stuck in this mentality where this is a man's job and women aren't meant to be here type thing. Yeah. It's very much a disconnect in that sense. [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

Sarah has maintained optimism about the prospects of a changing attitude towards women soldiers' service, but she felt it would take longer than her military career to get there. The optimism about her service and the service of women soldiers works to reinforce the social resilience attitude.

## VI. IDENTITY AS VETERANS

Participants expressed a range of reasons for leaving the military. Most participants felt the need to leave after their assaults, or after their leaders presented political pushback after an assault accusation. Other participants expressed a disenchantment with the military lifestyle, suggesting they felt unsatisfied with military productivity or felt underutilized. Regardless of their reason for leaving, all participants expressed pride in their service. The transition out of the military meant participants had to reenter civilian life and negotiate their new identity as veterans. This chapter will cover participants' attitudes regarding their reintegration into civilian life, the identity boundary they faced from civilians, and how they reconciled their identity as women and veterans.

Reentry into civilian life meant participants were subject to the norms and expectations for women in civilian society. This meant adhering to cultural expectations about how women express emotion and cope with trauma. The expectation of gender presentation is embodied by men and women in society (Butler, 1998). In the US, for women, this means openly and frequently expressing emotion, and their behaviors being accepted by society. For men, this means withholding emotional expressions and being punished by society for violating this norm (Grossman and Wood, 1993).

In the United States, women are perceived as experiencing more intense emotions more frequently than men (Grossman and Wood, 1993). Societal expectations about the expression of gender account for this perception of emotionality in women and lack thereof for men. Sue, a mechanic in the Army, addressed civilian gendered expectations during our interview:

And [her stepsons] say like, "That's something a girl should

do” or “girls can’t do that.” I’m like, what makes you say that? ... And I think we drill into men and women this social construct of what you should be and then we try and try and try to fit that mold. And fuck the mold. [ANG, OEF, Sergeant, 7 years, 63B/35M]

Sue continued her comments about gender expectations in American society, suggesting that the acceptance by society for her ability to express her emotions helped her transition out of the military and back into civilian life. Though Sue felt that the gender expectations surrounding emotionality were helpful during her transition out of the military, she feels these expectations may present a problem for male soldiers. She said:

And guys! If guys weren’t so restrictive with their emotions when they come back from war then they would be—I think, I don’t study psychology just FYI—I think they would be far more capable of being able to face reality when they get back. When their whole family is different, and life kept going without them and they can’t find a job, because it’s ok to cry about that stuff. I cried about it! And it was fine. But I think that helped me get through it better than some of my masculine counterparts. [ANG, OEF, Sergeant, 7 years, 63B/35M]

Other expectations about gender did not have the same positive effects on their reentrance into civilian society. The civilian expectations about who veterans are created frustration for participants because the expectations presented an additional identity boundary for participants to overcome.

Veterans in my study believed the civilian identity boundary was explicitly based on gendered expectations. This new boundary was disheartening for participants because they believed that their merits and presentations as competent feminine allowed them to successfully transcend the identity boundary in the military.

Participants expected that the gendered boundary they felt in military life would not exist in civilian society. When the civilian boundary materialized during their

transition back into civilian life, by outsiders of the military no less, it created a complication for their new identity as veterans. The complication manifested itself as an internal struggle for equal recognition for their service.

To better understand reintegration, I turn to the work of R. Tyson Smith and Gala True (2014). In “Warring Identities: Identity Conflict and the Mental Distress of American Veterans of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan” (2014), Smith and True explore the complications Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans faced when reentering society.

Rather than strictly focusing on the mental health complications associated with reintegration, Smith and True use identity to understand reintegration complications. They use the term “warring identities” to describe the internal conflict between the soldier and the civilian. The authors explain that the soldier identity emphasizes “deindividuation, obedience, chain-of-command, and dissociation” while the civilian identity emphasizes “autonomy, self-advocacy, and being relational”. The conflict between the two identity expectations causes complications with reconciling the new identity as veteran.

Using the framework of warring identities, we can understand the complications that participants experienced during their transition out of the military. However, the complications participants experienced differ slightly from those presented by Smith and True.

The major, or rather additional, conflict for participants during the transition from service member to veteran was the externally imposed identity boundary founded on the civilian expectations about veterans. This boundary is that civilians do not expect

veterans to be women. Participants' conflicts were the result of their internally held beliefs about transcending the identity boundary in the military, thus qualifying as a veteran, and the civilian imposed identity boundary that negated their service.

To exemplify the civilian identity boundary and how it was experienced by participants, I will use a portion of the interview with Sarah. Sarah served in the Army for four and a half years. When discussing her transition out of the military, she described the pride she felt in her service. She said, "So, it was like I served my time. I'm proud of what I did and let me get out while I'm still proud. So, I can say I'm proud of what I did..." [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

However, Sarah did express frustration with her identity as a veteran. She suggested that the frustration she experienced came from the civilian doubt that she is a veteran. Sarah stated that she does not usually talk about her service with civilians:

And that's why it is hard... I mean, my mom sent me this [recruitment flyer] and it's funny I even agreed to do this because I'm not really one of those people that talks about my time in the service... Even now that I'm a civilian I just don't talk about it... Which is unfair because it is stripping me of my experience and something that I have done and earned....[Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

She expanded on experiencing the civilian identity boundary by providing examples of civilians assuming she is the spouse of a veteran. One example was during her medical visits, she said,

I mean, it is hard. Even now. I have been out of the military for exactly two years now. Two years this month. And you know, I go to the VA still, for all my doctors' appointments and stuff. And since I'm pregnant, they outsource me to the military base Ft. Sam Houston. So, that's where I go for the baby doctor. And every time I go there, their questions are always "oh so you're the spouse. So,

where's your husband?" and it's like "mmmm I'm not married and no I am the veteran." [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

She ended her statement by suggesting that experiencing the civilian identity boundary became tiring. The pride Sarah felt in her service and her perception that she had transcended the military identity boundary was conflicting with the civilian identity boundary. This caused conflict in her transition back into civilian life and led her to cease her continual presentation as a veteran.

In other words, it is not the case that Sarah stopped identifying as a veteran.

Rather, she stopped expecting that either civilians or members of the VA would recognize her as a veteran. Her final statement on the topic was:

And that is people's automatic assumption of you because you're a woman veteran.... I mean, I am! Not just that, I am a combat veteran! So, I don't necessarily want to have to explain that to people. So, I usually just don't. It's usually just not something that comes up. And again, it's not that I'm not prideful for my service, but it's something that I'm like... "well people just don't get it". And so, I don't want to have to sit here and over explain myself. [Army, OEF, SPC, 4.5 years, 42A]

Sarah, like eight other interview participants, expressed frustration with the civilian perception of women veterans. Each participant felt that overcoming the civilian identity boundary became tiring and decided to limit their individual expression of their veteran identity. However, the goal of transcending the civilian identity boundary did not dissolve in the face of civilian doubt.

Rather, they associated with organizations that worked to collectively address the civilian boundary. Women Veterans of San Antonio, for example, works to combat the civilian identity boundary. They do this by educating the public on the presence of

women veterans in the veteran community and addressing the struggles for women veterans. A prominent symbol from their organization was the slogan “Women are veterans too!”. These words could be found on every banner, table display, and bright pink t-shirt for all their events. Their declaration about women veterans suggests that women are not readily recognized as veterans.

In this chapter, I discussed participants’ experiences transitioning out of the military and back into civilian life. I suggest that complications with reentering society stem from an identity boundary presented by civilians, and its conflict with participants’ feelings about their service. Participants felt they overcame the military identity boundary, and they are proud of their service. The civilian doubt experienced by participants about their identity as veterans counteracted the participants’ beliefs that they overcame the identity boundary. Though this conflict caused some participants to limit their individual expression of veteran identity, they continue to engage in organizations that work to overcome the civilian boundary.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

### **Boundaries and Cohesion**

Boundaries are the formal and informal rules in a society that determine who and what constitutes societal membership (Lamont et. al, 2015). These boundaries are based on societal members' attitudes and beliefs about individuals and groups. When groups or people attempt to alter or transcend societal boundaries, they are met with backlash from the societal members that wish to maintain the boundaries (Williams, 1989).

In the military, the boundaries regarding gender have historically been formally enforced using legislation about which roles women may occupy. Since the ban on women in combat roles was lifted in 2013, there are no longer formal boundaries for women in the military. The intended effect of removing the formal boundary was to integrate women as completely cohesive members of the Armed Forces. However, attitudes about women and their abilities to succeed in all areas of the military continue to permeate small units preventing complete cohesion (Trobraugh, 2015; Matthews et al. 2009; Young and Nauta, 2015; Cohn, 2000). This research has demonstrated some of the behavioral and attitudinal methods participants identified as preventing or straining the efforts of women working towards cohesion.

### **The Development of Competent/Cutesy**

In addition to recognizing the boundary reinforcing behaviors male soldiers may maintain regarding gender, this research has also demonstrated the ways participants constructed their own boundaries regarding gender and identity expression. The cutesy/competent identity boundaries discussed in chapter three displayed the ways participants conceptualized what it meant to be a woman servicemember and how women

worked to embody those concepts. Participants identified a distinction between those women who were displaying the institutional standards of a soldier, competent, and those who were not, cutesy. When women were labeled cutesy, participants critiqued other expressions of gender, such as wearing makeup and dresses.

Though participants openly critiqued expressions of gender, the boundary may have spurred from the historically held ideals about the abilities and capabilities of women. The competent/cutesy boundary may be a reaction to the negative attitudes regarding women. These attitudes often overtly or subtly suggest that women may not be capable of the same success as men due to their physical strength, marksmanship or mental stamina (Trobraugh, 2015; Matthews et al. 2009; Tortorello, 2010; Young and Nauta, 2015; Cohn, 2000; MacKenzie, 2015). Some research also suggests that existing male members of the military fear that integrating women into combat roles will “feminize” the military (Cohn, 2000).

Though male service members reference the gendered concept of femininity, they are referencing a well-worn argument that Carol Cohn (2000) calls the “PT protest”. The PT (physical training) protest is a discourse that those opposing women’s integration into ground combat roles refer to often. Those using the PT protest fear that integrating women into ground combat roles will result in either lowering the military standards to accommodate the limited physical abilities of women or allowing women to earn combat roles without having to pass the same PT standards as their male counterparts (Cohn, 2000).

The first fear stems from a belief that lowering the PT standards for ground combat roles may result in less combat effectiveness and preparedness. Allowing women

to fail these PT standards and still occupy combat roles is seen as weakening the entire unit and, by extension, the U.S. military. The second fear stems from a belief that allowing women to occupy combat roles without passing the same PT standards as men demonstrates inequality by giving women special treatment (Cohn, 2000).

During Carol Cohn's interviews with 80 servicemembers, mostly Army and Airforce officers, she explored how her participants frame and understand their beliefs about integrating women into all areas of the military. Cohn found that although the justifications for the PT standard invoked the perception of a neutral ideology that assumes equal and rigorous PT standards means equal status, her participants expressed feelings of loss and anger about changing the way the military has historically been gendered. These studies further demonstrate the negative attitudes and beliefs held by male servicemembers about their female counterparts. Additionally, it elucidates that their attitudes about integrating women into ground combat roles are tied to their beliefs that women are less capable than men at some military tasks.

In addition to these studies that describe individual attitudes about women, there was also an institutionally endorsed study that opposed women's integration into ground combat roles. When the Department of Defense (DoD) made the decision to open combat MOSs to women in 2013, several military leaders, and many more soldiers, were outspoken about their disagreement with this policy. Specifically, the Marine Corps leaders requested an exemption from the DoD stating that some Marine combat roles should exclude women (Thompson, 2015). The exception was not granted. Rather, the Navy Secretary Ray Maybus gave the Marines a 3-year period to conduct research on the implications of including women in previously restricted MOSs.

The Marines published a summary of the results in 2015, titled “Marine Corps Forced Integration Plan—Summary”. The results of the 2015 study are notably flawed (Ray Maybus, 2015). Navy Secretary Maybus discussed the study—and the gender bias in the Marines—in 2015 during a National Public Radio interview, stating:

It started out with a fairly large component of the men thinking this is not a good idea and women will never be able to do this. When you start out with that mindset, you are almost presupposing the outcome.

Retired Army Col. Ellen Haring also criticized the study’s flaws stating, “it was a flawed design from the get-go” (Bowman and Wagner, 2015).

Researchers used health and wellbeing, talent management, and combat effectiveness to determine whether including women in combat roles would have a deleterious effect on the Marine Corps performances (Marine Corps Forced Integration Plan—Summary, 2015). Health and wellbeing focused on the health outcomes for Marines during the training and tests. Talent management focused on the career trajectory and possibilities of women in the Marines based on their success passing Marine standard tests. The primary considerations for combat effectiveness were speed, tempo, lethality, readiness, survivability and cohesion. To test these categories, the Marine Corps researchers used a series of tasks to determine the performance differences between all-male and gender-integrated groups. These tasks included shooting drills, physical fitness tests, and tactical drills (Marine Corps Forced Integration Plan—Summary, 2015).

The study found that all-male groups outperformed gender-integrated groups in 93 of the 134 tasks. Much of their analyses focused on the mean scores for tasks for each gender, or the mean scores for group performance. This is problematic because the results completely glossed over the women who passed the Marine Corps standard tests in their

experiment in favor of focusing on the average performance scores.

Individual scores are used to determine promotions and acceptance into any MOS and not all males pass standard tests. Therefore, focusing on average performance across gender without consideration for passing individual performances specifically works to exclude women from participation, not determine the effectiveness and capacity of women in combat roles. The DoD acknowledged these flaws and required the Marine Corps to integrate women into combat roles by 2016. Though the DoD noted the flaws in the study, the result of the study may have created lasting implications and ideas about the abilities of women.

The ideas, both individually and institutionally held, about what women are capable of may contribute to reinforcing the gender-identity boundary that exists in the military. Further, the creation of competent feminine may be a reaction to this institutionally created identity boundary that uses ideas about women's abilities to reinforce their exclusion. The cutesy category may have developed as a way for my interlocutors to police the behaviors of women that undermine efforts towards transcending this military gender boundary. Women perceived to undermine participants' efforts towards equal acknowledgment and cohesion were punished by being labeled cutesy and other expression of gender were criticized as a result.

Success in transcending the gender identity boundary may result in women soldiers becoming an equally accepted part of the whole military society or becoming a cohesive member. Achieving full cohesion is likely the goal of those interested in successfully integrating women into all roles in the military, and for my participants. I propose that my participants use the competent/cutesy boundary to combat the negative

attitudes about women and their abilities in the military.

### **A Double Bind**

Many of the threats to cohesion that my interlocutors described demonstrate why the need for equal acknowledgement and cohesion is so important. Threats like MSA and harassment can lead to severe mental and physical health complications. And, they occur at significantly higher rates for women (“Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military”, 2018). Participants in this study demonstrated a desire to address those threats for women servicemembers by discussing the violence against women in interviews and organizing support groups and protesting the violence at their Women Veterans Day celebrations during participant observation.

While interview participants wanted to address the rates of MSA, harassment and sexual misconduct in the military, they also denied having any differential treatment to their male counterparts during their service. This contradiction was presented to me during interviews when participants denied differences in their services when asked “Do you think your gender impacted your service?” In contrast, all immediately responded yes when asked “Do you think men and women experience the military differently?”

All participants were motivated to participate because they wanted to contribute to progress toward equality for women in the military. However, before they can move toward equal treatment and improve the experiences for women soldiers, participants may have felt they needed to prove that they are capable of being equal to male soldiers. This need was driven by the ideological reinforcement of the gender-based identity boundary in the military.

I propose that participants felt they needed to deny any differential treatment

happened to appear competent and as if they had successfully transcended the identity boundary. It may be that while they recognize the violence for women service members, they also maintained the goal of promoting equal abilities to men. Thus, they denied differential treatment occurred to protect their service from the PT protest and other negative beliefs about women. It's possible that they believed embodying the ideal soldier through their merits and behaviors would allow them to transcend the gendered identity boundary.

The ideology about women's abilities in the military is reinforced by military standards tests and publications such as the 2015 study suggesting women did not belong in combat roles (Marine Corps Forced Integration Plan, 2015). It may be the case that women feel they must combat these reinforcements of the gender-based identity boundaries by proving that they are equal to men; not better or worse, but capable of being equal to men. It's also possible that they believed embodying the ideal soldier through their merits and behaviors would allow them to transcend the gendered identity boundaries. Thus, highlighting any difference between men soldiers experiences and participants' experiences would undermine the presentation of equal service.

However, the complete presentation of equal service may not facilitate the necessary change in truly harmful behaviors. Behaviors such as MSA and harassment are an immediately pressing. To address this double bind, participants were willing to accept that women in general have a different experience to men but denied themselves having different experiences due to their gender.

The data used to infer this double bind is only highly suggestive because I did not ask interview participants specifically about this double bind. Future research may

explore the double bind women in the military and other nontraditional occupations face to better support this hypothesis.

### **Suggestions**

Although this research does not provide clear solutions for the concerns presented in this study, there are a few areas where the military and associated organizations could redefine their approach to make resources for women veterans more approachable.

First, organizations could address the identity boundary suggesting women cannot be equal, such as correcting the PT protest. Women soldiers deteriorate this aspect of the gender boundary as they continue to succeed in various roles in the military (Cox, 2018). Promoting women soldiers by addressing the barriers to their success may help women in the military gain recognition as equal soldiers to men. MSA, harassment and the reputations about women, for example, may serve as barriers to cohesion. Addressing these concerns identified by participants is necessary for integrating women as fully cohesive members of the military.

Using this lens, organizations may provide training or highlight leaders that demonstrates behaviors promoting unit cohesion. Rather than creating training that demonstrates the negative effects of a sexual misconduct accusation on a male soldier's career, the training could demonstrate ways that male soldiers facilitate cohesion. The training and leaders may address the ideology that women are threats to men by specifically highlighting the opposite idea. Leaders who demonstrate respect for all unit members as a promotion of cohesion and a reflection of the military standard may facilitate a meaningful change in the reputations that follow women.

Additionally, changing the boundary so it excludes those whose behaviors

deteriorate cohesion may help male soldiers better support women soldiers. Leaders and servicemembers that explain specifically what the negative behavior is and how to stop it may better facilitate change. So, leaders that stop soldiers from relentlessly harassing each other and make it clear that the behaviors do not uphold the military standards, without suggesting that women caused this change, may better facilitate meaningful change for women.

The military has made substantial efforts to address MSA, harassment and equality (Schulte, 2018). However, as participants and recent reports have described, these classes and PowerPoints are not always sufficient at preventing predatory behavior (Phillips, 2019). Instead, promoting supportive behaviors from male teammates may act as a better deterrent for assault.

Having leadership that is familiar with the concerns of women and demonstrates the appropriate behaviors for supportive male soldiers may create a more cohesive environment for the entire unit. Further, having women leaders will familiarize service members with female soldiers. Having female leadership will also allow the military to utilize the unique strengths that women offer their units.

Lastly, making the VHA resources more aware of the specific concerns for women. During the participant observations, women expressed frustration with the resources available to them through the VHA. Some suggested that they needed access to counselors that were familiar with their combat related post-traumatic stress, and their sexual assault related post-traumatic stress. Often, they were sent to mental health professionals who addressed their concerns from a single perspective, rather than a holistic one. As these soldiers are both women and veterans, providing resources that can

address all aspects of their experiences will make for more successful transitions out of the military.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The research presented here discusses a variety of important concerns for women in and out the military, including how they experience resistance to their inclusion and negotiate new identities based on their service and femininity. However, this research does have several limitations.

First, the sample size for interviews was too small to make concrete statements about the experiences of all women servicemembers. For this reason, the results of this study are considered highly suggestive. The second limitation is this research does not compare the experiences of men veterans to women veterans. The third limitation is male significant others and children sometimes being present during the interviews. Occasionally, significant others would interject with their perceptions or thoughts about the questions or children interrupted during interviews by playing with the recorder.

After gathering and analyzing this data with considerations for the limitations, it is clear that future research should be done regarding the experiences of women veterans and how they negotiate identity throughout their lives. Particularly, interviews that can compare across gender demographics will provide new insights into identity boundaries in the military and how they are perceived by men and experienced by women. Additionally, conducting focus groups after interviews for male, female, and coed groups may elucidate the ways these boundaries are presented in societal norms. Further, veterans may cover topics outside of the scope of my military knowledge. Lastly, future research could further explore the double bind potentially presented by my participants.

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