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## News Media Representations of Women in the U.S. Military Post September 11, 2001

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News Media Representations of Women in the U.S. Military Post September 11, 2001

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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## Abstract

This paper examines newspaper portrayals produced by the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* of women in the military from Sept. 11, 2001, to Sept. 11, 2009. The purpose was to identify how the three nationally recognized U.S. newspapers depict women's expanding combat roles on contemporary battlefields that lack definitive front lines. Because the news media are the primary vehicle to update the general public on military matters, how the news media portray military women can play a role in shaping audience perceptions of military women. In turn, this relationship can influence the public debate on issues pertaining to women in the military. For my research method, I employed a longitudinal, qualitative content analysis of news articles that revealed three distinctively themed portrayals of U.S. servicewomen. The thematic findings include: "Tip of the Spear," a largely laudatory category portraying the "new" or "first" generation of servicewomen filling historically uncommon (particularly direct ground combat) roles for women; the "Combat Debate," with coverage listing arguments for and against military women's expansion into "direct ground combat;" and the "Sexual Assault" category that exposed women as continued victims of sexual assault across the U.S. Armed Forces. The portrayals of women in the "Tip of the Spear," and to a lesser extent in the "Combat Debate," reveal how these three particular newspapers are applying a new formula to represent military women. Rather than portraying military women in stereotypical support roles—or castigating them for transgressing gender norms—the stories from these papers cast the servicewomen performing traditional

masculine military activities in a positive light. However, following objective reporting protocol, the reports in the “Combat Debate” category also covered conventional patriarchal concerns to include protecting women from harm, particularly military mothers. Overall, these two categories comprised the greater part of the coverage of military women among the reports in this study, with only a handful of reports covering women as victims. I propose that the many positive portrayals that describe women fulfilling nontraditional masculine roles and activities demonstrate a revised blueprint in how the news media report on military women. Furthermore, while these research results cannot be applied universally outside this study’s sample, I contend that these types of images representing today’s servicewomen on contemporary battlefields increase public acceptance of women in the military and their expanding military assignments.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Since Sept. 11, 2001, 125 women have sacrificed their lives while serving in the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan (“Women in the global war,” 2009). During World War I and World War II, a combined total of 943 women serving in the U.S. military died while serving (“Did you know?” n.d.). In addition to giving their lives to country, women in the past century have progressively increased the degree and nature of their roles across all military services. They have been held as prisoners of war and participated in operations from Panama to Rwanda to Haiti. In 1998, a woman fighter pilot broke barriers by being the first woman pilot to drop missiles in combat, and, in 2005, Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester from the Kentucky Army National Guard became the first woman to earn the Silver Star for combat action (“Did you know?” n.d.). Despite advancements, recognition by the news media on military women’s contributions and progress remain largely unrecognized (Fiala, 2008). A recent study of women in military films made in Hollywood gives some clues as to why this might be the case. The findings revealed that the military films in the post-Cold War era showed a struggle to reconcile the paradox of women “betraying their femininity” by becoming professional soldiers (Furia & Bielby, 2009). Other scholars note that the press encounters the same difficulty with “rendering

ideologically inconsistent roles (i.e., female-soldier) as consistent in the stories they tell” (Howard & Prividera, 2008, p. 294).

Analogous to the media’s struggle to represent women as warriors, the U.S. military continues to face challenges in completely integrating servicewomen with servicemen. Servicewomen are confronted with ideological and attitudinal barriers compelling them to walk a gender tightrope. When women take on masculine traits or behavior, they are perceived to be deviating from gender norms. Conversely, women are criticized for exhibiting femininity because femininity is perceived as the antithesis of military masculinity. When women began their venture into military service and later all-male services, military men overtly demonstrated their dislike for women in the military by attacking the women’s morals (Treadwell, 1954). This type of condemnation against women began in earnest in 1943, and the War Department referred to it as the Slander Campaign. It consisted of exaggerated rumors and gossip about women in the Women’s Armed Auxiliary Corp and spread among military members, the media, and the public (Treadwell, 1954). Spurred by the steady rise of disparaging remarks tarnishing the WAAC image, Army Military Intelligence launched an intensive investigation into the matter. The investigators determined that the rumors resulted from resentment by Army men, the general public, and fanatics “who cannot get used to women being any place except the home” (Treadwell, 1954, p. 206).

Today, women are serving in unprecedented numbers in U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to these dynamic post-9/11 battlefields, for the first time women are

located in combat zones without definitive “front lines.” This marks another noteworthy step regarding women’s progress in the military; however, scholarly case studies on news media coverage of women in the military post-9/11 depict a narrow focus. The studies found that the preponderance of news media coverage largely focused on two sensationalized incidents involving a few women soldiers shortly after the 2003 Iraq invasion. While there is considerable research on portrayals of women in the media across a broad spectrum of academic fields, there is little academic research on news media coverage of military women, and none exists within the field of mass communications. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how national-level U.S. newspapers have portrayed women in the military between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 11, 2009.

I write as a white, Anglo, able-bodied, mid-30s, heterosexual woman and mass communications graduate student who served in the U.S. Army for 11 years. Below, I begin by providing a brief history of women’s contributions to and involvement in historical and contemporary militaries including the U.S. military. Herein, I trace the evolution of women and their relationship with the military dating back to times when women supported ancient militaries as unofficial contributors filling supporting roles. In addition, I outline the changes that led to contemporary servicewomen serving in a formal capacity with an increasing range of roles in the military. To provide deeper insight into the barriers to women’s full military integration, I define “combat,” and more specifically, “direct ground combat,” as armed ground battle with the enemy in close proximity with weapons that fire within sight of the target. Second, I outline the

predominant arguments against women's integration into the military. It is important to note that while some arguments against women serving in the armed forces persist, they are less prevalent today than decades past. Third, I cover the literature on media representations of women and scholarly case studies of women in the military in contemporary times. These suggest that the news media contribute to the perpetuation of traditional notions of proper gender roles. Fourth, I detail my method consisting of a longitudinal study of newspapers using qualitative content analysis. I chose this method as it was best suited for an initial exploratory study on this topic. My study included 59 reports produced by recognized nationwide newspapers ranked in the top five in the U.S. The criteria by which I selected these newspapers included identifying institutions with the widest possible readership and correspondingly, the highest level of audience recognition. Fifth, I describe and discuss my results gleaned from the analysis of newspaper narratives describing today's servicewomen on a contemporary battlefield. Here I show that the three studied newspapers, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* are slowly beginning to reconcile the paradox of women warriors. This was revealed by the recurring theme that showed women breaking new ground in combat without the traditional difficulties of representing women performing as "masculine" military warriors. Although the reports portrayed servicewomen positively, coverage of the serious social issue of sexual assault demonstrated a lack of vigorous reporting. While the reporting was fair and impartial, the news reports were intermittent and few. Moreover, they lacked a persuasive narrative that could effectively galvanize the public to rally for more effective military and government responses.

## Chapter Two:

### Background

Today's military women serve with the greatest equality to their male counterparts to date in terms of military duty positions and military benefits. The current integrated status of women is due to political lobbying and support by military generals, the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps senior leaders, later the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and politicians (Morden, 2000). Efforts to accommodate women included adjusting promotion, medical, legal, and social policies, some of which applied strictly to women including a variety of discharge circumstances often related to women's domestic obligations. One such policy that exclusively applied to women in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps era dictated that all unmarried pregnant women received a dishonorable discharge. However, in 1942 Director Oveta Culp Hobby discerned this particular policy as legally flawed and therefore pushed a reversal in regulations to classify all women discharged for pregnancy as honorable (Treadwell, 1954). While the mid-1900s saw the most drastic transformation for women in the military, steps to further incorporate women and expand their opportunities continue. The contemporary U.S. military demonstrates this evolution that began with women serving separately and culminating in today's gender-integrated services. The numbers of women serving in the U.S. armed forces as of Sept. 30, 2008, totaled 205,396, comprising an average of 14.2% of all the

forces – Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard (“Statistics on Women,” 2008). However, women remain exempt from certain combat positions, and they continue to face various forms of resistance to their integration into what is historically a profession by and for men (Enloe, 2000; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Nantais & Lee, 1999; Woodward, 2000).

Women’s participation with or contributions to militaries have a long history. Though there is some debate among archaeologists and historians, archaeological digs dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D. document women’s presence within Roman garrisons (Allison, 2006). Analysis of the artifacts to determine their purpose and “gendered” usage show that women lived with their “husband” soldiers and worked inside the walls conducting activities such as clothing making, along with the possibility that they worked as barmaids and innkeepers (Allison, 2006; Speidel, 1996). At one excavation dating to two separate periods during the 1<sup>st</sup> century, women’s presence based on artifact location suggests that women may have participated in significant fort activities, including providing supplies to other militaries (Allison, 2006). This suggests that women may have filled larger roles beyond those that were essentially categorized as domestic. In the West, women’s presence near the militaries endured over the centuries including nursing sick and injured U.S. colonial soldiers, and doing laundry for their husbands and soldiers throughout the American Revolution (Rees, 1996). During the Crimean War in the mid-1800s, Florence Nightingale was the driving force for significant reform of the British military’s sanitation and medical operations (Enloe, 2000). Nightingale was the chief nurse from 1854 to 1856 at a British military hospital

located on the coast of the Black Sea; after her success in drastically reducing deaths by improving sanitation, she took her lessons home. It is because of Nightingale that the British government erected facilities such as military barracks and hospitals to maintain sanitation, and established a military medical school (Cohen, 1984). Later, during the American Civil War in the 1860s, the U.S. military establishment followed Britain's lead regarding "military use of women" by actively recruiting them to serve as nurses (Enloe, 2000).

The beginnings of a U.S. gender-integrated military began in 1901 (Treadwell, 1954). At this time, Congress established a contractual women's army nurse corps with limited benefits and privileges among which included a lack of military rank, lower pay, and without retirement and veteran benefits (Treadwell, 1954). Similar contractual relationships ensued until 1942 with the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) as a separate women's military entity with members denied full military status. Full military status entails military benefits such as government insurance and financial allotments for dependents (Treadwell, 1954). In 1943, the WAAC converted to "Army status" by becoming the Women's Army Corps (WAC), but it remained a separate entity and continued to lack many of the privileges provided to the all-male regular Army (Morden, 1990). By this time, women had demonstrated their value filling administrative and medical support roles. In response, generals and key WAC leaders pushed a bill through Congress to integrate women fully into the all-male regular army (Morden, 1990). In 1948, President Truman signed the bill to enact the *Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948* permitting women to serve as permanent members of the

regular and reserve armed forces in all military branches. Despite this progress, this official admittance set restrictions confining women's service to 2% in each military branch, placed a cap on promotions, and prohibited women in the Navy and Air Force from filling combat assignments (*Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948*). The cap on the percentages of women permitted in the services was removed in 1967 (*Pub. L. No. 90-130, 81 Stat. 374, Nov. 8, 1967*), and women's numbers in the military began to grow from 1.4% in 1970 to 4.6% in 1975 to 8.3% in 1980 to today's overall numbers comprising an average of 15% for all military services ("Women in the Military," 1996; "Statistics on women," 2008). Ultimately, this formal admission of women to the military was due in part to the military's acknowledged human resource needs (Segal, 1995). Women participating in a support capacity to the military permit military fighting men the necessary freedom to perform offensively (DeCew, 1995; Enloe, 2000; Herbert, 1991). This division of labor is supported by societal understandings of traditional gender roles as they are enacted, written, recorded, and replayed in historical documents and literature, and as they are represented by the news media (Herbert, 1991; Prividera & Howard, 2006). Case studies of contemporary journalistic portrayals of military women show them as stereotypically feminine, weak, and fragile (Holland, 2006; Just, 2006; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Howard & Prividera, 2008). By framing women in such a manner, the media separate women and femininity from their male counterparts and from the masculine task of soldiering in the military (Howard & Prividera, 2008). Defined by some scholars as "patriarchal militarism," these accounts contrast masculine men from feminine women (Howard & Prividera, 2008). A mediated

demonstration of patriarchal militarism constitutes stories of men as protectors of women and all things “feminine” such as the journalistic narrative of soldiers protecting the “motherland” (Howard & Prividera, 2008; Prividera & Howard, 2006). Some scholars argue that due to the military’s mission, it is “a fundamental site for the construction of gender, that is, the defining of the boundaries of behavior” (Weinstein & D’Amico, 1999, p. 5). As such, the military becomes a forum in which men “enact masculinity” by fighting for and protecting their country (Howard & Prividera, 2004), and women are the justification for which men fight (Nantais & Lee, 1999). While the military institution might be a locus for defining gender vis-à-vis patriarchal militarism, studies show that the news media also promote patriarchal militarism, especially during wartime (Enloe, 2000; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Kellner, 2004; Kumar, 2006; Lemish, 2005; Taylor & Hardman, 2004).

Today’s servicewomen contend with two persistent challenges resulting from the military’s patriarchal environment. First are the reduced opportunities stemming from the ban on women serving in combat (Enloe, 1988). The second is that servicewomen may be victims of sexual assault and sexual hostility in the workplace (Enloe, 2000; Hillman, 2007). Sexually contentious situations and problems, discussed in detail later, are further exacerbated and prevalent in combat conditions (Herdy & Moffeit, 2004). Both challenges reflect degrees of resistance to women’s integration, but the combat issue becomes particularly controversial during times of war (Enloe, 1988). When the U.S. invaded Iraq, news media coverage that focused on two key servicewomen – Private First Class Jessica Lynch and Private First Class Lynndie England – reinvigorated opposition

against women serving in combat (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Just, 2006). While these incidents during the early years of the U.S. military's mission in Iraq renewed the public debate, changes made in the 1990s altered the military's personnel structure with particular impact on women. In 1991, Congress passed a law that permitted women to fly in combat (Gordon, 1992). Shortly thereafter, the Clinton administration opened a quarter million combat positions to women (Women in Military Service, 2008). Despite these changes and increased opportunities for women, mandates set by congressional leaders in 1993 and 1994 continue to impose restrictions on military women by banning them from "direct ground combat roles." In 1993, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin charged the military services to open more assignments to servicewomen while simultaneously establishing a committee to review the process. Ultimately, the services' proposals to increase women's participation were approved ("Application of the definition," 1994); however, a rule exempting servicewomen from certain combat conditions was approved and set for adoption on Oct. 1, 1994 ("Direct ground combat", 1994). This directive established the rule restricting women from select military units, defined the term "direct ground combat," and outlined the specific circumstances under which military women may not serve. The definition of direct ground combat is:

Engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the

battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect (“Direct ground combat,” 1994, p. 2).

This definition excludes organizations that perform supporting combat operations such as air combat and the use of indirect fire. These types of units use weaponry where missiles can travel great distances and fire at an enemy that is such a distance away that he or she is unseen (Indirect Fire, 2010). Unlike these units and based on previous Army definitions, ground combat units participate in direct combat missions that have a “substantial risk of capture” and a high probability of “direct physical contact with the enemy” (“Why American Servicewomen,” 2003).

Essential differences exist between direct combat ground combat units and the remaining units in which women may serve. Personnel serving in direct ground combat units fight and operate in circumstances dissimilar to the remaining military forces. Typically, these circumstances are characterized by tight quarters such as those of armored tanks or submarines. Some argue that redesigning military combat carriers to accommodate dual-sexes would reduce operational capabilities and increase cost expenditures by several millions for new equipment construction and design (“Who wants to spend,” 2000). Considerations such as these were the basis for Secretary of Defense Les Aspin to outline the circumstances under which women were restricted from serving. Limitations against complete gender integration include when costs to accommodate women are prohibitive, restrictions from any unit that engages in direct

ground combat or non-traditional units of the Special Operations Forces, and those positions where “job related physical requirements would necessarily exclude the vast majority of women servicemembers” (“Direct ground combat,” 1994).

This policy continues to restrict women from participating in direct ground combat units, and bars 39% of the total positions in the Army and Marine Corps from women (Women in the Military, 1996). While women now have options for advancement, combat remains the way for men to prove themselves, their masculinity, and their capabilities (Beck, 1991; Enloe, 1983; Enloe, 1988). Today, chances to serve in combat continue to be sought after by servicemembers because of the potential for greater job opportunities (Karpinski, 2006), and restricting women from participating in direct ground combat acts as a barrier to promotion (Decew, 1995; Hackworth, 1991; Miller, 1998; Sagawa & Campbell, 1992; Schmitt, 1992; Segal, 1982). The Supreme Court in the 1981 ruling of *Rostker v. Goldberg* (1981) held this policy as constitutional.

#### *Arguments against Women in the Military*

With highly visible news coverage of servicewomen’s involvement in situations such as the 2003 ambush of the 507<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Maintenance Company in Iraq, arguments against women serving in the military resurfaced with a particular focus on how close women should be permitted to ground combat (Just, 2006). Keeping women out of harm’s way is one of four persistent arguments against women being assigned to combat roles (Holland, 2006). These arguments exist as part of a greater picture of societal concerns about women’s “proper role” in the military and/or in combat (DeCew,

1995). Other objections to women in combat include: perceived physical inferiority (Enloe, 1988; Holland, 2006; Just, 2006); feminizing threats to men's "military masculinity" (Enloe, 1993; Holland, 2006), and concerns about sexual assault and sexual harassment (Enloe, 1988; Holland, 2006; Jeffreys, 2007).

*The "Proper Role" of Women and Keeping Women Safe*

When legislative leaders were addressing the bill that preceded the *Women's Armed Services Act* in 1948, prevailing societal attitudes about the "proper role of women" factored into the process (DeCew, 1995; Milko, 1992). Legislative and military leaders alike held that a woman's place was in the home and that soldiering in war was a man's job (DeCew, 1995). The same legislative policymakers also argued that the people of the United States were not prepared to see women killed in war, the effect of which would be demoralizing and reduce support for the war effort (Milko, 1992). The "proper role of women" dictated the decision to exclude women from combat, not a decision based on logic serving practical military purposes (DeCew, 1995). Beyond what women are or are not equipped to do, social and cultural attitudes prescribe that women also must be kept safe. As such, women were legislatively banned from serving on ships and in aircraft in the Navy and Air Force respectively (DeCew, 1995). The Army and Marine Corps followed by instituting their own regulatory bans against women in combat (Milko, 1992).

Despite all efforts to protect women from harm, today's wartime conditions are now considerably different from when women first began integrating into the regular

services. No longer are there definitive front lines distinct from rear areas in which women can more safely soldier (Hackworth, 1991). Modern weapon systems easily can reach into the rear area as exemplified by Iraqi deployment of scud missiles during the first Gulf War (Milko, 1992). Furthermore, women who serve in combat support units by driving in logistical convoys are vulnerable targets as they resupply troops throughout the entire area of operations (Milko, 1992). While women in convoys do not generally engage in direct ground combat, they still face risks to their safety. For that reason, the arguments to keep women safe via the combat exclusion become dubious.

### *Women as “Weaker Sex”*

Four components comprise the discussion of women as the weaker sex. The most obvious includes the physical differences between men and women, particularly with regard to upper body strength. The second point some opponents raise against women serving in combat relates to women’s perceived emotional frailty in dealing with the stressors of war. The third deals with issues of pregnancy, and the fourth argument is that women’s menstruation becomes problematic for women in combat.

The military’s mission requirements often encompass arduous heavy-lifting tasks. While all military occupation specialties (MOS) require various degrees of physical exertion, the combat arms fields require soldiers to carry heavy personal gear while marching considerable distances. Urban warfare also demands significant strength and stamina. Intrinsic to some of these tasks is the need for upper body strength, a physical disparity in capabilities between men and women. Proponents of combat exclusion for

women claim that women cannot meet these physical demands and permitting them to enter combat reduces military standards, readiness, and efficiency (DeCew, 1995; Tuten 1982). To ascertain and maintain soldier readiness, the services administer physical fitness tests that adjust for age and gender (Hackworth, 1991). The fitness test typically includes running, push-ups, and sit-ups and is an overall measure of general fitness, but it does not measure fitness for a particular military occupational specialty (Field & Nagl, 2001). Counterarguments to objections to women serving in combat roles include the introduction of a fitness test that mirrors job-related tasks and sets one standard for both genders (Milko, 1992). Demanding both men and women to qualify physically for one standard counteracts the argument that permitting women into combat fields would lower military standards (DeCew, 1995; Miller, 1997). Another factor that offsets the argument that women are the weaker sex making them unsuited for war relates to the ongoing technological improvement of modern weaponry. Mechanical and computer-automated systems reduce or altogether eliminate brute strength previously required (Tuten, 1982). Hackworth (1991) writes that women are equally capable as men of pushing buttons on military equipment. Segal (1982) provides her own perspective on women's physical capabilities as combatants by stating "[w]e must be careful not to confuse a difference in average physical strength between men and women with a situation in which all men are strong enough and no women are" (p. 271). Today, better training and conditioning for women can further counteract the argument against women as the weaker sex. With women's increased participation in athletics, from which they have been historically excluded, improved physical abilities to meet military physical performance standards

can reasonably be expected (Segal, 1982). Continuing with athletics and its linkage to strength measurements, the traditional perception of sports are defined by masculine concepts (Clasen, 2001). The argument can therefore be made that training can narrow any so-called physical gap and be applied to military physical measurements.

Furthermore, it is possible that some women can meet “masculine standards” and as such, women should not suffer from blanket policies barring them from opportunities based on their gender alone.

Some also point to a perception that men are more mentally able to withstand the hardships of war and have the requisite psychological aggressiveness to wage war (Howard & Prividera, 2004; Tuten, 1982). These beliefs are based on dominant soldier archetypes of a warrior who is physically and mentally resilient (Dawson, 1994; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Newsinger, 1997; Parker, 1985; Prividera & Howard, 2006). The same beliefs support the notion that women’s biology makes them psychologically passive, non-violent, nurturing, and fragile (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Ruddick, 1980; Stiehm, 1982). According to feminist researchers in international relations and their study of women and violence, men’s and women’s violence is defined and perceived through a gendered lens (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). In their argument, they reference Freud’s psychoanalytic theory that asserts that men are instinctively violent and women are biologically non-violent. However, the same authors say this perspective has largely been discredited (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Some scholars have referred to Russian women who capably served in combat roles in both world wars to refute the argument claiming women’s inability toward aggression. While some cite sketchy

historical data, there is evidence of a Russian Women's Battalion of Death that successfully performed in combat (Degroot, 2001; Griesse & Stites, 1982). Russian women soldiers, to include those in the death battalion, were said to have filled combat roles such as sniper, executioner, aviator, and in reportedly formidable anti-aircraft units (Griesse & Stites, 1982). Yet, the traditional beliefs about women's psychological traits have been used to justify the argument that women are unable to withstand combat stress and are too mild-mannered to take aggressive action against a predominantly male enemy (DeCew, 1995; Fiala, 2008; Maninger, 2008; Milko, 1992). Contemporary examples given by others point to the first Gulf War and Panama, where women deployed serving as military police and pilots, to exemplify women successfully managing the demands of combat (DeCew, 1995; Milko, 1992). Women serving as civilian firefighters and law enforcement officers also support women's mental toughness (DeCew, 1995).

The overarching concern about including women in combat duty positions is that their physical and mental differences from men will reduce military readiness. The third objection to women's military integration is that pregnant servicewomen also reduce military readiness. Any time a unit deploys, commanders must either deploy short-handed or find a replacement because pregnant soldiers are non-deployable (Milko, 1992). The Gulf War in 1991 lent some support to these concerns as 1,200 servicewomen of the approximate 40,000 deployed women got pregnant during the campaign and had to be repatriated to their home-stations (Milko, 1992). While pregnancy does affect military readiness, 13.9% of the Army at any given time is non-deployable for varying reasons, not all due to pregnant soldiers (Field & Nagl, 2001). Others point out that relative to

women, more male soldiers become non-deployable due to disciplinary actions and non-work related injuries (Enloe, 1988; Milko, 1992). Last, the practical implications of how women manage their monthly menstruation cycles in combat are cited as justification for why women should not be in combat. The reasoning is that when in combat situations, soldiers risk a greater likelihood of getting captured by the enemy. This situation can be detrimental physically and emotionally if women who are captives, or are in impractical circumstances intrinsic to combat, are unable to execute required hygiene activities (Just, 2007).

### *Women and Military Masculinity*

Reputedly, male bonding and esprit-de-corps is the necessary ingredient for success in combat (Milko, 1992; Hackworth, 1991). Those opposed to women in combat cite worries that either women's presence will negatively affect male soldiers' morale and cohesiveness or that no "cross-bonding" would occur between the two genders if women were to enter the all-male combat domain (DeCew, 1995; Milko, 1992). Male military generals expressing doubts about admitting women into close combat fields worry about the psychological turmoil male soldiers would face having to fight alongside women. Men on the fighting front may feel it is their duty to defend the nation and to protect military women in their units (DeCew, 1995; Enloe, 1988; Treadwell, 1954). Scholars contend that in order for masculine institutions to function, male masculinity must be clearly defined in relief against women's femininity (Enloe, 1983; Jeffreys, 2006; Morgan 1989; Snyder, 1999). Military training juxtaposes male masculinity against

women's femininity by frequently calling men "little girls" (Faludi, 1999; Snyder, 1999), and some scholars call attention to the military's unofficial use of pornography as another tool that "others" women (Brownmiller, 1975; Enloe, 2000; Jeffreys, 2007). One researcher who studied men and women in the military found men's resulting animosity toward women in the military exhibited itself as rumors and gossip, which they attribute to men's resistance and resentment toward women soldiers (Beck, 1991; Miller, 1997). Contemporary studies of modern mixed-gender units undermine this argument. For example, a meta-analysis of five longitudinal studies of Army soldier attitudes showed that there was no significant correlation between women's presence and unit cohesion (Rosen, Bliese, Wright & Gifford, 1999).

### *Sex and the Military*

Three issues arise regarding women's integration with regard to sex and the military. First, women's presence has been cited as a disruption to unit discipline (DeCew, 1995). Men, particularly those unaccustomed to women's presence, may find women distracting. Second, there is the actual sexual assault and sexual harassment that takes place as a form of violence against women in the military (Nelson, 2002). Third, some fear that exposing women to combat situations would increase their risks of enemy capture and the potential to be raped.

Opponents of integrating women in the military rely on arguments that women will be distracting and that their presence will lower unit effectiveness and cohesion (Sagaw & Campbell, 1991). Others have listed concerns that women who want to join the

masculine military are morally loose and will decrease military readiness by becoming pregnant and/or spreading venereal disease (Herbert, 1991). These arguments were posed during the 1940s when women began their transition from the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps to the regular Army. Moreover, women's presence in the military introduced the problem of sexual harassment and sexual assault, which remains a relevant issue today (Beck, 1991). History shows that during the 1970s and 1980s, sexual harassment reached such a level that it negatively impacted servicewomen's retention in the military (Enloe, 1988). The military, by this time an all-volunteer force, was required to fill its ranks to meet mandated quotas. In response to women leaving in high numbers, the U.S. Department of Defense formally looked into the matter with the aim of instituting policy and punishment against sexual harassment (Enloe, 1988). In the 1990s, an Army panel investigating the matter admitted sexual harassment remains a problem and that the Army "lacks institutional commitment" to correct the practice ("Army Investigation," 1997).

In 2005, the Department of Defense (DOD) began taking measures to report on and reduce incidents of sexual assault across all military services. The program is called the Sexual Assault and Prevention Response (SAPR) Program and it formed in support of DOD policy to address sexual assault in the military. While the program focuses on sexual assault, it also addresses sexual harassment but to a lesser degree. A March 2009 report from the DOD Office of the Secretary of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) provided statistics on sexual assault in the military for 2008. The DOD defines sexual assault accordingly:

...the term “sexual assault” is defined as intentional sexual contact, characterized by use of force, physical threat or abuse of authority or when the victim does not or cannot consent. It includes rape, nonconsensual sodomy (oral or anal sex), indecent assault (unwanted, inappropriate sexual contact or fondling), or attempts to commit these acts. Sexual assault can occur without regard to gender or spousal relationship or age of victim. “Consent” shall not be deemed or construed to mean the failure by the victim to offer physical resistance. Consent is not given when a person uses force, threat of force, coercion, or when the victim is asleep, incapacitated, or unconscious (Office of the Secretary of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, 2009).

The DOD report states that sexual assault is the most underreported of crimes by sexual victims in the military. The Bureau of Justice further substantiates this stating that rape and domestic violence are the most underreported of all violent crimes (“National crime victimization survey,” 1996). A 1996 DOD survey shows that both sexes are victims of sexual assault, but women experienced it at higher percentages. The survey showed that 64% of women and 17% of men reported experiences of sexually harassing behavior (Bastian, Lancaster & Reyst, 1996). Regardless of gender, victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault are less likely to come forward to report sexual assault or harassment in the military due “systemic barriers” (Nelson, 2002). These can include lack of support

within the chain of command and fear of persecution toward the victim after reporting the crime (Nelson, 2002). To counteract some of these problems, the DOD has taken steps to encourage victims of sexual assault to come forward. It has created two avenues of reporting: "Restricted" and "Unrestricted." Unrestricted reporting opens investigations into the crimes, and the victim's identity is known to investigators and certain personnel within the chain of command. Restricted reporting permits victims to report the crime, but they remain anonymous with no investigation into the incident unless the victim changes his or her status to unrestricted. Victims reporting under either status receive medical care and other related support.

The formation of the DOD SAPR Program and reports compiling and monitoring sexual assault on the military since 2005 indicate that it remains an issue. According to the *Department of Defense FY08 Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*, reports of sexual assault incidents increased by 8% over the previous reporting period (Office of the Secretary of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, March 2009). The increased number of reports does not necessarily indicate an overall rise in sexual assaults but instead may be a result of a greater number of victims filing reports. The March 2009 report on sexual assault in the military for 2008 reveals that there were 1,047 unrestricted reports of male servicemembers sexually assaulting women and 657 restricted reports of sexual assault were made by women against their male counterparts. For that same year, male servicemembers filed eight unrestricted and 83 restricted reports against women servicemembers. In combat zones, only women filed reports of sexual

assault against male servicemembers (Office of the Secretary of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, 2009).

It is here that the argument that women negatively affect military male bonding is also applicable. Women, perceived as outsiders to a previously all-male military unit, are likely to endure forms of slander and sexual harassment (Beck, 1991). Moreover, military training that reinforces the devaluation of women by using feminine epithets complicates gender integration and is seen as a factor in maintaining an attitude of sexual violence against women (Nelson, 2002).

While it is difficult to compare sexual assault cases between military and civilian women due to differences in reporting procedures (Office of the Secretary of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, 2009), there is some evidence that women in the military suffer sexual assault or harassment at greater rates than their non-military counterparts. Research from surveys administered at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Medical Center indicates that women in the military reported sexual assault incidents at rates 20 times greater than other government workers (Murdoch & Nichol, 1995). Despite whether men or women are harassed, the DOD's sexual assault prevention program acknowledges and affirms that sexual violence against either sex breaks military bonds and negatively affects military readiness (Office of the Secretary of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, 2009).

Regarding news media coverage of sexual harassment and assault in the military, scandal plays a role. Coverage of the military's internal climate includes the 1991

Tailhook scandal where navy pilots were accused of sexually harassing 83 servicewomen at an annual convention (Linville, 2000). This scandal is said to have exposed men's attitude toward women as sex objects rather than peers (Enloe, 2000). The allegations of sexual harassment were investigated with some of the accused attending court martial hearings, although none resulted in convictions (Donnelly, 2002). Another aspect to the problem of sexual harassment and assault within the military is that the incidents are downplayed with dismissive, accusatory behavior from the chain of command, and women, the predominant victims, are not given the support they need (Nelson, 2002). A case that exemplifies this is when Sergeant Major (SGM) Brenda Hoster accused the Sergeant Major of the Army, Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Gene McKinney, of sexual harassment in 1998. When Hoster filed her complaints, she encountered an unsympathetic and dismissive environment, and her credibility and professionalism were attacked despite her previously untarnished record (Nelson, 2002). Ultimately, McKinney was acquitted on all but one charge of obstruction of justice (Nelson, 2002).

The final argument raised by opponents of women in the military, specifically women in combat, is that women risk a higher likelihood of becoming victims of sexual assault when captured by the enemy (Jeffreys, 2007). Circumstances of opposing forces holding American women soldiers captive are rare, but the media create a news spectacle that focuses on the woman's victimhood (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Woodward, 2000). A modern-day example is the abduction of Private First Class Jessica Lynch in 2003 after the convoy she was riding in was ambushed. Studies of news media reports of the ambush and her capture raised concerns that she had been sexually

assaulted by her Iraqi captors (Howard & Prividera, 2004). Lynch's capture and subsequent rescue "became a contemporary justification for the combat exclusion" (Holland, 2006, p. 42).

In sum, arguments raised against women in combat reveal concerns that integrating women reduces military readiness and combat effectiveness. Those who argue women are too weak physically or emotionally assert that permitting women into combat units will weaken the unit's ability to fight. Others counter that job acceptance should be based on both sexes meeting the same qualifications rather than barring entrance on the basis of gender alone (DeCew, 1995). Strength of unit cohesion and the instrumental role it plays in a powerful military also raise concerns about women's military integration. Opponents claim women's integration undermines our military forces and gives the enemy a tactical advantage (Tuten, 1982). Some discredit the claim that women damage male bonding and morale by arguing that shared common experience is what contributes to bonding and good morale (Segal, 1982).

In addition to the need for a strong military is the need for military preparedness. Within military circles, this criterion is referred to as military readiness whereby its units are fully staffed and trained. Military units failing to meet either criterion are operating at reduced readiness levels and may be unable to meet mission requirements. If servicewomen's pregnancies render them unavailable for deployments, the unit's readiness is eroded. Yet, military human resource requirements make women essential for meeting military recruiting goals, which in turn fulfill personnel needs to meet

mission requirements. The small fraction of women pregnant at any given time does not offset the greater number of women who are not pregnant. Further, women are pregnant for a temporary period of time and many, such as women from the Gulf War, quickly rejoin their units (Hackworth, 1991; Milko, 1992). These arguments for and against women's integration have not fully been put to rest. Nevertheless, women have proven themselves, and it is unlikely that Congress will legislate to reverse the status quo. Continued technological advancements and dynamic battlefields coupled with evolving social norms may change the character of the entire debate.

## Chapter Three:

### Literature Review

In narrating the news, the news media rely on a vernacular that includes enduring myths, archetypes, and stereotypes (Berkowitz, 2005; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Journalists use these forms because they act as cognitive tools that help them relay complex information in a simplified story to audiences. Over time, this creates a dominant public narrative that provides context to audiences (Byerly & Ross, 2007; Entman, 1989; Norris, 1997a; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Cultural myths, archetypes, and stereotypes also contain beliefs and definitions of “proper” gender behavior and gender roles. One can, therefore, argue that the news media, through their narratives, reinforce commonly held beliefs about gender norms. These gender norms prescribe normative or socially acceptable behavior for each gender and “serve as an evaluative framework for people trying to make sense of their world” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007, p. 7). The ways the news media frame their stories using recurring narratives reinforce individuals’ definitions of gender norms while simultaneously creating a shared understanding of social relations that preserve traditional patriarchy (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Dines & Humez, 1995; Eldridge, 1995; Fiske, 1994; Ross, 1996).

Starting in the 1970s, scholars have studied media portrayals of women. One foundational study introduced the concept of “symbolic annihilation” to account for the news media’s minimal reporting on women and the news media’s tendency to represent women in stereotypical roles (Bradley, 1998; Tuchman, Daniels, & Benet, 1978). Since that time, scholars and organizations such as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) have studied news media representations of women in the U.S. and worldwide (Bradley, 1998; Cirkensa, 1996; Rhode, 1995). These studies indicate that women are “mostly absent” (Gallagher, 1981; Gallagher, 2004; Sachs, 1996; Spears, Seydegart & Gallagher, 2000). The GMMP (Gallagher, 2004) studied 70 countries’ news media reporting in 1995 and again in 2000. Results showed only a one percent increase in news media coverage of women over the course of five years from 17% in 1995 to 18% in 2000. These same studies revealed that when the news media report on women, journalists typically use stereotypes of women in traditional roles of mother, wife, and victim. Academic research shows that “woman as victim,” particularly sexual victim, is common in news coverage (Carter, 1998; Cuklanz, 1996; Kitzinger, 1992; Kitzinger, 2004; Lees, 1995; Pritchard & Hughes, 1997; Soothill & Walby, 1991). Moreover, when news media cover women as victims, the stories are often sensationalized (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Carter, 1998; Spears, et al., 2000). Ostensibly, to maintain audience interest, the news media are quick to cover rape by a stranger, but they avoid covering the much more prevalent yet less sensational news of domestic violence against women (Cameron & Frazer, 1987; Cuklanz, 1996; Cuklanz, 2000; Soothill & Walby, 1991; Weaver, Carter & Stanko, 2000). When the news media repeatedly use dominant stereotypes and

gendered frames of women as victim and housewife, a narrow perception of women and their “proper” roles is reinforced (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Carter, Branston & Allan, 1998; Lazier & Kendrick, 1993; Macdonald, 1995).

Where stereotypes reinforce norms, myths often explain deviance from the norm. For servicewomen, the problem of gender “normalcy” – that of woman as the fairer sex – further divides women from their male counterparts and creates a double bind (Howard & Prividera, 2004). The military expects its servicewomen to adhere to gender norms and to be feminine, yet military personnel view femininity as a weakness and to be weak in the military is failure (Boldry, Wood & Kashy, 2001; Ebbert & Hall, 1993; Enloe, 1988; Francke, 1997). Good soldiers are masculine soldiers. Thus a good woman cannot be a good soldier, and a good soldier cannot be a normal woman. Such persistent notions of proper gender roles construct an environment where men maintain ambivalent or negative feelings toward their women colleagues. In addition, some pundits attribute men’s negative attitudes toward women who assume “tough, masculine” roles to the threat strong women pose to “patriarchy’s authority” and the potential for strong women to destabilize the patriarchal status quo (Edwards, 1984).

As women might be seen as threats to the “established male culture,” male soldiers view and evaluate women soldiers in a negative fashion often manifested via use of derogatory language (Boldry, et al., 2001; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman, 1983). The most frequently cited discriminatory language used by male soldiers against women soldiers labels them as either a “slut” or a “lesbian” (Enloe, 1988;

Karpinski & Strasser, 2005; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007; Stiehm, 1988). Both labels imply a woman who has failed to follow the prescribed gender norms. Similarly, the news media tend to apply myths and stereotypes to women acting outside acceptable gender norm boundaries tagging them as “monsters” and “whores.” Both within the military and the news media, the institutions’ application of these myths facilitates the news media’s and society’s ability to reconcile the contradiction of “woman warrior.” To pair womanhood with the concept of warrior or soldier creates a paradox as the latter concept implies the likelihood, and expectation, of violent acts. The imagery evoked by words such as warrior, soldier, and hero is powerfully masculine. Yet women are viewed as the antithesis of masculinity. In these ways, women performing masculine acts are perceived not only as contradictory, but also out of the ordinary. Some scholars suggest that media summon different uses of mythical narratives for women to explain nonstandard feminine behavior (Berkowitz, 2005; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

What follows is a discussion of notable mediated mythical figures and archetypes used to reconcile women acting out of prescribed gender boundaries.

### *Monsters, Freaks, and Amazons*

Monsters, freaks, and Amazons have been applied to women performing outside prescribed gender boundaries in the news media, military, and in the general media. For example, at a 1976 press conference, General Westmoreland said, “Maybe you could find one woman in ten thousand who could lead in combat, but she would be a freak, and we’re not running the military academy for freaks” (“Women at West Point?,” 1976).

The labels of monster and freak categorize “unruly” women because they deviate from the properly feminine by virtue of a masculine appearance and/or a suspicion that she is a lesbian (Rowe, 1995; Heinecken, 2004). The emphasis on the “monster” archetype is that women who are violent, kill, or may kill, are considered deviant and horrible (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

The Greek mythical Amazon woman is one of the most all-encompassing characterizations of women who break gender rules. Amazons are women who upset gender hierarchies and are seen as a “contradiction in terms” (Staley, 2009). In some accounts, they are depicted as “militant,” “mannish,” and “butch” (Grimard-Leduc, 1988; Johnston, 1973; Wittig, 1973). While physiologically still women, the Amazons are said to have been willing to cut off a breast in order to fight the Athenians (Staley, 2009). According to Amazonian lore, the act of removing one or both breasts increased the Amazon women’s abilities to fight more effectively in warfare (Oldfather, 1935). These warrior women Amazons, refusing to take on subordinate roles, shunned men and traditional pathways of marriage and domesticity. As Amazons ran a purely matriarchal society, some scholars suggest it was a lesbian society (Grimard-Leduc, 1988; Johnston, 1973; Witting, 1973). In other accounts of Amazonian myth, Amazons were sexually loose women and sexual encounters were described as “one shot affairs” with any random male – entirely opposite of proper Athenian women (Tyrrell, 1984). For these reasons, Amazons were considered a threat because they opposed Greek patriarchal society (Grimard-Leduc, 1988; Johnston, 1973; Tyrrell, 1984; Witting, 1973). Today, the essence of the Amazon myth, like labels of monster and freak, is to denote women who

transgress gender norms (Johnston, 1973). All three labels have been used interchangeably by contemporary media to describe “deviant” women (Heinecken, 2004).

### *The Whore Archetype*

The “whore” is another useful archetype to analyze perceptions of women in the military. Single women who mingle among men are perceived as loose and immoral (Enloe, 2000). In contrast, proper women marry and bear children for their husbands (Jones, 1997). Yet history reveals circumstances where women filled non-traditional roles such as that of “camp followers” (Enloe, 2000). Women as “camp followers” supported armies by helping men with domestic duties. While some washed laundry and cooked, others turned to prostitution. Regardless of which role they filled, the military establishment looked upon them with contempt, even as the army’s success depended on them (Degroot & Bird-Peniston, 2000; Enloe, 2000). Women continued to perform unofficial duties as camp followers to the U.S. military during the Korean and Vietnam Wars where women operated massage parlors, bars, and brothels to succor and support the occupying forces (Enloe, 2000). From women who did soldiers’ laundry to those providing soldiers morale, camp followers lived on the fringes of society and social acceptability. Consequently, the military cautioned its troops about the dangers of camp followers and marginalized them by equating them with whores (Enloe, 1988). If women as followers were considered whores, then it is a short leap to label women in the military as whores (Enloe, 1988; Stiehm, 1988). Such labels that question women’s morals have been said to discourage women’s participation in the military and further differentiate women from their male soldier counterparts (Stiehm, 1988; Treadwell, 1954). Whether

women are internally labeled by the military as “whores” or externally by news media via myths, the references subordinate servicewomen and undermine their military and professional careers.

Contemporary studies of news media coverage of U.S. women at war expose news media’s continued use of myths – monsters and whores – and domestic and feminine stereotypes (Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Jeffreys, 2006; Just, 2006; McKelvey, 2006; Prividera & Howard, 2006; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Most of the research focuses on the two most highly visible incidents during the recent war in Iraq that began with the 2003 invasion. What follows is a review of specific case studies of how the news media incorporated the myths and stereotypes into their narratives.

#### *Case Studies of Modern Women in the U.S. Military*

Scholarly studies of media portrayals of women in the military over the past two decades primarily focused on specific case studies. Many originate from the field of “Women and Language,” which applied critical and feminist rhetorical analysis to critique media coverage. Several of these studies analyzed the news media’s use of language and discourse regarding servicewomen during the second Gulf War, also known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Howard and Prividera (2006) explain that understanding the media’s use of language reflects the nation’s dominant ideological meanings with respect to common understandings of femininity.

Studies of the two highly publicized contemporary stories about women in the military – that of Private First Class Jessica Lynch and Private First Class Lynndie England – show that the media applied stereotypes and myths in their coverage. Lynch’s troubles began with the U.S. military’s 2003 invasion of Iraq when she and her convoy of the 507<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Maintenance Company were ambushed after taking a wrong turn in Iraq. Eleven of the 33 U.S. soldiers were killed in the attack, and seven were captured (Howard & Prividera, 2006). The other notable icon of the Iraq war is that of Lynndie England who served as a reservist with the military police at the Abu Ghraib prison throughout 2003. During her time as a clerk at the prison, England participated in the abuse of Iraqi prisoners (Just, 2006).

In the case of Lynch, scholars agree that the media portrayed her as a stereotypical fragile, domestic, feminine woman and victim (Gruner, 1994; Holland, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2004; Howard & Prividera, 2006; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Just, 2006; Nantais & Lee, 1999; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). Analysis of this event revealed the news media’s tendency to focus on Lynch, the young female soldier, to the exclusion of all other servicemembers of the 507<sup>th</sup> Ordnance Maintenance Company. When covering the incident, the news media concentrated their attention on Lynch’s hostage situation and subsequent rescue. Repeatedly, news media representations covered Lynch’s victimhood by focusing on her injuries and frailty and continually questioned whether she had been sexually assaulted by Iraqi insurgents (Holland, 2006). The news media also tended to represent her as a civilian by frequently omitting her rank and detailing her childhood experiences and love for children instead (Howard & Prividera,

2004; Just, 2006). The ensuing sensationalized story of Lynch's capture provided a pivotal moment in the ongoing debate of whether women are fit for combat. From the civilianization and feminization of Lynch to her victimization, the media repositioned her to where she is best understood - as a civilian girl and not as a military soldier (Holland, 2006; Prividera & Howard, 2006). Furthermore, the news media's framing of Lynch as the weaker sex was said to turn her into a "synecdochical representative" of all other servicewomen (Holland, 2006). Opponents to women in the military claim that these types of incidents substantiate that women are physically inferior and unable to perform masculine military duties (Holland, 2006; Pin-Fat & Stern, 2005; Tong, 1998). In addition, Lynch's capture fueled concerns about women's "universal vulnerability" to become sexual victims when serving in combat (Holland, 2006).

In the case of Private First Class England, scholars concluded that the news media demonized her as an immoral and deviant whore (Howard & Prividera, 2008; Jeffreys, 2007; Just, 2006; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). While two other servicewomen participated in the Iraqi prisoner abuses, England was represented as the primary perpetrator. England was a "monster" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007), who became the iconic "face of Abu Ghraib" prison and its torture scandal. Scholars identified how the news media questioned her femininity by labeling her a "tomboy," (Kaufman-Osborn, 2007) and others likened her to an Amazon woman (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). One study looked at news media's comparisons between the stereotypically feminine Lynch and the "monstrous" England (Just, 2006). The researcher noted that the descriptions contrasted Lynch, who is a synecdoche for all military servicewomen, against England who is separated from

military servicewomen by her deviance (Just, 2006). Coverage of England also described her as sexually loose and deviant (Cornwell, 2004; Howard & Prividera, 2008; Just, 2006; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). She had sex outside of marriage and admits to having conceived a child with a fellow male soldier (Phillips, 2005), and she participated in physically and sexually abusing male Iraqi prisoners (Coalition Forces Land Component Command, 2004; Karpinski, 2007). One of the most famous photographic images of England poses her as a “dominatrix” holding a leash tied to an Iraqi prisoner (Burnham, 2004; Jagodzinski, 2006). The demonization of England by the news performs three functions. By rendering her a monster, England is isolated from the rest of her fellow servicewomen, which further helps people to perceive her actions as an unusual incident performed by a seemingly evil and aggressive woman (Just, 2006). Although England was only one of a handful of abusers at the prison, she became a convenient scapegoat for blame (Finlay, 2007; Howard & Prividera, 2008). As a result, some posit that “England’s media construction obfuscates military culpability for the events at Abu Ghraib...” (Howard & Prividera, 2008, p. 287). The events of Abu Ghraib also have been cited by news media and political commentators as proof of the failure of women’s integration into the military, suggesting that women were the cause for the scandals (Rajiva, 2007). Ultimately, England became emblematic of how women cause chaos in and are unsuited for the military, particularly combat service (Howard & Prividera, 2008; Karpinski & Strasser, 2005).

Both representations of Lynch and England further separate women in the military – as the subordinate sex - from their male counterparts (Bragg, 2003; Feinman,

2007; Holland, 2006; Just, 2006; Turpin, 1998). Along with news media's application of gendered narratives, the military's predominant placement of servicewomen in support roles and exclusion from combat perpetuates this distinction and continues to obstruct women's abilities to gain equal footing with their male military counterparts (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007).

These case studies suggest that news media continue to use stereotypes, myths, and archetypes in their narratives about women in the military. Stereotypes of and expectations for femininity within society and the military provide fodder for arguments against women in the military, particularly against women in combat. Either they are considered too weak to serve or are thought of as too disruptive to military discipline and morale (Burnham, 2004; Enloe, 2000; Jeffreys, 2007; Marquez, 2004). Because of these concerns, male military leaders continue to question women's physical strength and endurance to bear hardships on the battlefield (Wheeler, 2004). Another challenge of gendered expectations includes the struggles – sexual harassment, combat exclusions, military standards/measurements of body strength - women must overcome in order to be perceived as competent soldiers and leaders. As such, women's abilities are often marginalized and, in cases such as Abu Ghraib, make servicewomen a convenient target for blame, turning them into the “sacrificial lamb” or scapegoat (Finlay, 2007; Jeffreys, 2007; Karpinski & Strasser, 2005).

Enloe (2000, p. xi) writes that “how governments think about women as soldiers, how male soldiers and civilians and women as voters and activists and wives and

schoolgirls think about women as soldiers *does matter*” (Enloe, 2000, p. xi). News media may facilitate people’s perceptions that women soldiers automatically fail as women. News media also may facilitate notions that good women are too feminine to serve as effective soldiers. This study examines contemporary newspaper representations of women in the military.

## Chapter Four:

### Method

This study examined newspaper stories covering women in the U.S. military published from Sept. 11, 2001, to Sept. 11, 2009. The purpose of my study was to ascertain how nationwide newspapers represented today's servicewomen performing expanding roles, which have increasingly taken them out of administrative support positions and placed them into more combat-intensive roles. The selected timeframe covers the U.S. military's entry into and continued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan; both are combat zones consisting of battlefields without definitive front lines that the military continues to occupy and from which the question of women in combat resurfaced. The method employed for this study is a longitudinal, qualitative content analysis of news reports on women in the military. I chose to study newspapers frequently ranked in the top five based on their circulation numbers. *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal* were initially considered due to their rank in the top five; however, I excluded them because they had no substantive coverage of U.S. servicewomen for the period under review. Therefore, my study is based on 59 news articles from *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. My process outlined below provided a system to discover and track recurring key words, terms, and phrases that later comprised my overall thematic categories. The resulting themes, defined as

“recurring typical themes that run through a lot of the reports,” are the categories that account for the most relevant concepts repeatedly used by the three papers’ journalistic community (Altheide, 1996, p. 31). At the conclusion of my process, my emergent themes became the representation on how the three newspapers in this study portrayed women in the military throughout the designated timeframe.

In an effort to be as comprehensive as possible, I accessed stories using three different databases: Access World News, Lexis-Nexis, and ProQuest. I began by conducting multiple key word searches: women, female, U.S. military, military, servicewomen. The search terms were used in “headline,” “lead and first paragraph,” and “all text,” in varying combinations. Articles that referred to “men and women” serving in the military in a generic manner were excluded along with articles that were “Commentary,” “Debate,” “Editorial and Debate.” I chose to omit these types of articles in order to avoid their bias or opinion-heavy qualities. The initial search of the three newspapers resulted in 75 articles. After conducting an initial reading of the articles, I omitted duplicate articles and those with low relevance on the topic. In the end, I studied 59 articles from three of the top five nationwide newspapers. The number of relevant articles provided by each paper is broken down as follows:

1. *Washington Post*, 36 articles.
2. *New York Times*, 16 articles.
3. *Los Angeles Times*, 7 articles.

Because my method is qualitative and followed an emergent process, I applied inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning in research requires a “bottom up” approach where specific observations are later compiled into broader and more complex thematic categories. My first step involved reading the articles thoroughly (Creswell, 2007). Next, using Altheide’s (1996) qualitative content analysis guidance, I transcribed each article’s key information onto a protocol to aid in organizing my initial observations. See Appendix A for protocol template. I looked for regularities of key words, terms, phrases, quotes, and concepts that comprised the subject of my study and thoroughly learned about the topic and discussions surrounding it within my designated timeframe (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2007). From this, I derived my initial thematic categories. Next, to better identify and define conceptual trends, I placed each article’s headlines side-by-side in chronological order on a spreadsheet. Thereafter, I populated the headers with each article’s main theme and included the most relevant concepts from the initial protocols. Following that, I applied Altheide’s (1996) guidance to incorporate angles and frames into my process. Because stories can have many perspectives, I identified each story’s “angle” or “specific part of a theme,” as well as a theme’s particular focus otherwise referred to as “frames” (Altheide, 1996, p. 30). The completion of this process supplied the distinguishing perspectives of the overarching thematic categories.

The third round involved “intensive coding around one category” (Berg, 2001, p. 253). Here, I saturated my initial thematic categories with relevant ideas, terms, and concepts. Fourth, I compared within and between categories to provide greater clarity of the themes, frames, and angles. This process continued until no new meanings presented

themselves. Throughout this exploration, there was considerable back-and-forth between the news reports and the categories. However, this circular process aided the effort to “make sense of the data by grouping information” into themes that represented the identified patterns (Creswell, 2007, p. 51).

## Chapter Five: Results and Discussion

### *Results*

My analysis revealed that the stories in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* could be grouped into three fluid and sometimes overlapping, themes: (a) tip of the spear, (b) combat debate, and (c ) women as victims of sexual assault. Story types included personal profiles; interviews with politicians, academics, non-profit organizational spokespeople, military personnel and their family and friends; updates on court and congressional rulings, and panel investigations.

Images of women filling non-traditional feminine roles were pervasive in the three newspapers' coverage of women in the military. The reports in this study on women in the military focused heavily on women's emerging non-traditional combat roles, which news reports attributed to contemporary battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a general rule, this coverage on women's battlefield successes was positive, but also unprecedented. Moreover, the affirmative exposure of servicewomen was offset by arguments, which peaked in 2005, on whether women belong in combat. Closer examination of assertions in favor of expanding women's roles showed that demands to fill personnel objectives and to meet military mission requirements were behind the

military's calls to loosen assignment policy restrictions on women. Covering the same timeframe, the papers' portrayals often offered profiles of extraordinary servicewomen quite possibly as a testament to the potential for military women on the whole to measure up to combat demands. Indeed, one article alluded to the fact that there will now be "real world data on the performance of women in the field" from which later to assess their collective abilities (Alvarez, 2006, p. 4.2). Other portrayals included women's aspirations to "measure up" in some manner with their military male colleagues as evidenced by the many stories in which reporters shadowed women in combat jobs situating them close to battle. Other angles the reports took that were akin to portraying women measuring up to men with their battlefield feats showed women with a gritty-like character excelling in arduous physical activities and getting dirty "like the men." The three papers' write-ups of exceptional military women are encouraging to a certain degree. They demonstrate some acknowledgment of women's contributions while also revealing a new reporting formula that focuses on women's abilities to succeed in a male-dominated profession. Intermingled throughout this study's timeframe was reporting on sexual assault on military women. Although news reports on this topic from these three papers were fewer than other topics, the reports showed that women may be still perceived as sex objects instead of as peers and remain at risk for victimization.

I begin by discussing the representations of the new generation of women titled "tip of the spear." In this discussion, I include the subcategories that comprised this overarching theme and how they support the portrayals showing military women as an emerging generation of combat women warriors. Thereafter, I discuss how the portrayals

of contemporary military women who were unconventionally placed closest to danger reportedly spurred the debate on women in combat. Last, I conclude by discussing the reports that explain the circumstances and nature of military women as victims of sexual assault.

### *Discussion*

*Tip of the spear.* The category “tip of the spear” is most commonly related to military Special Operations forces that conduct unconventional warfare to include reconnaissance missions (United States Special Operations Command, n.d.). Inherent in these military operations is the need for these troops to be first on the ground. As a general rule, these soldiers face challenging settings and situations that are often unprecedented for mainstream military personnel (Olson, 2010). While today’s military women are not facing identical circumstances, the newspapers in this study covered women by using a similar theme.

A common storyline covered in the three newspapers depicted servicewomen performing military activities that are historically uncommon. The stories consistently highlighted that today’s servicewomen are the “first” to face hazardous settings due to contemporary battlefields lacking definitive front lines. The nature of this type of battlefield is such that, regardless whether women fill support or authorized combat roles, women potentially face the same dangers as men serving in direct combat roles. The reasons for this were attributed to advanced war-fighting technology and the “guerilla” style characteristics of modern warfare. By and large, contemporary military women

serving in Iraq and Afghanistan were framed by the three papers as a “new generation” or “first generation” to succeed in traditionally male roles. In many cases, the three newspapers showcased some of these servicewomen as they displayed courage on the battlefield while performing stereotypical masculine duties. Another technique the news media in this study used to demonstrate women with unprecedented achievements involved profiling exceptional women who broke “the brass ceiling” (Swarns, 2008, p. A18). Typically, stories of this type described women reaching ranks and filling positions previously held by men only. The three papers portrayed women breaking barriers and performing typically male activities by incorporating the following types of narratives to demonstrate how today’s service women are at the “tip of the spear”: showing women fighting and succeeding on the battlefield in-line with their male colleagues; struggling in a male-dominated field or opening doors for more opportunities for military women.

The military profession’s necessary emphasis on weapons, fighting, killing, and dying is traditionally masculine (Solaro, 2007). When the three newspapers in the present study portrayed servicewomen, they often did so by describing women performing combat arms activities and expressing their desire to do the same combat activities as military men. Further, some articles chronicled women who were competitive against men in varying domains either in their youth or while in military academies. I therefore titled this recurring theme as “one of the guys.” As an example, one news story quoted a woman in the Air Force who “wanted to see some action,” and the article’s author explained how she “grew up challenging boys to swimming races and sparring with them on the playground” (Wilgoren, 2003, p. 4). In a similar vein, the three papers frequently

gave detailed descriptions of servicewomen demonstrating their courage by engaging in battle. The newspapers' accounts followed women as they dodged bullets, fired their individual weapons at the enemy, and flew combat helicopter missions. It is possible that given the perceived uniqueness of women's combat successes, the newspapers opted to emphasize women's achievements by occasionally leading with headlines of women who were breaking barriers and earning military awards in combat. The following headline exemplifies this trend: "Female pilots get their shot in the Iraqi skies; men say women are proving skills in direct combat" (Tyson, 2006, p. A1). In all of these instances, instead of demonizing servicewomen for transgressing traditional gender norms, these three papers focused their messages on applauding women's courageous actions. The coverage also included quotes from women explaining that they performed the same combat activities traditionally executed by men. The following servicewoman's statement typifies women's descriptions of their - at times - reportedly unauthorized battlefield activities when she said, "I did everything there. I gunned. I drove. I ran as a truck commander. And underneath it all, I was a medic" (Alvarez, 2009, p. A1). Similarly, when coverage featured servicewomen in combat support jobs open to women such as the Military Police (MP), the reports pointed out that these women MPs perform "exactly the same mission as all-male combat units" (Loeb, 2003, p. D2).

While directly engaging the enemy is perceived as the greatest test to one's ability to soldier, enduring day-to-day life on the battlefield is another. As if to offset the argument against women's abilities to tolerate daily wartime hardships, news stories described how women lived the same combat experiences, as shown by the next excerpts:

“Here, women and men share the same squat toilets that stink of sewage” (Sheridan, 2003, p. A2), and “Like the men, women work 15-hour days” (Sheridan, 2003, p. A3). The repetition of themes portraying women functioning in the same capacity as men may signify shifting perceptions of women’s abilities to perform in the various aspects of combat conditions. These portrayals also may suggest a gradual reconciliation of the media’s struggle reporting on the “paradox” of women warriors performing non-traditional gender roles. Oftentimes, these same reports also highlighted military personnel’s perspectives that gender no longer mattered and that performance and wearing the military uniform was the “ultimate equalizer” (Wilgoren, 2003, p. 3). Captain Todd Lindner of the Military Police depicted this view when he spoke about two women in his command; he said they “shouldn’t be held up as showpieces for why there should be women in combat. They should be held up as examples why it’s irrelevant” (Fainaru, 2005, p. A3). By frequently quoting military personnel praising women’s abilities, these types of stories painted an overall positive picture of military women in combat roles.

Several articles proffered a different perspective about women meeting standards other than in combat settings. Stories that used this angle covered women’s struggles in military training and academic environments, with a specific focus addressing how women aspired to achieve reportedly strenuous physical standards. It was in these narratives where coverage included women’s acceptance of gender-neutral standards. The following quote given by one woman cadet embodied this theme: “I really feel that way because the standards, as a minimum, is not unattainable by anybody. It is reasonable. Somebody might have to work a little bit harder, but just because you have to work

harder doesn't mean that standards need to be lowered to meet your needs" (Dwyer, 2004, p. B4). Moreover, the women quoted in this article were depicted as opposed to proposed changes to the physical fitness test to adjust for gender differences. This article thus provided an anecdotal counter-argument to claims that women as the "weaker sex" will reduce standards and military readiness, and should therefore be reason enough to bar women altogether from serving in combat roles.

Alongside the newspapers' reporting on women's determination to compete with men by meeting equal fitness and training standards was a reported attitudinal resistance toward women in these training environments. At times, the newspapers showed women acknowledging a perceived need to prove their abilities as expressed by one cadet when she said, "we try harder so we don't look weak" (St. George, 2002, p. A9). Despite women remarking on their efforts to achieve equal footing with military men, the news reports also showed women's continued perceptions of men's resistance to women's integration. With few exceptions, the newspapers did not list men's specific actions against women or how men's attitudinal resistance to women manifested itself. Yet some of the reports on women, typically in academic and training settings, showed women's concerns about measuring up to men. However, in the reported circumstances of women struggling to meet standards and gain men's acceptance, the stories' tended to conclude with a positive outlook for the expanding opportunities for military women and their increasing combat participation.

A second way the three papers wrote about how women were breaking barriers was to profile exceptional military women. Several stories profiled notable military women exclusively, and others incorporated lower ranking women fighting on the battlefield into a larger story. Common themes running through the exclusive stories of notable military women showed that their achievements made them the “first” or among the first for military women. Typically, these were women who earned the rank of general and filled prominent military positions. The newspapers that provided this special coverage frequently gave details of women generals, mostly serving during the Women’s Army Corps era in the 1970s, whose efforts led to systemic changes for women across the armed forces. Highlights showed that because of their leadership, these exceptional women opened doors and increased benefits for today’s women in the military. The following statement from a retired general about a Women’s Army Corps general was a typical testimonial of an exceptional woman leading during a period of significant transformation: “The volunteer army really drove the change, and she was at the point of the spear” (Schudel, 2009, p. C8).

While most coverage included women from an earlier era as they began their first official steps into the military, profiles of notable women generals past and present touched on their struggles and successes in a male-dominated military. This theme also was present in the coverage of lower ranking women on the battlefield. Typically, a story’s focus demonstrated women’s courage, their military resumes, and their interest in performing traditionally masculine military activities.

Despite the positive coverage, the issue of sexual harassment emerged in a few reports, most typically when portraying women who served in the Women's Army Corps. Stories covering struggles of today's women facing sexual harassment while working in a male-dominated military were less prevalent. Instead, the stories focused on women's superior job performance, although a select few touched on some of the men's reservations about women filling combat roles. Overall, most of the reports covering women in modern combat circumstances emphasized servicewomen earning distinguished military awards including a "V" for valor in combat.

Yet another to approach featuring exceptional women involved descriptions of the woman's military career and competitiveness. The following introduction to one news story about the first woman recently to earn the rank of four-star general was emblematic of this theme: "For more than a decade, Lt. Gen. Ann E. Dunwoody has delighted in leaping through the doors of military planes and plunging into the night with a parachute on her back" (Swarns, 2008, p. A17). These articles portrayed and emphasized that today's military women are "one of the guys" with sparse reference to women's femininity or traditional gendered roles. One Army Lieutenant who spoke about sending a woman medic to support combat operations illustrates this theme when he spoke about her combat performance: "Brown 'was one of the guys, mixing it up, clearing rooms, doing everything that anybody else was doing'" (Tyson, 2008, p. A1). However, coverage in the papers in this study from women in the military of past eras showed a somewhat different perspective where women soldiers were reportedly perceived through a more traditional lens. For example, one male general's testimonial about his recently

deceased colleague and Women's Army Corps general hints at his traditional outlook on women when he was quoted saying, "She was a lady, and she was a soldier" (Schudel, 2009, p. C10).

*The combat debate.* A dominant theme in this study centered on whether women should be permitted in combat. The reports that covered the women in combat debate addressed each side of the argument, both for and against women in combat. Recurrent throughout these reports was the "gap" between the policy barring women from combat and the reality that women were facing the same threats as men regardless of job assignments. Often, the news stories identified the gap as the primary cause for the debate about women serving overseas in combat zones. Furthermore, and on repeated occasions, reports divulged that some military commanders were following the 1994 policy restricting women in combat in name only and were using women against policy guidelines. Frequently, these news reports also included statements to substantiate why current policy requires revisions to accommodate women's new battlefield roles. One military commander's admission demonstrated the conflict between reality on the ground and reportedly restrictive policies when she discussed her decision to use a woman medic in an unauthorized combat role: "'The Army has to understand the regulation that says women can't be placed in direct fire situations is archaic and not attainable,' said Lt. Col. Cheri Provancha, commander of a Stryker Brigade support battalion in Mosul, who decided to bend Army rules and allow Guay to serve as a medic for an infantry company of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne" (Tyson, 2005, p. A2). Similarly, one senior male officer acknowledged the disappearance of gender issues on today's battlefield when he said the

following: “Among Marines in the field, the gender lines have already been erased. You can’t go to Iraq and not be at risk in some way, and that’s what all of us who put on a uniform here understand” (Glanz, Burns & Schmitt, 2005, p. A1). Most noteworthy in the coverage of this topic was the consistent feedback from military leaders who considered women instrumental to meeting personnel shortfalls and fulfilling unique combat mission requirements such as the “culturally sensitive role of providing medical treatment for local women” in Iraq and Afghanistan (Tyson, 2008, p. A1). This validates the recurring trend that women’s increased presence, integration, and expansion of roles in the military were again due to personnel and operational needs.

Conversely, and with similar consistency regarding the debate on women in combat, many of the same reports disclosed politicians’ aims to codify into law the 1994 policy restricting women in combat. Because of some of these efforts to pass a measure restricting women’s roles, the coverage also incorporated arguments outlining some opinions on why women do not belong in combat. These reports covering the proposed amendment to further restrict women were most concentrated in 2005, with the corresponding arguments to bolster support for the amendment reflecting traditional apprehensions. Some of these conventional concerns outlined in the news reports in this study reported that certain politicians were asking the Bush administration to take a fresh look at the role of women in the military. Coverage of some of the points given against women in combat consisted of people’s desire to protect women and assumptions that servicemen may treat servicewomen differently. However, the greatest emphasis revolved around the issue of military mothers and a request for the administration to look

into the “policies that put mothers in danger of being killed, wounded or captured” (Alonso-Zaldivar, 2003, p. A23). One news article wrote in more detail about the debate on the role of military mothers in combat by listing the specifics on the complex military, administrative, and equal opportunity concerns if the administration opted to change current policy. Although the news reports showed a concentration of opinions against sending military mothers in to combat, they also wrote of people’s opinions on the other aspects of women in combat. For example, some people were quoted expressing thoughts that it was harder to lose a daughter than a son. The newspapers also mentioned political pundits’ worries about how the public would react to the sight of women returning home in body bags. Yet four articles noted that this had incited minimal public reaction. On two occasions, reports revealed changing polling numbers regarding people’s opinions on women in combat. The earlier poll cited in one news report indicated that a “slim majority of Americans support having women serve as ground combat troops” (Wilgoren, 2003, p. 2); whereas, a later poll in 2009 showed that 53% favored permitting women to serve with ground combat troops (Alvarez, 2009). As a general rule, the coverage reporting on arguments opposing women in combat typically involved protecting women and military mothers with only infrequent reference to questions whether servicewomen were physically and emotionally capable of meeting the demands of combat performance. In these few circumstances, most of the coverage involved quotes from two politicians, one of whom was former Navy Secretary James Webb running for Virginia Senate, who later “distanced himself” from his earlier assertions (Alvarez, 2006, p. 4.3).

*Sex and the military.* Although the military may be shown to be more progressive regarding integrating women in combat, news coverage in this study reported on a continued struggle with the military responding to and preventing sexual assault against women within its ranks. Four news articles offered varying statistics from various military organizations representing the issue of sexual assault during the ongoing military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. One news report indicated a 25% increase in sexual assault reports against servicemembers from the previous year or a total of 1275 across all military organizations (Tyson, 2005, p. A3). This report, along with another, identified an increase in sexual assault reports coming from the Central Area of Commands that include Iraq and Afghanistan with one story citing the 112 reports made across all the services over an 18 month period (Schmitt, 2004, p. 1). However, the reports showed some debate about the causes for the increase in reports within the Department of Defense with one Pentagon official stating his belief that “the increased numbers primarily reflect efforts to raise awareness and sensitivity to the problem” (Tyson, 2005, p. A3). While statistics varied depending on which reports the articles cited, the recurring issues in a majority of the articles were the reported systemic deficiencies in handling sexual assault and military cultural issues. In nearly every article, confidentiality, insufficient victim support, and a failure to define sexual assault uniformly across the services were cited as critical shortcomings. In addition, all the reports identified various cultural deficiencies of handling the problems such as peer retaliation and insensitive responses by victims’ commanders (Clemetson, 2004a; Clemetson, 2004b; Schmitt, 2004; Tyson, 2005). Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Joe Richard directly acknowledged

these types of shortcomings when he said that “[s]exual assault is probably the most underreported crime” (Tyson, 2005, p. A3). Among some of the reported defense mechanisms against accusers laid bare in the articles included: rationalization, retaliation by peers, defending school conduct, criticism, and women being labeled as crazy or promiscuous. The articles also noted legislators’ dissatisfaction with the military’s handling of sexual assault with one article mentioning the House Armed Services Committee Representative John M. McHugh’s statement saying that the military had conducted “18 major studies on sexual assault in the last 15 years” (Clemetson, 2004b, p. A1). Overall, the tone in the articles’ writing on legislators’ reactions was a cumulative anger with the military’s reported inability to institute effective corrective measures.

In a related matter, a few articles covered the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandals, although the overall coverage of the prisoner abuse scandals was infrequent compared with other news story topics. Nearly all articles regarding the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandals included coverage on Private First Class Lynndie England with two giving specific updates on her and describing her as the young servicewoman who took front page news at the height of the scandal’s exposure. The two reports that exclusively covered England identified her as the central figure and predominantly represented her from the angle of her defense team. These reports included the defense team’s claims that England’s gender pushed her to the forefront of the scandal as indicated by the following quote by England’s civilian defense lawyer: “It’s because she’s a woman, and it’s because she became the face of this” (White, 2005, p. A25). The articles suggested that England faced stiffer penalties than her male counterparts despite the fact that England

was a low-ranking administrative clerk. Details of one report showed that England's original charges carried a potential 30-year maximum prison sentence; whereas, two of her male military police colleagues received 10-year and 8-year prison sentences (White, 2005). Other articles reporting on the Abu Ghraib prison scandals covered, to varying degrees, the details on the sexual and violent nature of the crimes. The relationship between sex and violence was noted in one article by a victim advocacy's executive director who said that sexual assault and violence in the military are related (Clemetson, 2004a).

By and large, reports on sexual assault in the military showed that it remains an issue. And while the coverage offered differing opinions by military and political leaders whether incidents of sexual assault were increasing, two essential realities were illuminated. First, the coverage showed that women remain the predominant victims of sexual assault in the military, and second, military culture vilifies women who come forward against their attackers.

In many respects, a large portion of the news reports demonstrated progress towards a positive representation of women warriors succeeding on today's modern battlefields. With matters related to women's combat performance, the news reports showed that military personnel's reservations about women's abilities or inability to perform were minimal or altogether absent. The narratives described contemporary servicewomen's efforts to achieve battlefield equality by their exceptional performance and masculine-like determination. But other reports showed an incongruity between

representations of women performing admirably in combat and those that identified servicewomen as victims of sexual assault. While stories covering women's combat successes quoted men praising women's accomplishments, the reported systemic military shortcomings to halt incidents of sexual assault indicates a lingering problem that was often attributed to military culture. This suggests servicemen's continued attitudinal resistance or resentment to servicewomen in today's military despite the numerous laudatory articles on a handful of servicewomen in combat. Comparing the anecdotal evidence of praise with reports of system-wide sexual assault leaves news media reports of military women somewhat grim. Sexual assault problems, particularly when women were shown perpetrating sexual abuse - as demonstrated by this study's reports of Private First Class England's participation in Iraqi prisoners' sexual abuse - show that news media reports demonstrated a continued reliance of old stereotypes to represent military women.

## Chapter Six:

### Conclusion

The news representations of women in the military in this study of *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* reveal two different portrayals. Where one depiction paints imagery of military women integrating in male-dominated environs, the other reveals women subjected to the challenges of a gender-integrated military in the form of sexual assault. Inasmuch as the reports portray women combating hostile forces, news reports also reveal that women face continued hostilities within the ranks from their male colleagues. The more pronounced and prevalent theme, however, rests with the former.

This study uncovers rival depictions from early Iraq-war 2003 icons such as Lynch – the synecdochical representative of the “proper feminine soldier” – to women who are iconic because they deviate from traditional feminine dictates by sharing the fighting front with their male counterparts. As such, I maintain that these descriptions of women’s battlefield feats cast doubt on long-standing arguments against women in combat. Furthermore, where previous studies argued that the representations of Lynch and England further separated feminine women from masculine men in the military, post

Lynch/England representations of servicewomen exhibit effective “social integration” (Carreiras, 2008).

In lieu of portrayals implying that servicewomen violate their prescribed gender rules by breaching the male-only domain, the narratives in this study quoted servicemen accepting women’s expanding roles into combat. Along with quotes citing servicemen’s increased acceptance of women in non-traditional roles, portrayals in this study also attest to the equalizing effect women’s performance and athletic abilities have with respect to their male counterparts. These testaments of capable women diverge from a previous literature comprised of traditional arguments against the appropriateness of women in combat.

Notwithstanding these and other conventional arguments posed among legislators and the public to keep military women and mothers safe from harm, the most compelling theme within these narratives shows a trend of slowly disintegrating social, ideological, and procedural barriers against women in combat. In addition, news reports deviating from the customary depictions of feminine care-taking women implies a new but still emerging construct for contemporary servicewomen. In place of depictions of administrative women “freeing the men to fight,” the new generation of military women is instead wearing away at the boundaries of “gender appropriate” jobs, otherwise defined as military jobs or positions that are traditionally masculine and deemed inappropriate for women (Yoder, 1991 p. 165). Not only do the reports describe a new generation of women as necessary contributors who are meeting combat demands and military mission

needs, but also suggestions that these women are “paradoxes” or out-of-the-ordinary Amazon warriors are absent.

To be sure, the news stories reveal that not everyone accepts women’s expanding roles, but I contend that the news media factor into this evolutionary perception of women in the combat arms profession. For that reason, I concur with one organizational scholar’s belief that the “co-constitutive relationship between mass-mediated meanings and organizational identities is a general characteristic of the organization-society relationship” (Just, 2006, p. 117). I believe that were it not for the news media transitioning to representations of women prevailing in masculine roles without simultaneously questioning their womanhood, there would be less acceptance and louder public outcry against women serving overseas. However, these new representations are nascent news media images of contemporary military women, and the rather modest coverage in this study provides only a limited sample. Furthermore, the results from this study can only suggest a relationship between news media representations and its role in facilitating society’s acceptance of women warriors.

While women in combat portrayals uncover a positive perspective, news media reports in this study also expose the persistent issues of sexual assault against military women. There is fair and objective coverage of the issue; however, such reports are brief and intermittent compared with coverage of women in combat. As such, it is my opinion that the newspapers in this study could take a stronger stand on this important social issue. Instead of digging deeper into the matter, the reports written give a rather impartial

and macro view of the problem as it exists across all the services. Although providing statistics on the increased reporting of sexual assault is relevant to the topic, a nearly singular focus on numbers stirs little emotion. And unlike the individual profiles of women in combat, the thumbnail sketches of assaults against women fail to provide a persuasive and compelling narrative. Any direct quotes in news reports studied here typically include politicians' and non-profit organization's concerns over women's ongoing victimization in the military. The reports, however, were successful in consistently identifying that the problem is systemic and cultural across all services. Yet, there was some debate on whether sexual assaults were on the rise or whether it was simply an increase in reporting, which had the effect of diluting the issue's seriousness. With regard to journalistic follow-up, the study reveals only one instance of subsequent reporting on the matter within a one-month timeframe. The remaining two articles were isolated publications. Taken as a whole, the newspapers in this study failed to call for social change and fell short in fulfilling their fourth estate role as government watchdog.

Overall, this study reveals how the three newspapers portray women in today's military with the greatest emphasis on women's progressive immersion in combat. This particular focus on the topic remains relevant as demonstrated by an article published immediately outside the timeframe for this study that covers the U.S. Navy's consideration to permit women to serve on submarines (Bynum & Jelinek, 2009). Additional research extending beyond this study's timeframe and spanning other newspapers and newsmagazines likely would provide further insight and revelations of news media's changing portrayals of women working in a male-dominated military.

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1:

### Altheide's (1996) Qualitative Research Analysis Protocol Template

1. Newspaper (USA Today, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post)
2. Date of newspaper article
3. Location of article (page and Section/Story Number)
4. Length (Word count)
5. Title or emphasis, focus or main topic
6. Source(s)
7. Themes
8. Brief summary of article