

WOMEN WARRIORS: INCREASED SEXUAL
HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE IN THE U.S.
MILITARY DURING COMBAT

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Even in the twenty-first century, decades after she made her debut, Rosie the Riveter continues to captivate the American historical imagination and represent the ability of women to defy social norms. Many of the women who exemplified Rosie during the Second World War worked in factories where they not only produced arms for the military, but also permitted the men who traditionally held such jobs to enlist in the armed forces. In the decades since the Second World War, women have assumed the even more unconventional role of fighting alongside men in the U.S. military. The currently all-volunteer force is 14 percent female. Women serve in all positions except those requiring ground combat, and female recruits are filling the gaps created by insufficient enlistment (Herbert 126). Because they comprise such a significant proportion of the armed forces, we might expect women to be considered an invaluable part of the U.S. military, as Rosie the Riveter was of wartime industry. This logic, then, predicts a concomitant decrease in sexual harassment and assault of female soldiers by their compatriots either because of more stringent policies regarding harassment or because of greater respect for women among their peers. To an extent, this is true: Department of Defense (DoD) studies conducted over the past two decades indicate a steady decline in sexual harassment and assault of women soldiers. During wartime, however, the trend ceases. In fact, intra-force gendered aggression toward female soldiers actually seems to increase among deployed troops during wartime.

This trend accords with the academic literature regarding heightened masculinity during wartime. That is, if women's roles are not as clear-cut during wartime, men's are seemingly more so: it

becomes more important for men to adhere to gender-specific ideals of aggression and bravery during combat than during peace. In order to reinforce these ideals, the military has a masculine institutional structure, as is suggested by both the cut of military uniforms and the gendered narrative of basic training, which transforms boys into men. Given this systematic reinforcement of gender roles in military culture, integrating women as service members is a difficult process that requires a significant cultural shift within the military. Sexual harassment and assault during wartime take place within this context of incomplete gender integration and cultural transformation.

Before moving forward with analysis of this phenomenon, several key terms need to be defined. Given the high degree of confusion about what legally constitutes sexual harassment, it is imperative to begin with a clear definition of sexual harassment itself. Because I write in the context of the military, I will use the DoD's definition of sexual harassment rather than that of the civilian judicial system. Sara Zeigler and Gregory Gunderson, in their overview of the U.S. military's sexual harassment policy, summarize the DoD's definition of the term:

A form of sex discrimination that involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

1. a submission to or rejection of such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a person's job, pay, or career, or
2. a submission to or rejection of such conduct by a person is used as a basis for career or employment decisions affecting that person, or
3. such conduct interferes with an individual's performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment (Zeigler 116).

Next, I adopt the World Health Organization's definition of "rape" as "physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration—even

if slight—of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or object” (WHO 149), and add to it forced or coerced oral penetration. “Sexual assault” will be used synonymously with “sexual violence” and includes both rape and attempted rape. “Sexual coercion” is a nonviolent form of rape and will refer to sexual activity engaged in under duress or pressure, but without the explicit use of force or threats.

This paper will first examine the history of women in the U.S. military in order to establish the context within which women serve today. In particular, the first section will emphasize the history of sexual harassment within the military and changes in institutional attitudes toward sexual harassment. Next, I will examine sexual harassment and assault patterns and procedures from the late 1980s through the present in non-deployed troops, primarily via DoD studies, which are the most comprehensive source of statistics on the issue. I will then consider case studies and sexual assault data from the Persian Gulf War and the ongoing conflict in Iraq. The aggregate data on wartime sexual assault is very limited since no study has ever been commissioned to look explicitly and systematically at sexual assault. Thus, data is based primarily on self-reports. Finally, I will examine theories as to why sexual assault appears to increase during wartime and dedicate particular attention to the influence of a gendered military culture.

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE U.S. MILITARY

Women first significantly participated in the U.S. military during the Second World War when the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was formed in 1942. The WAAC was originally established within the Army not to recruit female soldiers, but rather to ensure financial benefits for those women already working for the Army in traditionally female occupations such as nursing and clerical work. Still, the WAAC spurred significant debate in the months preceding its passage. Its opponents insisted that such an institution would emasculate the “manhood of America” and suggest that American men were unable to defend their women (Meyer

13). Preserving gender roles, while undoubtedly an important concern of both the military and American society, was less important than the broader war effort, and the bill was passed. The Navy and Marines soon followed the Army and instituted policies that gave women even more equitable status within their branches than did the Army's WAAC bill. The relative inadequacy of the WAAC led to its replacement in 1943 by the Women's Army Corps (WAC), which dropped "Auxiliary" from its name and achieved official status in the Army.

While the impulse to preserve the ideal of a masculine soldier who defended his country and its women fueled opposition to female participation in the military, it was not the sole source of such opposition. Many opposed the WAC because they feared that women soldiers would be sexually exploited and used more as prostitutes than as logistical support (Meyer 39–41). This sort of opposition neatly encapsulated the period's norm of gendered sexuality. Implicit in this norm was the assumption that the women who would be wanted as Army representatives should not be having sex, and that men in the military would be unable to refrain from sexual relationships with women soldiers. Although those who espoused this argument were rhetorically reinforcing these gendered norms, they were genuinely concerned with the welfare of women in the military, and, to an extent, they were right to worry. By asserting themselves as guardians of their members' chastity, the WAC and the Army adopted an officially paternalistic attitude toward women's sexuality. Yet, rape and other forms of sexual harassment were far from uncommon; Meyer (141) relates a number of accounts from WAC members who either were sexually harassed or assaulted or could testify to the prevalence of harassment and assault.¹

After the Second World War, women's enlistment was legally

1. Statistical data on prevalence is unavailable as unofficial Army policy was to not acknowledge any sexual exploitation of WAC volunteers. WAC servicewoman were supposed to adhere to a strict code of (a)sexuality, and any sexual activity on their part, including that which was coerced, was punishable by discharge. Those that were prosecuted were generally racially coded, involving an African-American male and a white woman (Meyer 1996: 141).

limited to a maximum of two percent of service members in the armed forces. In 1967, a few years before the draft ended in 1973, this cap was repealed. Women served during the Vietnam War, but usually in the traditional occupations established by the WAC precedent. In 1978, the WAC was assimilated into the rest of the Army and women were allowed to serve on non-combat ships. Between 1972 and 1980, women's representation in the military grew nearly fivefold to around 55,000. Nonetheless, the so-called "risk rule" that restricted women's service in any unit that risked combat was preserved until 1992, and a restriction on enlistment in units that engage in ground combat remains to this day.

As opportunities for women in the military have increased, so has women's enlistment: in 1991, women made up 12.5 percent of military officers and over 10 percent of the total service. Of these women, 45 percent served in "nontraditional" occupations, that is, occupations other than clerical work, communications, or nursing. Today, women make up about 14 percent of the military (Zeigler 5). Although these numbers are still low, integrating women into the military—particularly the higher ranks—is necessarily a slow process that requires gradual replacement of senior officers as they retire. Furthermore, integration requires willingness on the part of the female population to serve in the armed forces (Beckett). Female willingness is unlikely to increase as long as the military maintains its image as a masculine organization. The military has attempted to change this image through advertising campaigns that emphasize the potential for women to be soldiers while maintaining their femininity. That said, the campaigns have achieved only limited success (Herbert 3–4). Many male service members also view the military as a male institution (Hansen 2004a) and retaliate against women service members via sexual harassment (Herbert 30). A strong indication of gender integration, therefore, should be a decline in sexual harassment rates.

Although sexual harassment and assault have been controversial issues for as long as women have served in the military, the military had no strong policy against sexual harassment until the early 1990s. The U.S. government did not even formally study

the issue until 1988, when the DoD conducted the first in a series of parallel studies that observed changes in sexual harassment rates over time. These studies were largely an outgrowth of complaints over unreliable data on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the armed forces. Sexual harassment and rape are hugely underreported crimes because those assaulted often fear reprisal or not being believed, or they feel ashamed of their ordeal (Kilpatrick). On account of this, the report rate in the military is around 22 percent (Hansen 2004a). Consequently, reported and prosecuted instances of sexual abuse are unreliable gauges of the sexual harassment problem. Yet, the studies commissioned by the DoD are anonymous, survey both male and female service members, and ask only about incidents that have happened in the past year. While those surveyed may still underreport, the anonymity of the survey confers a reasonable expectation of honesty (see Campbell). Response rates are around 50 percent, and it is possible that those who have experienced sexual harassment are more likely to fill out the survey. Still, the 1988 report (Martindale) found that 64 percent of active-duty females had experienced some form of harassment in the past year.³ Five percent of women were raped by servicemen. These numbers made it undeniable that sexual harassment was an issue, particularly in comparison with the rate within the civilian workforce (44 percent).

By the early 1990s, sexual harassment in the military was reaching a turning point. In 1991, an incident known as the Tailhook scandal marked the culmination of latent tensions between the old masculine military culture and the pressure to integrate women. The scandal captured national attention and prompted the Navy to publicly disavow sexual harassment. The Tailhook Association, founded in 1956, is an independent club for U.S. Naval (and some Marine) aviation officers. Its primary annual event since 1963 has

2. Those filling out the survey are not given an exact definition of sexual harassment. The first page of the survey gives a list of example behaviors, with an emphasis on the “unwanted, uninvited” nature of the behavior, and the fluidity of what sexual harassment can be. The study is thus designed to measure service member’s perceptions of whether or not they feel they have been sexually harassed.

been a Las Vegas reunion. In 1991, approximately 4,000 officers attended the reunion to partake in the infamous after-hours socializing. Weeks after the convention, complaints of indecent assault began to appear in newspapers, and a letter written by the president of the Tailhook Association to its members was leaked to a reporter at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. This letter, meant as an admonishment, stated that “I [Richard Ludwig, the president of Tailhook] have had five separate reports of young ladies ... who were verbally abused, had drinks thrown on them, were physically abused, and were sexually molested” (Vistica 333).

The most infamous sexual assault at Tailhook was the “gauntlet.” Reportedly, the gauntlet began with a lookout, who would yell “mill about” when a woman approached. Men would then stand near the sides of the walls in order to create an apparently traversable passage through the hallway. After the woman entered the hallway, the men would crowd around and pinch or grab her as she moved along.³ The gauntlet was a tradition at the Tailhook conventions dating from at least the early 1980s (OIG 38), but it was not officially condoned. Tailhook officials warned officers to avoid the “late-night gang mentality” found at the reunion and typified by the gauntlet. This mentality, exacerbated by alcohol and a sense of group belonging, held no individual responsible for his or her actions and encouraged adherence to traditional but irresponsible behavior.

A number of Congressmen heard the story, and Senator John McCain adopted Tailhook as a cause and initiated hearings on the scandal. Tailhook became a national symbol of the Navy’s inability to integrate women into its ranks. In the aftermath of Anita Hill’s sensational testimony against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, reports of the sexual molestation of women by the nation’s defenders reinforced public awareness of the pervasiveness of sexual harassment. The Tailhook scandal helped remove barriers to female

3. It is important to note that not all men participated in the gauntlet. Indeed, at least two officers spent a considerable amount of time at the end of the gauntlet near the elevators warning women not to walk down the hallway. Some women found the gauntlet amusing and passed through it several times consensually.

engagement in combat, since public officials tried to demonstrate that the military was an institution open to women's participation (Zimmerman 8). Lobbyists fought against the combat exclusion rule for over a decade but encountered unyielding opposition from military leaders prior to Tailhook (Katzenstein 48–49). Tailhook led to intense media scrutiny of military attitudes toward gender and created an atmosphere in which politically-minded members of Congress could not afford to oppose women's integration into the armed forces (Zimmerman 8). By the end of 1992, then, Congress had voted to allow women to serve in most kinds of combat carriers (Ebbert and Hall 292–294). While sexual harassment and sexist attitudes in the Navy did not cease with the Tailhook scandal, public and political shock from Tailhook indicated that the Navy's mores were in severe discordance with those of the public. In order to maintain respect, the Navy had to reform its attitudes toward women, and it began with a public acknowledgment that change was necessary. That message, which has yet to fully permeate the Navy or the other branches of the armed services, is the first step toward dismantling the "late-night gang mentality" that allowed Tailhook to happen.

THE PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN NON-COMBAT SITUATIONS

The 1990s brought military indictment of sexual harassment and inequity, but substantive changes to military culture have been slow to occur. The 1995 (Bastian) and 2002 (Lancaster and Lipari) DoD surveys, comparable to each other and to the 1988 report, show the progress that has been made. Annual sexual harassment rates declined from 64 percent in 1988, to 55 percent in 1995, and to 24 percent in 2002. Sexual coercion within the past year decreased from 13 percent in 1995 to 8 percent in 2002. The prevalence of rape of female service members by male service members changed little from 1988 to 1995—it went up slightly from five percent to six percent—but went down to three percent by 2002. During a comparable time period, the prevalence of civilian rape

ranged from about 0.27 percent to 0.71 percent, depending on the study (Kilpatrick). Even with the decline, military rates of rape remain notably high.

However, the decrease between 1988 and 2002 is a remarkable success for changes in military policy, particularly since nearly four-fifths of male and female respondents said that they felt comfortable reporting incidents of harassment to their command. However, a closer examination of the numbers discourages hasty optimism. The overall harassment rates require a two-pronged identification for the purposes of the DoD study: a service member must first say that she (these rates have been disaggregated from the men's responses) experienced a given behavior, and then say that she considered it to be sexual harassment. Asking individuals to label behavior with loaded terminology such as "sexual harassment" does not promote full disclosure. While many service members do not self-identify as victims of sexual harassment, they still experience sexist and sexually offensive behaviors on a broad scale. In 2002, 50 percent of women serving experienced sexist behavior (down from 63 percent in 1995) and 45 percent experienced crude or offensive behavior (down from 63 percent in 1995). Sexism in the military is changing, but not as quickly as the overall sexual harassment numbers imply.

Even the behavior which women themselves regard as sexual harassment as opposed to sexist behavior is rarely addressed outside of the anonymous surveys. About two-thirds of the sexual harassment incidents recorded in these studies went unreported. Of the unreported 2002 incidents, half went unreported because service members felt that the incidents were not serious enough, and the other half because women feared reprisals or not being believed (Lancaster and Lipari). That women view complaints as ineffective is as indicative of their general sense of sexism in the military as are actual gender-biased behaviors. These perceptions of bias are greater among the junior pay-grades. This indicates both that men feel freer to harass those with little power and that those with little power feel more vulnerable to harassment (Bastian, et al.).

The perceived futility of reporting sexual harassment or

assault within the military is not unwarranted. Military law differs significantly from civilian law, and, under military law, it is more difficult to get reports of harassment or assault prosecuted and punished.⁴ First of all, while under civilian law there is a particular statute that deals with sexual harassment, under the Uniform Code of Military Justice—distinct from military policy, which does specifically identify the issue of sexual harassment—sexual harassment must be prosecuted indirectly through a number of separate laws. While for civilians policies on “quid pro quo” and “hostile working environments” are gendered, military complaints of the same behavior are prosecuted under extortion, bribery, conduct unbecoming an officer, dereliction of duty, or other related crimes (Zeigler 117). Since each branch of the military has its own system for formally dealing with sexual harassment and assault complaints, it is difficult for outside groups to monitor proceedings. Furthermore, most service members are advised to report their complaints first to their commanding officers to be handled internally and unofficially (Zeigler 116, Nelson 78–80). This is a significant problem when commanding officers are skeptical or when they themselves harass women. It also means that there is often no official record of the complaint and legal proceedings are delayed even if the commanding officer is not hostile toward the complainant (Nelson 80–82). Those claims that are found to be credible are forwarded for disciplinary action, which is not necessarily legal action. In 1997, substantiated accounts of sexual assault were only court-martialed at a rate of about one-third, and less than 10 percent of total reported cases were convicted (Nelson 84–85). The military branches also lack thorough, disaggregated data on complaints of sexual harassment and assault, which makes the real complaint success rates difficult to measure.

4. There were significant differences between the services. In general, the Marine Corps had the highest rates of “unprofessional, gender-related behavior,” and Air Force members reported the least. The Marine Corps, however, is also typically reporting the fastest decline in harassment and assault rates, implying that perhaps a convergence of prevalence between the branches is forthcoming. Differences are no doubt due to a combination of leadership attitude, individual branch culture, and individual branch policies, but to explore them is beyond the scope of this paper.

Statistical or systematic data on sexual harassment or rape is even more difficult to acquire in combat situations. Reporting hierarchies are typically less accessible, either because there are geographic barriers or because those in charge are less willing to hear complaints (Hansen 2004a, 2006). Victims are generally less willing to make reports because harassment issues may seem less important than the fighting and because victims are worried about being perceived as unpatriotic at a time when most people are unwilling to see flaws in military personnel (Nelson 33). While the American public has looked critically at the military during peacetime, it has been divided at best in critiquing the military during combat. Vocal public critique of the military is reserved for extreme cases, such as the torture practices at Abu Ghraib. Thus, as I examine sexual harassment and violence during combat, I will be drawing more strongly on individual cases and self-reports than on academic studies.

EXPERIENCES IN THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

Iraq invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, precipitating the Gulf War. That August, U.S. troops launched Operation Desert Shield to protect Saudi Arabia from Iraq. Operation Desert Storm, aimed at driving Iraq out of Kuwait, began in January of 1991. In a matter of days, the war and the operation ended when Kuwait was liberated on February 27, 1991.

The Gulf War was an unprecedented conflict for the American military in several respects: it tested the efficacy of the all-volunteer military and tested women's abilities as soldiers. Women were serving in record numbers and in a far wider variety of positions than ever before. While in the Vietnam War, women made up two percent of military personnel and worked primarily at clerical and communication jobs, women comprised a larger proportion of the military in 1991 and participated significantly in positions that were considered "nontraditional." Indeed, despite the formal ban, many served as *de facto* soldiers in combat, and six were killed during action (Katzenstein 48). In general, the Gulf War success-

fully passed both the test of the all-volunteer force and the test of women's service. The all-volunteer force was efficient and professional, and there was no evidence that women performed any less competently at their jobs than men (Ebbert and Hall 298). By all measures, the Gulf War, which ended quickly and with few American losses, was a victory for the American military. The mess of Vietnam seemed a thing of the past.

Despite this seeming success of gender integration, sexual assault of female service members during the Gulf War remained a problem and appears to have been more prevalent than among non-deployed troops. While only one-sixth of one percent of women serving in the Gulf War officially reported any sort of sexual trauma, non-government studies have revealed a prevalence, adjusted to reflect an annual rate, of about eight percent—a rate as much as ten times the civilian rate over the same time period (Hansen 2004a). This rate is also higher (although less extravagantly so) than both the 1988 and 1996 DoD reports indicate. Because most of these incidents were never officially reported or acknowledged, very few of the perpetrators were held accountable. The official story, the one that occupies popular consciousness and history textbooks, is that sexual violence was not an issue during the Gulf War, and that men and women worked in harmony to preserve Kuwait's freedom.

One case that did manage to permeate popular consciousness was that of Jacqueline Ortiz, a reserve engineering specialist deployed in Saudi Arabia during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Her sergeant, David Martinez, forced her to perform oral sex in his tent during the war. In her testimony before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Ortiz described her ordeal:

On January 19, 1991, at 10 in the morning I was sodomized by my company's first sergeant. I immediately reported the incident to my supervisors. Unfortunately, my claim fell on deaf ears...I was refused medical attention...I was put on unneeded guard duty—first, for 6 hours straight, then it was 12 hours...When the CID investigator came over, I was

interrogated for hours. I had to tell him the story over and over, at least 6 times before he wrote anything down...I was not treated like a human being. I was treated like a dog. I was going from tent to tent, I didn't have a place to stay. No one wanted me around. I could hear remarks from other people, "Well, we wouldn't set up our first sergeant like you did" (Ortiz 1992).

As with Tailhook, political intervention from Washington resulted in increased public attention to the neglected complaint and ultimately forced the military to act. Ortiz appealed to her Congressman, Representative Bill Richardson, who made her case public. This pressure led to the Army forcing Martinez to take a lie detector test, which he failed. Ortiz subsequently gave the testimony excerpted above. Finally, Martinez faced court martial in August of 1992—over a year and a half after the rape. Nearly three years after the incident, Martinez finally pled guilty to sodomy (non-vaginal sexual penetration) and making false statements in return for dropping the indecent assault charge. This led him to be simply discharged, without any prison sentence (Sciolino).

Ortiz's struggle represents the experience shared by several female members of the military. First, Ortiz was sexually assaulted. Second, her complaint went unheeded by her superiors. She found the civilian world more sympathetic to her charges than the military world. Her story, though atypical in the amount of national attention it received, was still less captivating to the public than the story of Iraqi soldiers who captured a female American soldier, Rhonda Cornum, and sexually fondled but did not rape her (Sciolino). While Ortiz's story made clear the imperfection of the military and ongoing gender issues, the story of Rhonda Cornum appealed to patriotic visions of a brutal "other" violating American women.

EXPERIENCES IN THE CURRENT IRAQ CONFLICT

After more than a decade of recruitment and retention

of female soldiers, gender integration in the military looks very different today from how it did during the Gulf War. Roughly 14 percent of those serving in Iraq are female, or 13,000 individuals, a slightly higher proportion than during the Gulf War. In addition, although women are still not technically allowed to participate in ground combat, the risk rule that existed during the Gulf War has been repealed. Perhaps most importantly, the military has focused more effort on the elimination of sexual harassment within its ranks. While the armed forces are far from completely gender-integrated, they certainly have made enormous progress, as evidenced by the 2002 DoD report. Women are encouraged to integrate into their mainly male units rather than form separate all-female networks (Katzenstein 84–85). Currently, about one-third of women in the military report that they attempt to socialize only with other women in order to avoid sexual harassment (Sadler 266). Women do not serve at all in units primarily intended to face direct ground combat. In other areas, women generally report a task cohesion equivalent to all-male units, and those units with women generally have less hypermasculine attitudes toward gender division (Harrell 1997).

Despite this progress, sexual violence is still a significant problem among deployed troops. Since Operation Iraqi Freedom began, over 500 cases of rape in the combat theater including Iraq and Afghanistan have been reported to the Miles Foundation, an independent organization that collects data on sexual abuse in the U.S. military (Hansen 2006).⁵ These cases are far from comprehensive, since the victims have proactively reported their complaints to the Miles Foundation. Still, these numbers are far higher than those reported to the official chain of command, where a reporting rate of 22 or 23 percent is indicated (Hansen 2006). Gathering data is difficult because the conflict is ongoing, and it is

5. The Miles Foundation is a well-respected organization which is frequently called upon to testify before Congress about gender issues in the military. Because the Miles Foundation is primarily an information-gathering and disseminating organization and does not deal with individual cases of prosecution, it is unlikely that the women who report their cases of sexual abuse to this foundation are fabricating their experiences.

difficult to survey servicewomen while they are actively deployed. Consequently, to gauge the character of sexual harassment and assault in Iraq, it is even more important to look at individual cases than it was in the case of the Gulf War.

One individual who has gained some attention for her situation is Suzanne Swift. Swift was deployed in Iraq in 2003 when she was nineteen years old after one month of training. Once she reached Iraq, two of Swift's superiors made sexual advances toward her. Her squad leader coerced her into an ongoing sexual relationship. Unhappy with the initial responses she received from her equal-opportunity representative, Swift did not originally file any sort of complaint until she returned to the United States from her tour. There, facing further harassment from another superior, Swift filed a complaint against him, which quickly led to his transfer elsewhere. In January of 2006, Swift was scheduled to return to Iraq, but was emotionally unprepared to do so and believed redeployment would lead to more harassment and assault (Swift 2006). She instead remained in the United States, officially went AWOL, and was arrested the following June. This all happened after she had begun legal processes to receive a medical discharge and her mother had started a media campaign to draw attention to her sexual abuse. Usually, deserters are not actively pursued, and Swift's family saw this singling out of Swift for arrest as "retaliation" for her campaign (Burke 2006). In June 2006, the Army began formally investigating Swift's charges. Swift, like Ortiz, has found an advocate in her Congressman, Peter DeFazio (St. George 2006). However, Swift remains in jail on the AWOL charge, where she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Rich 2006). Swift went AWOL, but some women have died to avoid sexual harassment or assault while deployed in Iraq. According to Colonel Janis Karpinski, a female commander once in charge of Abu Ghraib, "several women [soldiers] had died of dehydration because they refused to drink liquids late in the day. They were afraid of being assaulted or even raped by male soldiers if they had to use the women's latrine after dark" (Cohn 2006).

EXPLANATIONS: THE UNIQUE PROBLEM OF WAR

It is evident from this statistical and anecdotal examination of sexual harassment and violence within the U.S. military that acts of sexual harassment and rape increase during combat. The important question to ask now is why this is the case. Examining causality may suggest policy solutions that would lead to a more equitable military that reflects American demographics and values. A number of possible explanations arise, and they must be parsed in order to determine how the military should respond to the problem of sexual violence. I will examine three different theories. First, that the particularities of the conflicts alone, and not anything systemic, contributed to the increase in sexual violence. Second, that the circumstances of combat provide greater opportunity for sexual violence. Third, that the particular culture of masculinity within the U.S. military resulted in greater sexual violence.

Particularities of the Conflicts

One possible explanation for the increase in sexual violence during these two conflicts in Iraq is a particularistic argument: the particular circumstances of each conflict contributed to the character of sexual violence. Therefore, these increases are atypical. In the case of the Gulf War, it is possible that the novelty of women in the military and the impending military cuts at the end of the Cold War made men feel insecure in their jobs and led them to retaliate against female comrades through gendered domination and violence. If so, the rate of sexual assault should be no higher than in the 1988 DoD study, during which the same dynamics were in play and women were even more of a novelty in the armed forces. This is not the case.

In the ongoing conflict in Iraq, the heightened sexual assault rate might be due to soldiers' frustrations with the length and messiness of the occupation. If this were the case, the soldiers would be expected to take out their frustrations on Iraqis or higher-ups in the command rather than their fellow or subordinate soldiers. Ad-

ditionally, there is no need for any sexual actions. In many of the cases, sexual assault takes place in relatively isolated locations where acts of violence against Iraqis are impossible, and the difficulties of enacting violence against a superior are obvious. Thus, fellow and subordinate soldiers emerge as the most available targets. Women soldiers are an identifiable minority and an available other—a cohort that male soldiers can identify as unlike themselves and thus outside the group to which they owe their loyalty. However, this fails to explain the attacks in the early stages of the conflict. Swift, for example, was assaulted in 2003, before the conflict had continued for any length of time and when soldiers should not yet have been evincing major signs of frustration with their deployment. Indeed, sixty-eight of the sexual assaults reported to the Miles Foundation happened in 2003 (Hansen 2004a).

One might argue that the particular lack of alternative sexual outlets in the Middle East had some sort of impact on men's expressions of frustrated sexuality and was responsible for the rates in both conflicts:

The Persian Gulf was a dry war, a chaste war. Islamic society had stern prohibitions against alcohol, and Muslim women were kept strictly segregated. For R&R, Gulf War troops had to make do with the *Cunard Princess*, a cruise liner, rented for \$31 million by the Pentagon and stocked with hamburgers and beer. It was a far cry from the alcoholic binges of previous conflicts, of the "hospitality women" (Zimmerman 56).

Similarly, during the current Iraq conflict, there are no (known) brothels available for soldiers to use, possibly heightening their likelihood of turning toward forcible methods of finding sexual outlets. However, this assumption doesn't hold when the option of consensual sexual relationships is available. Though they are illegal, they are less violent and have considerably kinder power connotations. In the few cases examined closely, the accounts given by the victims reveal no attempts made by the male officer to engage the woman in a consensual sexual relationship. Rather, all of

the acts were degrading, violent, and laden with power inequalities (Swift 2006, Ortiz 1992). Moreover, American soldiers did not refrain from sexually assaulting their female comrades even in conflicts such as the Vietnam War (e.g. Bilton and Sim 1992) in which brothels were widely available (Zimmerman 56). More factors are at work in sexual assault than simple sexual desire. The particularities of the two deployments in Iraq no doubt contributed to the nature of sexual harassment and assault, but they do not explain it completely.

Opportunism

During war, it is easier to get away with sexual harassment. In a battle zone, there are many characteristics that make it easier to commit sexual harassment:

- lack of privacy for performing daily routines
- poor lighting in and around the tent cities
- isolation
- safety concerns relative to staging areas for convoys
- difficulty of collection and processing of DNA samples
- jurisdictional issues, on-post or off-post incidents, and reporting requirements (Hansen 2004a).

In general, female soldiers are more exposed and thus more accessible for sexual violence, units are further away from each other, and the legal difficulties of reporting incidents make prosecution unlikely. Moreover, soldiers are aware that the high pressure of war makes commanders likely to deflect public attention from any internal troop misbehaviors. Indubitably, the fact that few perpetrators have faced repercussions for sexual assault has had some impact, but it is more likely a negative effect—potential perpetrators are not deterred—than a positive one that encourages sexual assault. If opportunism alone were the cause of heightened sexual assault during deployments, it would follow that something is to be inherently gained from rape, and it is this gain that must

be explained. Men are perceived to reap sexual, biological, and sociocultural gains from rape. The sexual gratification argument is dealt with in the preceding section and found to be weak. Biological arguments are similarly insufficient, as there is little reproductive advantage to be gained in rape situations and biology produces behavior only in interaction with social circumstances (Goldstein 18). The sociocultural benefits of rape during war seem to be located in the bolstering of masculinity and are explored below.

Heightened Expressions of Masculinity During War

Joshua Goldstein's theory of war and gender holds that fighting wars requires a certain set of traits—mainly, a willingness to face death while fighting the enemy at the peak of one's reproductive fitness—that are not naturally occurring in humans. Thus, these traits must be socially constructed. They are constructed as “masculine” by default because, biologically, men tend to be physically stronger and more capable than women. While women have historically demonstrated gender fluidity and a willingness to assume traditionally male roles during times of war, men indicate no such fluidity. Rather, their roles become more rigid in order to prepare them for the hardships of war. Women who try to enact these roles therefore undermine the concept of an essential masculinity. They may be regarded as much as an “other” or an enemy as the real enemy. Sexual harassment is a uniquely gendered way of indicating that women are not wanted among the troops. Perhaps more accurately, emphasizing the female soldiers' femininity makes the male soldiers “feel like men.”

Madeline Morris studies this phenomenon with respect to the increased rate of rapes perpetrated by American soldiers during the Second World War. She attributes this high rate of rape to military norms of masculinity that are shared by a cohesive unit and are stronger under pressures of war, and these norms generally correlate with a high incidence of sexual violence (Morris). Rosen and Martin, in a broad-based survey of soldiers' perceptions of gender and unit cohesion, find contemporary empirical evidence that

suggests attitudes of masculinity intensify under the threat of combat: "For male soldiers, deployment expectations were negatively correlated with cohesion, readiness, and acceptance of women, but positively correlated with time stress and gender harassment" (Rosen and Martin 11). Under the stress of deployment, soldiers often form tighter bonds that are based around the ideal of a shared masculinity that may increase cohesion among men in a unit, but not necessarily across the gender divide.

Because this explanation is one of social construction, it can also be socially deconstructed, and military policy for the past several decades has indicated that the military is attempting to deconstruct the gendered norms of its culture. This explanation would require male soldiers to still believe that women are not fit for war. Historically, this has been true: the paradigm for the U.S. military has been deeply entrenched in the notion of a "combat masculine warrior." Since the inclusion of women in the military and a more general public acceptance of non-traditional gender roles, however, the military has been evolving toward a model that is more inclusive, tolerant, and egalitarian (Dunavin). Some call this the "feminization of the military," and it has been accompanied by an increased rate of intra-military marriages, increased influence of civilian culture on military culture, and changing attitudes toward homosexuals in the military (Kier 20, Guenter-Schlessinger). The declining sexual harassment rates over the past two decades are one piece of evidence that this change in acculturation is happening.

This change, however, is incomplete and ongoing; about one-quarter of new recruits continue to oppose women's participation in the armed forces (Hansen 2004a). During peacetime, it is easier to foster the ongoing integration because adherence to the role of a combat masculine warrior is seen as less urgent. During combat, the focus of military personnel shifts away from most other goals to focus on fighting. Thus, soldiers appear to revert to a more established version of masculine military culture.

Unit commanders can influence sexual harassment and assault rates of their subordinates through example by demonstrating that sexist behavior will either be tolerated or punished (Sadler et al. 271,

Nelson 150–151, Guenter-Schlessinger 206). This demonstration is more real to soldiers than official policy, which may remain officially in effect during combat but is frequently ignored by those on the ground. Commanders who are intolerant of sexual harassment will, by example, encourage other men in the unit not only to refrain from sexual harassment, but also to act as protectors themselves. This clear association of command tolerance with unit behavior gives some hope that military culture is not completely intractable.

CONCLUSION

Despite enormous progress in the integration of women into the U.S. military, sexual violence remains a significant problem. This violence is perhaps the clearest indicator that gender integration in the military has not yet been fully achieved. While harassment and assault rates have been declining over the past several decades, these rates regress when the same troops are deployed in combat. The particularities of the individual conflicts are insufficient to explain heightened sexual violence during wartime. Thus, we must look to explanations endemic to war or American military culture. Military culture is currently in a transitional stage from one that relies on the image of the masculine warrior to another that embodies more androgynous traits—heroic images which are not explicitly gendered as male or female, but based on ideals of bravery, hard work, and patriotism. Nonetheless, the incidence of sexual violence within the ranks remains higher, and complaints are more likely to be ignored during combat. To have a truly gender-integrated military, the military must pay more explicit attention to the problem of sexual assault during wartime. This is important not only to protect individual members of the armed forces, but also because the military's behavior when fulfilling its *raison d'être* is most representative of its character and most representative of how deeply change has permeated its culture.

Civilian culture had very little impact on military culture until the past several decades. As the case studies demonstrate, recent media and political exposure of military practices, along

with concomitant public outrage, can be effective at forcing the military to evolve its policies and attitudes. The military seems to be assimilating many civilian values, and while this is more difficult to do during war than in peace, the military leadership has not been completely oblivious to the demands of the country that employs it. This fact can only give us hope that in the realm of gender equity, too, the military will continue to take cues from its typically more progressive civilian counterparts.

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