

**WOMEN
PEACE
&
SECURITY**
**IN PROFESSIONAL
MILITARY EDUCATION**

VOLUME 2

**EDITED BY LAUREN MACKENZIE, PhD
and COLONEL DANA PERKINS, PhD**

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MCUP

MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY PRESS

Quantico, Virginia
2024

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Mackenzie, Lauren, 1976- editor. | Perkins, Dana, 1965- editor. | Marine Corps University (U.S.). Press, issuing body.

Title: Women, peace, & security in professional military education /edited by Lauren Mackenzie and Dana Perkins.

Other titles: Women, peace, and security in professional military education

Description: Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps University Press, 2024. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda is a global framework and policy tool that guides national actions addressing gender inequalities and the drivers of conflict and its impact on women and girls. By fostering structural and institutional change, the WPS agenda aims to 1) prevent conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls and 2) ensure the inclusion and participation of women in peace and security decision-making processes to incorporate their specific needs in relief and recovery situations. This volume gathers student papers from the Joint Women, Peace, and Security Academic Forum's 2022–23 WPS in PME Writing Award program, a best-of selection of informative and empowering work that intersects with Department of Defense equities supporting global WPS principles. Student participants in the Joint WPS Academic Forum hail from prestigious DOD academic institutions, and this monograph shows how the strategic leaders of tomorrow embrace WPS today, offering a strong indication of how WPS principles will be implemented over time and how they will influence the paradigm of peace and security and our approaches to conflict prevention and resolution"— Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022024550 (print) | LCCN 2022024551 (ebook) | ISBN 9798987336120 (paperback) | ISBN 9798987336137 (epub)

Subjects: Women and peace. | Women and human security. | Women and the military. | Women—Violence against—Prevention—International cooperation. | National security—United States. | Military education—United States. | United States—Armed Forces—Women. | United Nations. Security Council. Resolution 1325.

Classification: LCCJZ5578 .W6674 2022 (print) | LCCJZ5578 (ebook) | DDC 327.1/72082—dc23/eng/20220705 | SUDOC D 214.513:W 84

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022024550>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022024551>

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Published by
Marine Corps University Press
2044 Broadway Drive
Quantico, VA 22134
1st Printing, 2024
ISBN 979-8-9873361-2-0
DOI: 10.56686/9798987336120

THIS VOLUME IS FREELY AVAILABLE AT WWW.USMCU.EDU/MCUPRESS

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FOREWORD

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) is a significant and impactful framework and policy tool for the U.S. government as it encounters increasingly dynamic and complex security threats to the nation. WPS seeks to advance women's participation in peace and security processes and integrate gender perspectives in U.S. foreign policy and national security decision-making to promote more inclusive and democratic societies and the long-term stability of countries and regions. To fully leverage the insights and advantages WPS provides the Department of Defense (DOD), we must ensure WPS principles are integrated into professional military education (PME) to empower future U.S. military leaders with these essential skills.

With the 2023 U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, the U.S. government recommitted to the idea that women's meaningful participation, leadership, and engagement in decision-making at all levels is both a moral and a strategic imperative for U.S. foreign policy and national security. As our adversaries and competitors continue to seek a strategic advantage through exploitation of diverse populations, we must find our competitive advantage by using crosscutting approaches to address international instability such as analyzing the role gender plays in inter- and intrastate relations and considering how DOD can leverage this knowledge to drive operational effectiveness.

The chapters in this monograph address many of the security threats the United States faces right now. From geographic foci looking at Somalia to Syria to Iran, and functional challenges such as issues around recruitment and retention, these chapters give a broad set of perspectives and showcase why learning what a gender perspective means is so critical. By understanding how the different roles, rights, and responsibilities of men, women, boys, girls, and people of diverse gender identities across multiple domains of social life shape a person's needs, interests, and—importantly to us—security, servicemembers and their leaders become better equipped for the operating environment. Learning about a gender perspective and how to conduct a gender analysis at PME institutions gives students a critical added level of analysis from which to view many intractable security problems facing DOD and the nation.

U.S. PME institutions are increasingly charged with covering down on more information to better prepare warfighters for the future of warfare. Adding the WPS agenda and gender analyses to PME courses and curriculums is not just adding another rock in an already too-heavy rucksack. By incorporating a gender perspective into curricula, operations, and activities, we can better prepare students to counter threats from adversaries who are focusing on actively targeting and sowing instability in democratic societies around the world. Research shows that limits on women and girls' freedom of movement, harms to their physical safety, and violations of their human rights serve as early warning indicators of conflict or instability within a society.

Employing the principles of WPS during crisis and conflict is proven to significantly reduce blind spots and risk, providing better situational awareness and ultimately improving operational outcomes. It is not only critical to model and employ the importance of gender as an analytical tool with partners and allies, but it ensures that we are using every force multiplier possible during a time when every competitive advantage matters.

It is important to never stop learning. The U.S. armed forces must embrace challenging assignments and seek broadening opportunities to best train its warfighters. PME institutions are developing Service-specific courses to better prepare servicemembers to understand how WPS principles apply across mission areas. These courses will draw from best practices and lessons learned by DOD's gender advisory workforce and will lay the foundation for servicemembers before they enter command and execute WPS the DOD's areas of responsibility. I am proud of the work that has been done, and I look forward to seeing how these courses drive even more action on integrating WPS principles across the military's institutional practices.

I would like to extend a thank you to Dr. Lauren Mackenzie and Colonel Dana Perkins. This monograph on WPS by Marine Corps University Press showcases some of the best papers submitted to PME WPS writing award programs. As we look to the future and consider how warfare will be fought, how to encourage the meaningful participation of women with our partners and allies, and how to counter threats from our near peer competitors, our ability to operationalize the WPS agenda becomes more important than ever. I look forward to seeing how our PME institutions capitalize on the lessons in this work and further spotlight and integrate the WPS agenda into their programs.

Brigadier General Corwin J. Lusk
Deputy Director, Joint Staff J-5
Counter Threats and International Cooperation

PREFACE

In the quest for peace among nations, who knows better how to reflect Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) principles than those experienced in defending that peace? Within the Department of Defense (DOD), what lenses are we using that expand and improve capabilities, force multiply, build peace, and promote longer-term impacts? The application of WPS connects to military paradigms that touch peace/conflict continuums and when operationalized, create potentials to empower a more harmonious, global effectiveness. This can also lead to a synchronized Joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environment across cultures. While the soft power capabilities of WPS concepts lie within the aspirations of the people that suffer from unrest and injustice, the Joint Force equips the armed forces with the intellectual tools that expand awareness (and a common understanding) that can transform continuums. This endeavor provides the opportunity to study practical knowledge that goes beyond habitual patterns of thought within institutional defense platforms. That knowledge is integral for growing a healthy yet powerful defense force aimed to advantage strategic, operational, and tactical success. Here, we unravel another vehicle—WPS—that can help us evolve as peaceful warriors alongside international partners that believe in similar processes. Such lofty goals challenge us to imagine the way a foundational understanding of WPS and its application within the JIIM environment could significantly impact student study to address paradigms reflected within the defense peace/conflict continuum.

The DOD *WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* challenged the DOD and its Services to reflect WPS principles appropriately “in relevant policies, plans, doctrine, education, operations, resource planning, and exercises.”¹ Additionally, the PME-related recommendations from the Independent Review Commission for Sexual Assault in the Military “will be what the DOD holds PME accountable for completing with regards to WPS.”² By understanding and implementing WPS principles across the Joint Force, professional military education (PME) can make an impact on ways of managing conflict through examination of current crises in Ukraine, the Balkans, and the broader European theater; Afghanistan; Israel, Yemen, and the wider region; Mexico’s northern border, Haiti, and Colombia in our hemisphere; sexual violence and its ongoing effects on peace in East Africa, conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, and the breakdown of democratic governance in the region; and, at home in Defense Support of Civil Authorities in the prevention and response to crises such

¹ *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 11.

² Page W. Beavers, WPS advisor, Joint Staff J5 Counter Threats and International Cooperation Stabilization and Humanitarian Engagement Division, personal communication, 8 November 2023.

as the U.S. southern border, sites housing asylum seekers, floods, fires, pandemics (including COVID-19), and climate-related disasters.

The Joint WPS Academic Forum is a network of scholars integrating WPS concepts and principles, conducting research on WPS topics, and advancing diversity and inclusion initiatives within PME. The “Best of WPS in PME Writing Award” is the forum’s initiative to advance these collective efforts. The papers in this volume—winners of their own institutions’ WPS writing competitions—reflect more than the high quality of the students’ scholarship. They no doubt result from a relationship with a mentor, professor, or events that demonstrated the positive influence of including WPS considerations as well as the risk of not including them for operational effectiveness. We appreciate the intellectual energy that informed the students’ work published in this volume and that of the DOD WPS community, an interdisciplinary network of scholars and practitioners.

Colonel Veronica Oswald-Hrutkay (Ret),
U.S. Army, RN, BSN, MN, MSS, ACNP

and

Susan Yoshihara, PhD,

Founder and President,

American Council on Women, Peace, and Security

INTRODUCTION

The *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (2023 WPS Strategy), published in October 2023, “recognizes the interconnectedness of domestic and international implementation of the [Women, Peace, and Security] WPS agenda”; acknowledges “the need to promote women’s participation in decision-making roles in local, state, and national government, and to strengthen WPS principles within our institutions”; and notes that none of the global security challenges “can be effectively managed without the full and meaningful participation of women and girls.”¹

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) WPS lessons learned over the past four years, as included in the strategy’s annexes, emphasize—among other things—the WPS implementation “to strengthen women’s meaningful participation in the U.S. military and to diversify U.S. forces” and in the “planning and execution of external military operations, engagements, and activities around the globe,” the latter noting that a gender analysis “should inform the Department’s definition of the civilian environment.”² Because the WPS strategy mentions the national security priorities (i.e., strategic competition and global challenges), it is worth noting that in the three often-coexisting phases of the competition continuum—armed conflict, competition-below armed conflict, and cooperation—WPS integration may lead to increased operational effectiveness, a more thorough understanding of the operating environment, improved civilian harm mitigation and response, strengthened ties with partners and allies, increased civilian-military cooperation, and a more secure environment.³ While the strategy provides a compass for integrating and institutionalizing WPS principles within DOD institutions and operations, the papers authored by students in professional military education (PME) programs provide a roadmap for exploring future possibilities and envisioning desired outcomes while providing holistic perspectives on WPS and recommendations for WPS integration to align with long-term goals.

The student authors of the papers compiled in this edited volume are either 1) recipients of a WPS writing award, or 2) recipients of the top grade in a WPS-specific course at an institution without a WPS writing award nominated by a faculty member. These student authors—from the Air War College of Air University, Army War College, Naval War College, National Defense University/College of International Security Affairs, and the Command and Staff Colleges of Air University, Army University, and Marine Corps University—applied their critical and strategic thinking skills to address challenges and opportunities in WPS implementation. Topics ranged from female

¹ *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (Washington, DC: White House, 2023), 4–5.

² *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*, 31.

³ *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 7–9.

military retention in the Air Force and combat arms branches of the Army, to country or geographic combatant command-specific cases (Somalia, Iran, Syria, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command [USINDOPACOM], U.S. Central Command [CENTCOM]), and a gender perspective to coercive diplomacy. Throughout these papers, readers will find stories of pervasive discrimination and harassment against women in the military and glass ceiling limitations but also stories of trailblazing women's courage and determination, including those who felt they represented more than themselves and felt pressure to perform to higher standards. The literature review provided by Major Kimberly G. Brutsche outlines and examines the male categorization of females as one of several archetypes (the nurturing mother, the attractive seductress, the purposeless pet, or the iron maiden) and the "queen bee behavior" that some women resort to in a male-dominated environment as sociodynamic factors with the potential for affecting military readiness and effectiveness while eroding a competitive edge.

The PME enterprise seeks to "produce leaders who embody the knowledge, skills, and attributes necessary to succeed in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous battlespace," and the papers collated in this monograph demonstrate that students successfully grasp the military dimensions of the WPS challenges affecting national security and, as future leaders, are thus empowered to integrate WPS principles and a gender perspective to help shape the global norms, rules, and institutions as a "human response" to the core drivers and emerging dynamics of the future world.⁴

Colonel Dana Perkins, PhD
U.S. Army Reserve, MS
Former Director of Women, Peace, and Security Studies
Office of the Provost, U.S. Army War College

⁴ *Developing Enlisted Leaders for Tomorrow's Wars* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2021), 2.

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CHAPTER 1

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP

An Analysis of Female Retention in Combat Arms Branches

by Major Kimberly G. Brutsche, USA

INTRODUCTION

People are the starting point for all that we do. Today, the total Army is more diverse—the most talented and lethal force in our nation’s history. . . . We want our Army to look like our nation, and to reflect what’s best of our citizens.

~ Lieutenant General Thomas Seamands¹

The 2018 National Defense Strategy states, “Retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for warfighting success.”² Nested within this strategy, the Army People Strategy connects retention to “Total Army readiness.”³ This is because, quantitatively, retention allows the Army to maintain force strength through numbers. However, it is more than just numbers. Retention is also conducive to keeping a diverse pool of talented professionals. *Diversity* and *talent* are two critical words within the Army People Strategy’s mission.⁴ This strategy also states that it is “incumbent upon the Army to institute policies and systems” to retain “exceptional” talent and ensure leadership diversity for the future.⁵ This is especially important to consider in Army organizations that still have a perceived lack of diversity within their formations. Such formations include combat arms branches—specifically infantry, armor, and field artillery. There are gaps in gender diversity in their cases, with women making up only about 1 percent of their military occupational specialties (MOS). This chapter introduces the current state of female retention in the armed forces and how it helps define the problem of future underrepresentation of senior female leaders in combat arms branches.

¹ *Diversity in Recruiting and Retention: Increasing Diversity in the Military—What the Military Services Are Doing*, House Armed Services Committee, 116th Cong. (10 December 2019) (statement of LtGen Thomas C. Seamands, USA, Deputy Chief of Staff).

² *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), 7.

³ *The Army People Strategy* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Army, 2019), 3.

⁴ *The Army People Strategy*, 3.

⁵ *The Army People Strategy Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Army, 2020), 2–3.

Background

It has been less than 10 years since the armed forces officially allowed women to fill combat arms roles. In January 2013, former secretary of defense Leon E. Panetta rescinded the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, which outlined restrictions that excluded women from assignments within “direct ground combat units.” What immediately followed were the military departments’ efforts to develop implementation plans that fully integrated women into all units by the prescribed deadline of 1 January 2016.⁶ The Department of the Army followed this guidance and, with Army Directive 2016-01, opened 125,318 conventional and 7,475 special operations positions to women.⁷ With policy supporting the change, the Army now needed to fill the ranks with interested and qualified women.

The Army implemented the “Leaders First” approach, which assigned female officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) into combat arms units first, before their junior enlisted counterparts.⁸ Each company would require two female officers or NCOs of the same combat arms MOS before units could integrate junior enlisted females. This policy intended to give junior enlisted females role models and mentors to support their integration into these uncharted fields. However, the Army has modified this approach several times since receiving criticism that the policy, in fact, harmed gender integration.⁹ Gender integration efforts progressed slowly as fewer women were willing to commission or reclassify and transfer into combat arms roles. Major Melissa Comiskey, command policy chief for the Army’s chief of staff for personnel, stated that the reason was “the inventory of Infantry and Armor women leaders is not as high as we have junior soldiers.”¹⁰ The Army modified Leaders First so that any woman at E-5 (sergeant) or above of any MOS could serve as a mentor. This modification would allow more junior enlisted females of combat arms-specific occupations to serve in more units.

It was clear that the Army saw professional development and mentorship as critical to the success of gender diversity and integration in combat arms. This aligns with conclusions made in 2020 by the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in

⁶ Les Aspin, memo, “Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule,” 13 January 1994; and Leon Panetta, memo, “Elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule,” 24 January 2013.

⁷ Patrick J. Murphy, Secretary of the Army, memo, “Army Directive 2016-01 (Expanding Positions and Changing the Army),” 29 January 2016.

⁸ Andrew Swick and Emma Moore, “The (Mostly) Good News on Women in Combat,” Center for a New American Security, 19 April 2018.

⁹ American Civil Liberties Union, “ACLU Files New Legal Challenge Against Defense Department for Failing to Integrate Women into Combat Positions,” press release, 18 December 2017.

¹⁰ Kyle Rempfer, “Army Adjusts ‘Leader First’ Policy, Plans to Integrate Women into Last 9 Brigade Combat Teams This Year,” *Army Times*, 8 June 2020.

the Services (DACOWITS) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO).¹¹ Both reports concluded that a lack of female mentors, role models, and leader support for personal or career advancement negatively affects female servicemember retention. Despite the Leaders First policy's formal attempt to establish female-to-female mentor relationships, the Army's current view of mentoring is based "solely on *informal* relationships."¹² This is a shift from pre-2005 Army doctrine, which emphasized mentoring as an inclusive action for every subordinate "under a leader's charge."¹³

Current doctrine, despite using the verb *mentoring*, actually describes the concept of the mentor as a noun: a mentor is one of greater experience who serves as a wise counselor for selected individuals.¹⁴ The word *selected* supports how *Army Leadership and the Profession*, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, currently defines *mentorship*, which is the "voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and one of lesser experience."¹⁵ This lack of doctrinal distinction between mentoring as an inclusive action and the mentor as an exclusive individual supported criticisms of the Leaders First policy. The Service Women's Action Network argued that the policy negatively messaged to leaders that the Army could relieve men of the responsibility to mentor women, or that women were the only ones qualified to mentor other women.¹⁶ In either case, what was at risk was the development of women in combat arms, and the potentiality for their departure from military service.

Problem Statement

There is a gap between the Army's ability to recruit women and the Army's ability to retain them. This highlights the problem of female underrepresentation in senior leadership positions across the Army, despite their marginal success in increasing the overall force strength of women. This especially affects combat arms branches, which are now approximately seven years into their female integration efforts. Combat arms is now at a point where initially integrated women are beginning to compete for and

¹¹ *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2020 Annual Report* (Alexandria, VA: DACOWITS, 2020); and *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020).

¹² *Mentoring Programs Across the Services*, Issue Paper no. 33 (Arlington, VA: Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2010), 1, emphasis added.

¹³ *Army Leadership*, Field Manual (FM) 22-100 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1999), 5–16.

¹⁴ James R. Thomas and Ted A. Thomas, "Mentoring, Coaching, and Counseling: Toward a Common Understanding," *Military Review* 95 (2015): 1.

¹⁵ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2019), 6–11.

¹⁶ American Civil Liberties Union, "ACLU Files New Legal Challenge Against Defense Department for Failing to Integrate Women into Combat Positions," press release, 18 December 2017.

serve in more senior positions. This introduces the main problem of this study, which is that the high turnover of women across the Army may have a drastic negative impact on the representation of women in future senior leadership positions in combat arms branches. This problem undermines current Department of Defense (DOD) and Army diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) guidance.

For five years, the Army has put forth a sizeable effort to support gender integration into historically male-dominated environments, yet the numbers remain overall very low. As of 2020, there were 680 enlisted females and 260 female officers serving in infantry or armor slots. Comparatively, in 2020, there were 83,000 total enlisted male and male officers serving in the same capacity. In December 2020, 74,695 total women were serving in the active-duty Army; 16,950 of those women were officers.¹⁷ This means that women in armor and infantry were approximately 1.2 percent of the total female force and 1.1 percent of combat arms.¹⁸

Despite this stark gap in representation within combat arms, the overall force strength of active-duty Army women has remained steady and increased by 6 percent between 2018 and 2021.¹⁹ These steady numbers are due to successful Army recruiting efforts, in which women recruits increased from 17.1 percent to 18.1 percent between 2018 and 2020. However, Emma Moore, a researcher at the Center for a New American Security, said, "It's all well and good to recruit women. But whether or not they can keep them in the service is another big question."²⁰

A 2020 GAO report stated that women are 28 percent more likely to leave the armed forces than men and cited it as a significant concern. Another concern the GAO noted was that the DOD does not have a specified plan to address retention.²¹

If female retention in the overall Army remains comparatively lower than males, female force strength in combat arms branches will be at risk for continued underrepresentation, as their numbers are already low compared to other branches. While the Army is still collecting data on female retention within combat arms branches, this is a problem that DOD must remain proactive on. The Military Leadership Diversity

¹⁷ Defense Manpower Data Center, Table of Active Duty Females by Rank/Grade and Service, Department of Defense, 2020 (Excel document).

¹⁸ Steve Beynon, "The Rise of Female Commanders in Combat Arms," *Stars and Stripes*, 15 August 2020.

¹⁹ Defense Manpower Data Center, Table of Active Duty Females by Rank/Grade and Service, Department of Defense, 2018 (PDF); and Defense Manpower Data Center, Table of Active Duty Females by Rank/Grade and Service, Department of Defense, 2021 (PDF).

²⁰ Haley Britzky, "The Army on Its Slight Increase in Recruiting Women and Minorities: Please Clap," *Task and Purpose*, 9 October 2020.

²¹ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 18.

Commission has stated that lower retention of midlevel female enlisted and officer servicemembers is a major explanation for a lack of female representation in senior leader positions.²² If left unaddressed, this potential problem could lead to a lack of female representation in senior infantry, armor, and field artillery leader positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenological experiences of women who have served in combat arms occupations and how those experiences informed their decisions to either leave or continue military service. The phenomenon driving these experiences was Army Directive 2016-01, which fully integrated women into combat arms and subsequently led them to be among the first in their fields.²³ Personal perspective was essential in understanding intangible human elements, as the DOD exit survey data cannot capture it as quickly. Extracting patterns can inform how specific factors connect individual experiences to organizational retention.²⁴

This phenomenologically based research was conducted through open-ended, online surveys. The survey asked participants to answer retention-based questions using a Likert scale, with companion open-ended questions to allow the participants an opportunity to further elaborate on their experiences. The study participants consisted of 85 women, from warrant officer 1 to colonel, who either currently serve or have previously served in combat arms roles. These roles encompassed MOSs within infantry, armor, field artillery, and special operations. Convenience and snowball sampling were the methods used to recruit survey participants. The researcher preferred a critical case sampling method, as the overall population of women in combat arms, while limited in number, was very rich in knowledge and experience regarding their shared phenomenon.²⁵ Snowball sampling assisted in increasing the sample, as the overall population of females in combat arms is small. In addition, limited time and resources made it difficult to reach a larger population for recruitment opportunities.

²² *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st-Century Military* (Arlington, VA: Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2011), xvi.

²³ "Army Directive 2016-01 (Expanding Positions and Changing the Army Policy for the Assignment of Female Soldiers)."

²⁴ John W. Cresswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, vol. 4 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 87.

²⁵ Lawrence A. Palinkas et al., "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis," *Administrative and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42, no. 5 (September 2015): 534, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>.

This phenomenological study sought to describe, not explain, the experiences of combat arms women and how they related to service retention.²⁶ Bracketing through journaling was implemented to ensure any preconceptions did not taint the research process.²⁷ The researcher conducted reflexivity by documenting data collection methods and how interpretations of that data affected the researcher and the overall research process.²⁸

Primary Research Question

Participants shared how their unique experiences in combat arms informed their decisions to continue or end military service through an online survey. The research question that drove the conduct of this study was: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations?

Although close-ended, the primary research question did not limit the exploratory nature of this research study. Although a phenomenological study, its intent was not to serve as a compilation of the general experiences of women in combat arms professions. This study's design was to address Army retention. After completion of the research, the answer to the primary research question is: no, the Army does not require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations. The conclusions section further explains how the research led to that conclusion.

Secondary Research Questions

The online survey design considered the secondary research questions, which drove toward answering the primary question. The secondary research questions were:

1. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue service?
2. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to terminate service?
3. How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service?

²⁶ Stan Lester, *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (Taunton, UK: Stan Lester Developments, 1999), 1.

²⁷ Lea Tufford and Peter Newman, "Bracketing in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Social Work* 11, no. 1 (2010): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325010368316>.

²⁸ Penny Mackieson, Aron Shlonsky, and Marie Connolly, "Increasing Rigor and Reducing Bias in Qualitative Research: A Document Analysis of Parliamentary Debates Using Applied Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Social Work* 18, no. 6 (2018): 967, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325018786996>.

This study did not presuppose that the Army should implement a retention approach for women in combat arms beyond what is already in place. The data presentation and analysis section details how the data answered the primary question through the secondary research questions.

Hypotheses

When the Army developed the Leaders First approach, they believed that female officers and NCOs were essential in supporting and integrating junior enlisted females into combat arms roles. However, the Army was unable to fully realize this theory, due to the limited number of female combat arms leaders filling the ranks. In addition, criticisms that the Leaders First approach indirectly segregated women and relieved men of the responsibility to mentor made the idea less palatable, which led to its modification.

Studies of nonmilitary workplaces posit that increased representation decreases collective employee turnover.²⁹ The turnover of women in the Army is the defining problem in this study that results in a lack of gender representation, especially in senior-level positions. Thus, this study introduced four hypotheses:

1. More active-duty women in Army leadership positions increase female soldier retention.
2. If a female active-duty officer or NCO is present in a female subordinate's chain of command, the subordinate is more willing to continue service.
3. If a female active-duty soldier in combat arms knows another female employed in a similar occupation, they are more willing to continue service.
4. The less female active-duty soldiers feel mentored, the more likely they will terminate their Army service.

These were simple hypotheses in which the dependent variables were all related to soldier retention. They relied on female presence and mentorship as independent variables. Hypothesis 1 was more general in introducing any female leader in any Army leadership position. Hypothesis 2 was specific to the female soldier's chain of command. Hypothesis 3 removed the leader from the independent variable and instead broadened the scope to include any female with the same combat arms occupation as the dependent variable. Hypothesis 4 introduced general mentorship from anyone as a contributing variable that manipulates retention outcomes.

²⁹ Cara C. Maurer and Israr Qureshi, "Not Just Good for Her: A Temporal Analysis of the Dynamic Relationship between Representation of Women and Collective Employee Turnover," *Organization Studies* 42, no. 1 (October 2019): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619875480>.

With female integration into combat arms only seven years into its execution, there is no expectation that many combat arms women have advanced into senior leadership ranks and positions. There is not enough research to indicate a connection between a lack of female leader representation and retention. This study seeks to contribute to that research.

Assumptions

Due to limited information available on this topic, this study accepted a few assumptions as valid to continue the investigation. The first research assumption was that the 28-percent higher attrition rate for female servicemembers compared to males equally affects all military Service branches and Army-specific branches, as the researcher does not have access to comparative retention data between branches. This especially considers that female retention issues are also proportionally similar between Army combat arms and noncombat arms branches. The research could not validate whether there was a significant retention problem for women in combat arms roles. Still, this assumption was necessary to shape recommendations for the Army to consider if it was to be proactive in its diversity and retention efforts. There may not be enough time elapsed since the lift of the ground combat exclusion policy to gather the data on long-term retention for women in combat arms. But to meet current DOD guidance, it is a potential problem to anticipate. As a result, the recommendations in the concluding section focus on maintaining force strength and nurturing its diversity rather than solving an issue this research cannot confirm exists.

A second assumption was that female attrition occurs at the expiration of their initial contractual obligation. Reviewing total female force strength by rank between 2018 and 2021 revealed that the highest concentration of women serve in O-3 (captain) and E-4 (corporal) positions.³⁰ After these ranks, the overall numbers decrease. Captain and specialist/corporal are the last achievable ranks for an average enlisted or officer service contract, ranging from four to five years of service. This assumption was necessary to continue examining gender underrepresentation of senior-level positions and why women who choose to leave the Service do so after completing one contract period. This chapter's literature review explores the literature explaining why this decrease may occur.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, there was a research assumption that the study participants would answer truthfully to the best of their recollection. The second assumption was that the online survey responses to the open-ended questions

³⁰ "Active Duty Military Personnel by Service by Rank/Grade reports for 2018–21, DOD Personnel, Workforce Reports and Publications," Defense Manpower Data Center, accessed 10 October 2021.

would reveal connections to the retention factors the participants scaled, therefore providing additional context to the Likert scale results. There is already literature on issues women servicemembers face in the Army that result in higher attrition rates as compared to males. Whether the participant responses can validate this assumption affected how this research's conclusions answered the primary research question.

Definition of Terms

This study uses terms that are familiar to those employed in military environments. The following definitions will provide an easier understanding of the presented research.

Combat arms. *Tactics*, Field Manual 3-90, defines combat arms as “soldiers who close with and destroy enemy forces or provide firepower and destructive capabilities on the battlefield.”³¹ Although combat arms is a legacy term replaced by Operations Division branches in Army doctrine, its traditional association with direct fires in combat makes it an easily recognizable term and aids in the ease of understanding in this study. Combat arms encompass several branches. But for this study, only infantry, armor, field artillery, and special operations will define combat arms.

Counseling. “The process used by leaders to guide subordinates to improve performance and develop their potential.”³²

Diversity. “All attributes, experiences, cultures, characteristics, and backgrounds of the total force.”³³

Equity. “The fair treatment, access, opportunity, choice, and advancement for all soldiers.”³⁴

Glass ceiling. When referring to the glass ceiling, this study refers to the invisible barriers women face that prevent their ability to advance in their careers or rise to leadership positions past a certain point.³⁵

Inclusion. “The process of valuing and integrating each individual’s perspectives, ideas, and contributions into how an organization functions and makes decisions.”³⁶

Junior enlisted soldiers. Soldiers in the ranks of private to specialist learn, apply, and develop their technical and leadership skills in their assigned MOSs.³⁷

Mentoring. “The voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by

³¹ *Tactics*, Field Manual 3-90 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2001), A-2.

³² *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 6-10.

³³ *The Army People Strategy Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex*, 4.

³⁴ *The Army People Strategy Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex*, 4.

³⁵ A. Chamaru De Alwis, “Effects of Glass Ceiling on Women Career Development in Private Sector Organizations—Case of Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Competitiveness* 5, no. 2 (June 2013): 6, <https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2013.02.01>.

³⁶ *The Army People Strategy Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Annex*, 4.

³⁷ Stephen Bajza, “Army Ranks for Enlisted Personnel,” *Military.com*, 8 August 2014.

mutual trust and respect." The developing leader often initiates the relationship and seeks counsel from the mentor.³⁸

Noncombat arms. Any Army branches that are not infantry, armor, field artillery, and special operations. For this study, traditionally defined combat arms branches, such as aviation or air defense artillery, will fall under noncombat arms.

Noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Serving in ranks from corporal to Sergeant Major of the Army, NCOs are responsible for "conducting daily operations, executing small unit tactical operations, and making commander's intent-driven decisions."³⁹

Officers. Officers hold the ranks of second lieutenant to general officer. The term *officers* will also include warrant officers in this study. The president of the United States or secretary of the Army maintains the authority to commission or appoint officers to "command units, establish policy, and manage resources."⁴⁰

Readiness. The capability to support national strategy by synchronizing personnel, equipment, and weapons, so that forces can "fight and meet the demands of assigned missions."⁴¹

Retention. Retention refers to "the rate at which military personnel voluntarily choose to stay in the military after their obligated term of service has ended."⁴²

Trailblazer. "A pioneer; a person who makes, does, or discovers something new and makes it acceptable or popular."⁴³

Underrepresented. When the total number of minorities employed within an organization is a lower percentage than the total number of general population employees.⁴⁴

Scope

This study aimed to describe the experiences of women who serve in combat arms occupations and how their experiences affect their decisions to either continue or terminate their military service. The sample is comprised of active-duty officers who currently or previously served in combat arms occupations, namely infantry, armor, field artillery, and special operations. This research narrowed the scope of combat arms to these branches due to their specification in Army Directive 2016-

³⁸ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 6-11.

³⁹ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 1-11.

⁴⁰ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 1-11.

⁴¹ G. James Herrera, *The Fundamentals of Military Readiness* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 3.

⁴² *Defense Primer: Active Duty Enlisted Retention* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), 1.

⁴³ Merriam-Webster, s.v. "trailblazer."

⁴⁴ *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report: Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 25.

01, the document that lifted the combat exclusion policy.⁴⁵ Online surveys through Verint used both a descriptive and phenomenological approach to remain within the parameters outlined through the research questions. Research topics included the following:

1. Motivations to serve in the active-duty Army
2. Reasons for choosing to serve in combat arms
3. If the participant is a branch transfer, compare combat and noncombat arms roles
4. Positive and negative aspects of serving as a woman in combat arms
5. Reasons for choosing to continue or terminate service
6. Mentorship and how it can affect retention
7. Role modeling and how it can affect retention

Research and publication deadlines constrained the duration of this study to four months. These boundaries kept the study focused on female service in combat arms professions and how their individual experiences influence their retention decisions. However, despite the narrowed scope of this research, the Army may consider this study's findings and recommendations for broader long-term diversity and retention strategies.

Limitations

Some limitations concerned potential weaknesses out of the researcher's control.⁴⁶ These limitations influenced the research methodology and scope. The first limitation was time. Due to research and publication deadlines, there was limited time to conduct deep statistical analysis over a larger population of women, including expanded definitions of combat arms. It constrained the study to qualitatively draw on the experiences of a smaller participant pool. Therefore, the insights drawn from these experiences will only present general recommendations for the Army to consider. The subjects provide insight into the population of combat arms women but are not representative of all of them.

Another limitation was the lack of long-term research on female retention in combat arms. Gender integration into combat arms is only seven years into its execution, and the DOD's Defense Management Data Center did not start deliberately tracking women-specific data until 2018.⁴⁷ There is literature on gender integration into combat arms. However, it primarily addresses general leadership, individual challenges,

⁴⁵ "Army Directive 2016-01 (Expanding Positions and Changing the Army)."

⁴⁶ Dimitrios Theofanidis and Antigoni Fountouki, "Limitations and Delimitations in the Research Process," *Perioperative Nursing* 7, no. 3 (2019): 155.

⁴⁷ Defense Manpower Data Center, Table of Active Duty Females by Rank/Grade and Service, Department of Defense, 2018 (PDF).

and recruiting data. There has not been enough time to extract definitive conclusions on female retention in combat arms.

Delimitations

Delimitations are self-imposed restrictions concerned with the narrow scope of this study.⁴⁸ This study only describes the experiences of female officers employed in combat arms roles within Infantry, Armor, Field Artillery, and Special Operations. This is due to their specification in Army Directive 2016-01, the document that lifted the combat exclusion policy.⁴⁹ These branches were also the focus of effort for the Army's Leader's First initiative. In addition, time limitations and lacking access to the greater female population of the Army delimited this study's focus to officers. This study will also not consider women involuntarily separated from the Army. It is not to invalidate their experiences; this focuses on choices and how individual experiences inform said choices. This study also delimits itself to gender-specific issues and does not cover intersectional topics, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. The conclusions recommend that the Army study these topics in the future to better understand even more nuanced perspectives regarding diversity and retention.

Significance of the Study

The DOD recognizes that diversity and inclusion are "fundamental necessities to force readiness and mission success."⁵⁰ This study does not argue for or against the potential adverse or advantageous effects of women serving in combat arms positions. Gender integration is a well-established policy that aligns with DOD guidance to build DEI into the organizations.⁵¹ However, DOD also observes "persistent underrepresentation" of minority populations in senior leader positions.⁵² A gap between the current and desired end state is evident in the ongoing higher attrition rate for female servicemembers than for males.

For women to rise to influential leadership positions in combat arms branches, they must continue service and be resilient through potential barriers. Retaining and

⁴⁸ D. Anthony Miles, "Let's Stop the Madness Part 2: Understanding the Difference Between Limitations vs Delimitations" (workshop, Black Doctoral Network Conference, October 2017), 7.

⁴⁹ Murphy, "Army Directive 2016-01 (Expanding Positions and Changing the Army)."

⁵⁰ *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report: Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military*, 4.

⁵¹ "SECDEF Lloyd Austin's Message to the Force," *USNI News*, 2 March 2021.

⁵² *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report: Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military*, viii.

nurturing diverse talent to overcome proverbial glass ceilings is how the Army can fill the gap between representation and underrepresentation. The benefit of doing so is creating a smarter and more lethal team.⁵³ Also, it creates an institution that, as Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Mark A. Milley says, “is a place where all Americans see themselves represented and have equal opportunity to succeed, especially in leadership positions.”⁵⁴ This is a strategic imperative.⁵⁵

Summary

This section introduced the current state of female retention in the armed forces and how it helps define the problem of future underrepresentation of senior female leaders in combat arms branches. Through the topics outlined in the scope of this study, this qualitative, phenomenological approach describes the experiences of women who have served as some of the first or few in combat arms; and, subsequently, how those experiences affected their desire to serve in the Army. The secondary research questions provided the qualitative data necessary to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? This study intended to provide a concrete recommendation to the Department of the Army as it develops its diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies beyond 2025.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Combat arms gender integration is only seven years into its execution. This leads to a limitation of available literature that explicitly addresses female service retention in these branches. As a result of this limitation, this literature review uses the secondary research questions as a framework to study related topics, such as the current state of female representation in the Army, factors that influence female retention in the armed forces, and the phenomenon of being a trailblazer or minority. This study does not attempt to explain the effects of gender integration on Army readiness or combat effectiveness. Instead, this study explores the impact of current integration on Army combat arms retention and attrition. As a result, it provides the context necessary to

⁵³ Office of the Sergeant Major of the Army (@USArmySMA), “Diversity is a number—Do you have people who don’t look or think like you in the room? Inclusion is listening and valuing those people. #WomensEqualityDay reminds us we’re smarter and more lethal when we come together as an inclusive, cohesive team. Our values demand it,” X [formerly Twitter], 26 August 2021, 8:53 a.m.

⁵⁴ Tom Vanden Brook, “Where Are the Black Officers? US Army Shows Diversity in Its Ranks but Few Promotions to the Top,” *USA Today*, 1 September 2020.

⁵⁵ *Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion Report: Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Military*, vii.

Table 1. Active component (AC) enlisted members and commissioned officer corps, FY 19, by paygrade and gender.

Enlisted Paygrade												
Gender	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	Unknown	Total	
Army												
Males	22,214	22,403	41,681	93,059	57,875	48,693	31,387	9,798	3,180	0	330,290	
Females	4,154	4,323	7,947	17,119	10,200	7,055	4,195	1,448	344	0	56,785	
Total	26,368	26,726	49,628	110,178	68,075	55,748	35,582	11,246	3,524	0	387,075	
Percentage females	15.75	16.18	16.01	15.54	14.98	12.66	11.79	12.88	9.76	—	14.67	
Officer Paygrade												
Gender	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	010	Unknown	Total
Army												
Males	7,945	8,764	22,787	12,528	7,414	3,536	117	110	42	13	0	63,256
Females	2,285	2,275	5,714	2,978	1,405	487	13	8	2	0	0	15,167
Total	10,230	11,039	28,501	15,506	8,819	4,023	130	118	44	13	0	78,423

Source: Extracted from tables B-36 and B-38, Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019, Appendix B, 106, 115.

answer the primary research question in the conclusions: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations?

Current State of Female Representation in the U.S. Army

The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, published a 2019 demographics and service report with data pulled from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) that concluded that in fiscal year (FY) 2019, female active-duty representation in the Army reached 18 percent of the total force (table 1). Also, female active-duty enlisted representation across DOD reached its 12th year of consecutive growth. It was the 11th consecutive year for officer ranks.⁵⁶ The population and representation report credits DOD recruiting efforts as the primary reason for female representation in the military trending upward. However, despite these increases in female representation across DOD during the past 11–12 years, there is an overrepresentation of female junior officer paygrades (O-1–O-3), while there is a consistent underrepresentation of mid-level (O-4–O-6) and senior (O-7-plus) grades.⁵⁷ In 2019, 305 servicemembers held general officer ranks. Of those 305, only 23 were women.⁵⁸

The growth in female representation spans all occupational areas for all Service components. This includes direct combat-related positions, which the DMDC encompasses under the titles “Infantry,” “Gun Crews,” and “Seamanship” for enlisted soldiers and “Tactical Operations” for officers. Compared to the total number of servicemembers within combat arms-related occupations (both male and female), women marginally increased their total representation between FY14 and FY19 (figure 1). The highest percentage increase within a single year was between FY15 to FY16 (0.74 percent) for officers and FY16 to FY17 (0.57 percent). In this report, these combat arms-related categories are the least represented occupational categories for women. Conversely, health care and administration-related occupations are the most represented. In 2019, enlisted women comprised 33.32 percent of the total force of administrators in the military. Female officers comprised 38.6 percent of the total force of health care professionals in the military.⁵⁹

In 2014, prior to the lift of the direct combat exclusion policy, the Army surveyed female soldiers to gauge their interest in joining direct combat jobs. Survey results

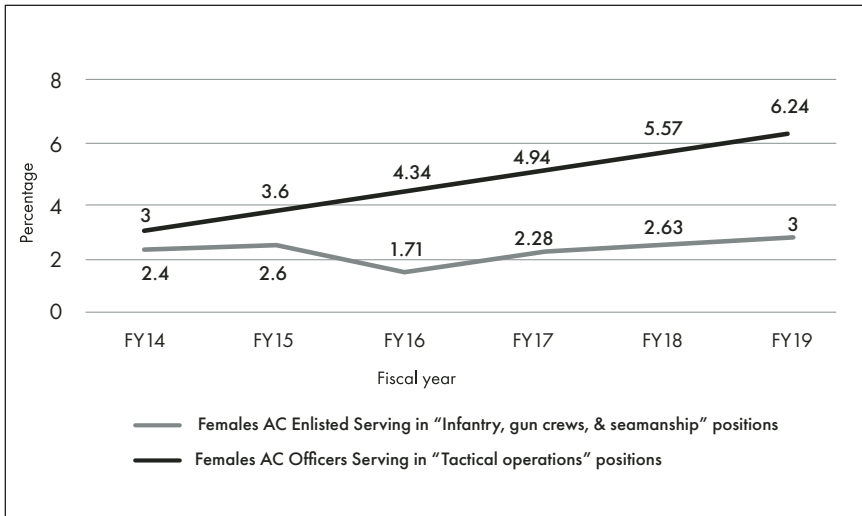
⁵⁶ *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019 Summary Report* (Washington, DC: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, Personnel, and Readiness, 2019), 6.

⁵⁷ *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019 Summary Report*, 41.

⁵⁸ *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019 Summary Report*, Appendix B.

⁵⁹ *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019 Summary Report*, Appendix B, 55, 75.

Figure 1. Percentage of total combat arms occupations filled by females



Source: created by the author, based on tables B-19, B-18, B-17, B-16, B-15, and B-14 for FY14–FY19 in *Population Representation in the Military Services: Fiscal Year 2019*, Appendix B.

showed that 7.5 percent of the 30,000 female participants said they would want an infantry, armor, field artillery, or combat engineer job.⁶⁰ In 2016, former Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel A. Dailey wrote a memo to the force asking female NCOs and officers to voluntarily transfer into combat arms, stating, “As young soldiers do, they will look for leadership and mentorship from their superiors. Unfortunately, we have not had a sufficient number of serving female soldiers and NCOs volunteer to transfer into these mentorship and leadership roles.”⁶¹

The Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), gender integration implementation plan specifies that talent management comprises recruiting, retaining, and advancing. Every year, HQDA would report a detailed description of recruiting and retention efforts to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.⁶² However, the Talent Management Annex within this order focuses solely on recruiting and accessions.⁶³ In 2020, the GAO reported on this DOD gap, stating that “services do not have

⁶⁰ Lolita C. Baldor, “Few Army Women Want Combat Jobs, Survey Finds,” *USA Today*, 25 February 2014.

⁶¹ Meghan Portillo, “SMA: Army Needs Female NCOs to Transfer to Combat Arms MOSs,” *NCO Journal*, 5 October 2016.

⁶² HQDA Execution Order 097-16 to the U.S. Army Implementation Plan 2016-01 (*Army Gender Integration*) (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 9 March 2016), 13.

⁶³ HQDA Execution Order 097-16 to the U.S. Army Implementation Plan 2016-01 (*Army Gender Integration*), C-22.

plans that include goals, performance measures, or timeframes to guide and monitor current or future efforts to recruit and retain female active-duty servicemembers.”⁶⁴

Factors that Could Influence Women’s Decisions to Leave Military Service

Despite the GAO reporting that women maintained higher attrition rates than men, there is limited literature addressing the specific factors that influence women to leave military service. DACOWITS reported that Service branches are inconsistent with collecting, analyzing, and reporting “meaningful and accurate” data on female retention. Services’ exit surveys employ different methodologies and, as a result, are difficult to compare. This leads to a lack of identifiable trends or patterns that could develop actionable steps to improve retention.⁶⁵ This literature review relies heavily on qualitative data to assess potential factors influencing women’s decisions to terminate military service.

Female Army officers were more likely than male officers to separate immediately after completing their initial service obligation.⁶⁶ Three themes drawn from interviews and survey data have remained consistent during the past 30 years: discrimination, career limitations, and family considerations. There are two pieces of literature reviewed that heavily addressed these topics. The first is a 1992 study by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, which studied female captains promotable to major. The second is the 2020 GAO report that details guidance and plans needed for female active-duty retention efforts.⁶⁷

Female officers discussed career-specific difficulties as a reason they chose to leave the Service. Such difficulties include glass ceiling limitations of career-advancing jobs and assignments, poor evaluations, and being passed over for promotions or for Command and General Staff College.⁶⁸ The studies also discuss general work schedule issues and how they cause disproportionate work-life balance problems. Family considerations are another dominant factor influencing female attrition, exacerbating career limitations as a concern.

Family considerations are the most prevalent reasons influencing women to leave military service: 67 percent of captains who participated in the 1992 study credited

⁶⁴ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 35.

⁶⁵ *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2020 Annual Report*, 22.

⁶⁶ *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2017 Annual Report* (Alexandria, VA: DACOWITS, 2017), 21.

⁶⁷ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*.

⁶⁸ Alma G. Steinberg, Beverly C. Harris, and Jacquelyn Scarville, *Why Promotable Female Officers Leave the Army*, Study Report 93-04 (Alexandria, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1993), 1, 9.

conflict between their family and their career as a reason they wanted to leave the military.⁶⁹ In a focus group of 54 female officers, 94 percent stated that deployments negatively affected their spouses and children, while 85 percent mentioned the negative career impacts of poorly timed pregnancies.⁷⁰ In addition, with nearly “half of married active-duty female servicemembers (44.9 percent)” having a spouse also in the military, colocation policies have a significant impact on servicewomen, who, compared to male servicemembers, feel they have to shoulder the burden of parenthood and family care plans.⁷¹

Unsupportive leaders who undermine or dismiss family needs exemplify how toxic organizational climates affect retention. Gender discrimination or sexism inside an “old boy’s network” are additional examples explaining organizational climate as the third reason why women choose to leave military service.⁷² In the 1992 study, 46 percent of officers cited gender discrimination and 13 percent cited sexual harassment as one of several factors for their choice to separate from the Army. Female servicemembers noted unequal treatment based on their gender, even though they felt they were working harder to prove themselves.⁷³ In addition to discriminatory actions or behaviors by individuals within their organizations, women also discussed institutional discrimination. For example, the federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 applied only to civilians.⁷⁴ Also, the first version of the Army Combat Fitness Test sought gender neutrality, but its criticisms included the Army’s inability to account for physiological differences between men and women.⁷⁵

Overall, career limitations, family considerations, and personal and institutional discrimination affect female retention in the military. In addition, both past and current female servicemembers feel that a lack of leadership support and mentorship exacerbated these challenges and made them much more challenging to navigate. Compounding this desire for understanding leadership is the lack of female mentors, role models, and leaders available to female servicemembers.⁷⁶ An interviewed female Air Force officer stated in a Rand study

⁶⁹ Steinberg, Harris, and Scarville, *Why Promotable Female Officers Leave the Army*, 9–10.

⁷⁰ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 29.

⁷¹ *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2017 Annual Report*, 13.

⁷² *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2020 Annual Report*, 28.

⁷³ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 29.

⁷⁴ Hope Hodge Seck, “DOD Set to Roll out New Policy Targeting Pregnancy Discrimination in the Military,” *Military.com*, 1 September 2020.

⁷⁵ *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2017 Annual Report*, 30.

⁷⁶ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 29.

My O-6 is the first female I've seen at that level with a family. Most are divorced or single or don't have kids. It's sending a message. If you want to be Gen[eral Gina M.] Grosso, what do you have to give up to get there? It's hard for us or me to say I can be in that position and still have a happy husband and a family when I don't see that reflected. I haven't seen a female group commander like me; I don't think, ever!⁷⁷

This anecdote is an example of self-stereotyping, in which tokens may stereotype their own demographic and, as a result, highlight how starkly different they are from the in-group. This Air Force officer believes that a woman who prioritizes a husband and family cannot easily climb the ranks of a general officer, as there is a self-developed prototype of the kinds of people qualified to hold those positions. Without current support or exposure to a visible representation of a future career path, women may choose not to pursue career-advancing opportunities. They may also be more inclined to leave military service.

Factors that Could Influence Women's Decisions to Continue Military Service

As is the case for why women leave the military, there is limited research directly related to the reasons why women continue to serve. This section uses a DACOWITS study to examine female propensity for career continuation. Two studies that use Air Force data to address the topic of female retention factors subsequently follow. In addition to examining female officer attrition, the 1992 U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences study also surveyed what could have influenced the participants to continue service. A 2019 study of Air Force officers made connections between family support, career satisfaction, and retention. Factors that could positively influence women to continue military service are categorically similar to the themes that motivate them to terminate service. Career-enhancing opportunities, command support of family considerations, and accountability to identify and eliminate discrimination are all factors that affect women's retention decisions.

Studies show that travel, education, and helping others and their communities were more likely to motivate women than men. These are common reasons for women

⁷⁷ Kristen M. Keller et al., *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2018), 29, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2073>.

to enter military service.⁷⁸ A 2019 Air Force survey study reported thematically similar results, listing patriotism, GI Bill benefits, tuition assistance, and choice of job assignments/locations in the top 8 of 20 factors. Other career-related factors for female officer retention included command opportunities, promotions, and career flexibility, such as branch transfers or sabbaticals.⁷⁹

Organizational and command support of servicemember needs were contributing factors to military retention. In "Retaining Women Air Force Officers: Work, Family, Career Satisfaction, and Intentions," the authors observe that the greater command support one receives, the more satisfied the servicemember is with the "Air Force way of life." This increases one's intention to continue military service.⁸⁰ One participant in a 2018 Rand study described her thoughts about a leader's influence on servicemember retention: "Really good leadership that's supportive. If you have good leadership, you're more likely to stay in, and crappy leadership, more likely to get out. If it's a toxic environment, that could be the tipping point."⁸¹

Command support incorporates leaders from the lowest to the highest echelons and encompasses specific elements, such as mentorship, accountability, and understanding of family or career needs. Mentorship and visible female role models positively affect motivation, with female officers stating that mentorship is an essential factor in career success.⁸² In potentially hostile or toxic environments, maintaining accountability and enforcing policy are how organizations can demonstrate support to their servicemembers. For example, in a 1992 Army Research Institute study, officers stated they might have been convinced to continue service if their command had handled sexual harassment issues fairly and not victim-blamed. With family considerations being a principal reason why women choose to get out, improved childcare facilities, approving career intermission requests, and homesteading support are examples of how commands can make family life compatible with military life.⁸³ Exiting Army officers from the 1992 study suggested that if the Army is to retain women, then they must not be hypocritical and instead "do something about the issues" and not just

⁷⁸ Melissa E. Dicter, "'This Is the Story of Why My Military Career Ended Before It Should Have': Premature Separation from Military Service among U.S. Women Veterans," *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 30, no. 2 (2014): 190, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109914555219>.

⁷⁹ Steinberg, Harris, and Scarville, *Why Promotable Female Officers Leave the Army*, 11.

⁸⁰ Erika L. King et al., "Retaining Women Air Force Officers: Work, Family, Career Satisfaction, and Intentions," *Armed Forces and Society* 46, no. 4 (2020): 689, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X19845024>.

⁸¹ Keller et al., *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force*, 28.

⁸² Keller et al., *Addressing Barriers to Female Officer Retention in the Air Force*, xi.

⁸³ King et al., "Retaining Women Air Force Officers: Work, Family, Career Satisfaction, and Intentions," 689.

conduct surveys.⁸⁴ Overall, following through on policy and guidance that espouses inclusivity and leader development of diverse talent is an important form of command support that can influence women to want to stay in the military.

Impacts of Being One of the First Women in a Military Organization

This study sought to understand if there are significant differences in female experiences in the military, depending on the level of representation of their organizations and how long those organizations have been gender-integrated. In 1977, Rosabeth Kanter wrote about her theory of tokenism in the *American Journal of Sociology*, in which a token is a member of a specific demographic population that comprises 15 percent or less of an entire group. The word *token* describes underrepresented groups “because they are often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals.”⁸⁵ Women comprise 23.9 percent of the total number of officers across the entire Army, thereby exceeding the token criteria. However, only 8.6 percent of total armor and infantry officers are women, meaning they still fall within the token threshold. What are the experiences of women who serve as trailblazers within their professional careers, and how may those experiences inform their decisions to continue or terminate service?

There is a lack of academic study on the career impacts of being a trailblazer woman within male-dominated professions in the armed forces. This is especially the case for women serving in Army combat-arms branches. News articles and first-person anecdotes from women are the primary sources of literature describing this phenomenon. To provide context to shape the research methodology, this study expanded the definition of combat arms for this section of the literature. This section will include anecdotes of trailblazing women from military branches that historically employed women in a direct combat capacity. These include aviation and the Marine Corps.

In Kanter’s study, she notes “visibility” as a phenomenon that generates male perceptions when they are the dominant gender demographic in a group. This means that tokens have higher visibility, capturing a larger awareness due to their rarity.⁸⁶ Women are subject to their acts serving as “symbolic consequences” that “could affect

⁸⁴ Steinberg, Harris, and Scarville, *Why Promotable Female Officers Leave the Army*, 11.

⁸⁵ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 5 (March 1977): 966.

⁸⁶ Kanter, “Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women,” 971.

the prospects for other women."⁸⁷ These women are not individuals but rather are a general representation of women in the workforce. As such, they must work harder to prove their competence.

Several anecdotes of female military trailblazers support the visibility phenomenon. Retired major Lisa Clark was the Air Force's first female Boeing B-52 Stratofortress navigator in 1996. She stated that she just wanted to "blend in" and "not draw attention" to herself. She felt pressure to do well to combat the stereotype that women are a distraction.⁸⁸ Likewise, in a 2021 study of female fighter pilots, participants stated that they had to achieve a higher standard due to their *only* status, as they could not afford to make the same mistakes the male pilots could. They were subject to more scrutiny because they did not have the luxury of blending in. One female pilot stated, "Not everybody that gets to fighters is meant to be a fighter pilot. But if you have five girls that have bad experiences because they struggle flying—I mean 5 out of 10 is 50 percent."⁸⁹ Major Nargis Kabiri, the first female field artillery commander for the 3d Infantry Division, stated, "I thought that if I messed up, not only would that mistake be magnified because of my gender but also that I would ruin the opportunity for other females to be in artillery."⁹⁰ In these three examples, these female trailblazers felt pressure to perform to a higher standard, as they represented more than just themselves. They felt as if they represented all women.

Stereotyped role induction is a subset of the interaction dynamics of assimilation, a second phenomenon Kanter theorizes influences male perceptions of female tokens. In this case, men categorize women into roles they can understand. The first role is the nurturing, emotional *mother*. The second is the attractive *seductress* who seeks favors or male competition for her attention. The third role is the cute *pet* accompanying the group who does not have a meaningful part in the work. The *iron maiden* is the last stereotypical role, which categorizes "strong" women. Suppose a woman displayed behavior that deliberately contradicts these typecasts, such as refusing to flirt or confronting unequal treatment. In that case, men may consider her a problem from whom they should keep distance.⁹¹ If the men cannot maintain their distance from the

⁸⁷ Kanter, "Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women," 973.

⁸⁸ Kelly Kennedy, "What It Was Like to Be One of the First Female Fighter Pilots," *New York Times*, 2 May 2018.

⁸⁹ Alissa Christine Engel, "I Just Want to Do My Job: The Experience of Female Fighter Pilots in the United States Air Force" (graduate thesis, University of Montana, 2021), 85.

⁹⁰ PFC Zoe Garbarino, 50th Public Affairs Detachment, Fort Stewart, GA, "Female Field Artillery Officer Paves the Way for Future of Combat Arms," press release, 22 August 2017.

⁹¹ Kanter, "Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women," 982–84.

“problematic” women, the women must be eliminated to maintain order. Elimination strategies may come in the form of wage inequality, harassment, or career hindrance.⁹²

A woman recounted how she was typecast as the first female officer in her Marine Corps unit. She shared that while planning a physical fitness event, someone suggested she could be the “cheerleader,” thus confirming Kanter’s *pet* stereotype. She confronted the offending party about the inappropriateness of the behavior. This same officer shared that at a future unit event, a male peer and his wife said that, despite that initial confrontation, she was not a “bitch,” after all.⁹³ The second part of this anecdote confirms the *iron maiden* stereotype, as the male officer and his wife negatively perceived her as problematic for correcting sexist behavior.

Overall, these conditions indicate implications for serving as a token within a group. Gaeun Seo et al. discuss social attraction theory, which argues that visible commonalities in groups influence their social identity, which establishes the evaluation criteria for their organization. For example, a male-dominated organization may shape norms and practices that make communication, conflict management, organizational values, and leader prototypes favor men over women.⁹⁴ Therefore, tokens are subject to more scrutiny and disproportionate expectations than dominants. To preserve this dominant proportion, men may block women from either entering or promoting within the group.⁹⁵ An additional impact of this group dynamic is that to assimilate, tokens can become self-deprecating, self-loathing, or even hostile to other tokens.⁹⁶ Other literature describes this phenomenon as “queen bee behavior,” in which women resort to misogynistic behavior so male dominants recognize them as equals, thus improving their standing in a male-dominated organization. Therefore, they strive to set themselves apart from other women by evaluating each other harshly and negatively.⁹⁷

⁹² Yılmaz Benan Kurt and Dalkılıç Olca Sürgevil, “Gender Based Tokenism: A Qualitative Research on Female-Dominated and Male-Dominated Professions,” *Istanbul Management Journal*, no. 88 (September 2020): 88, <https://doi.org/10.26650/imj.2020.88.0004>.

⁹³ Lauren Katzenberg, “40 Stories from Women about Life in the Military,” *New York Times*, 8 March 2019.

⁹⁴ Annelies E. M. van Vianen and Agnetta H. Fischer, “Illuminating the Glass Ceiling: The Role of Organizational Culture Preferences,” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 75, no. 3 (September 2002): 316, <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317902320369730>.

⁹⁵ Gaeun Seo, Wenhao Huang, and Seung-Hyun Caleb Han, “Conceptual Review of Underrepresentation of Women in Senior Leadership Positions from a Perspective of Gendered Social Status in the Workplace: Implication for HRD Research and Practice,” *Human Resource Development Review* 16, no. 1 (March 2017): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484317690063>.

⁹⁶ Kanter, “Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women,” 988.

⁹⁷ Nina Rones and Frank Brundtland Steder, “The Queen Bees and the Women’s Team: A Contextual Examination of Enmity and Friendship between Military Women,” *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning [Women, Gender and Research]* 27, no. 2–3 (November 2019): 32, <https://doi.org/10.7146/kkf.v27i2-3.110846>.

At a leadership panel, a higher-ranking female fighter pilot shared her disdain for women that poison the overall perspective of women.⁹⁸ Another female fighter pilot in the audience identified with this behavior, stating the following:

Like, if I see a female airman—I'm way harder on a female Airman than I am like a male Airman. I definitely think like there's a stereotype. . . . So, I've had to like release myself of that. I'm always doing my best. But it shouldn't be because I'm trying to like change somebody's opinion of females in their squadron. And I get caught up in that.⁹⁹

Captain Kristen M. Griest, one of the first women to graduate from Army Ranger School and the first female infantry officer, has recently been active in advocating for women to train and perform in the previously gender-neutral version of the Army Combat Fitness Test. However, her opinion pieces have come under heavy scrutiny. Female veterans have criticized Griest for her "internalized misogyny" and fear of being "that girl" or not "tough enough."¹⁰⁰ Whether these criticisms are valid or not, these authors' perspectives support the theory of the queen bee phenomenon. To survive and thrive as a token female in a male-dominated environment means potentially positioning oneself to harshly judge or criticize other women.

There is minimal academic research on the physical or psychological impacts of being a trailblazer. However, the tokenism theory provides a foundation to introduce some potential factors to consider, supported by the anecdotal experiences of trailblazing women who have publicly shared their stories. Regardless of specific phenomena, military women find themselves in a stressful environment to perform in and, as a result, bear the burden of compensating for the proportional imbalances within their units' social demographics through their performance or attitude. Kanter argues that these dynamics "perpetuate the system that keeps members of the token's category in short supply; the presence of a few tokens does not necessarily pave the way for others—in many cases, it has the opposite effect."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Engel, "I Just Want to Do My Job: The Experience of Female Fighter Pilots in the United States Air Force," 90.

⁹⁹ Engel, "I Just Want to Do My Job: The Experience of Female Fighter Pilots in the United States Air Force," 90.

¹⁰⁰ Dan Lamothe, "An Army Trailblazer Set Her Sights on a New Target. The Reaction Highlights a Deep Rift," *Washington Post*, 8 May 2021; and Lisa Beum, "The Army Never Should Have Switched to the ACFT," *Military.com*, 6 May 2021.

¹⁰¹ Kanter, "Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women," 988.

Summary

The literature provides context to answer secondary research questions about what factors contribute to the decisions of combat-arms women to continue or terminate service, as well as the potential impacts of serving in a token status. Recent quantitative data about female force strength numbers indicate continued underrepresentation of women both in combat arms-related occupations and senior Army leader ranks and positions. This underrepresentation continues to make women in the military Services appear as rare and, according to the theory of tokenism, susceptible to scrutiny, discrimination, or ostracization from the leading group. Several pieces of literature attempt to identify and explain why women chose to leave military service.

Former secretary of defense Ashton B. Carter stated that talent management is a key concern in gender integration. Acknowledging the challenges for female aspirations to pursue careers in an underrepresented environment, he says the Army must balance a merit-based system that deliberately retains advancing women.¹⁰² These issues could negatively affect Army combat arms branches and their abilities to have female representation in senior leader positions, thereby not meeting the vision of the Army People Strategy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The following research methodology analyzes the individual experiences of combat arms women to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat-arms occupations? This study sought to contribute to the topic of career continuation for women in combat arms, which is an area still lacking in research. The secondary research questions provided the data needed to answer the primary question:

1. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue service?
2. What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to terminate service?
3. How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service?

Qualitative Methodology

This research used open-ended online surveys to collect data on the phenomenological experiences of women previously or currently serving in combat-arms occupa-

¹⁰² Ash Carter, *No Exceptions: The Decision to Open All Military Positions to Women* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, 2018), 10–11, 24.

tions. The phenomenon that connects the study's participants is serving as one of the first or few women in combat arms in the wake of the Army's gender integration and its degree of success in retaining women.¹⁰³ The small population of women serving in combat-arms branches, relative to female service in the overall Army, was the main factor in implementing a qualitative methodology. The online survey used a combination of Likert scale and open-ended questions to give participants an opportunity to express their perspectives on the state of their military service.

This methodology enabled the exploration of diverse perspectives within a homogenous pool of participants, yielding more nuanced information that is not suited to epistemic theoretic construction.¹⁰⁴ The questions or response options did not presuppose what topics the subjects should have considered. There were opportunities within the online survey for participants to discuss matters most important to them.¹⁰⁵ Participants had the option to give extraneous detail in every open-ended comment block. They equally had the opportunity to only answer the Likert-based questions and provide no additional feedback. This created enough flexibility for the subjects to answer the questions to their level of comfort and their time available. This study hoped that their input would reveal how possible underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions of combat-arms organizations influenced retention or attrition decisions. Such insights may validate this study's hypotheses or construct new ones for future research. Additionally, conclusions drawn from this research will be helpful in informing policy, evaluating programs, and "playing an important role in advancing a field's knowledge base."¹⁰⁶

A constrained publication timeline was this study's predominant research limitation. Using structured, open-ended online surveys was a strategy to give the study enough qualitative data to analyze the phenomenon without overwhelming the research. However, this meant that the research was dependent on quality survey responses. A potential weakness with using an open-ended online survey was the risk of nonresponses. Research suggests that open-ended questions within online surveys

¹⁰³ Jennifer C. Greene, Valerie J. Caracelli, and Wendy F. Graham, "Toward a Conceptual Framework for Mixed-Method Evaluation Designs," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 11, no. 3 (1989): 262, <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737011003255>.

¹⁰⁴ Looi Theam Choy, "The Strengths and Weaknesses of Research Methodology," *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 4 (April 2014): 102, <http://dx.doi.org/10.9790/0837-194399104>; and Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (November 2006): 221, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363>.

¹⁰⁵ Charlene A. Yauch and Harold J. Studel, "Complementary Use of Qualitative and Quantitative Cultural Assessment Methods," *Organizational Research Methods* 6, no. 4 (October 2003): 470, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428103257362>.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Reis, "Strengths and Limitations of Case Studies," *Tomorrow's Professor* (e-newsletter), accessed 10 October 2021.

have higher rates of nonresponses than other survey questions.¹⁰⁷ The use of Likert scale questions provided an opportunity to still obtain data from participants that may have lacked the motivation to write long responses. The voluntary nature of the study also mitigated the risk of participants not answering questions, as those who participated chose to of their own volition.

Another weakness of this qualitative approach was that the data was not objectively verifiable. As biases can affect data manipulation and results, the study was subject to the researcher's integrity.¹⁰⁸ This study cannot objectively prove that the data collected from a homogenous group can genuinely represent the expanded population.¹⁰⁹ Joseph Maxwell agrees that qualitative inquiry cannot capture reality. The dependence on context makes the research's validity "a goal rather than a product," as "it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted."¹¹⁰ This assertion, combined with the limited study population, resulted in outcomes that this study could not generalize to a greater population of women serving in combat arms. However, the study's outcomes provided insight into individual experiences and identified potential trends for continued future research.

Participants

The study required a relatively homogenous participant pool. Using convenience sampling, the following criteria screened participants to be eligible for the study:

- a. Female (as stated in Army records)
- b. If separated from the Army, it must have been voluntary
- c. Held/holds employment in a combat-arms occupation (infantry, armor, field artillery, special operations)
- d. If separated from the Army, it must have been voluntary

The limited overall population of female officers serving in combat-arms roles constrained the total number of participants eligible for this study. A closed social media group, comprising only current and female Army officers, was the primary venue to conduct convenience and snowball sampling. Women who knew of the study or volunteered to participate were welcome to share the recruiting message within their

¹⁰⁷ Angie L. Miller and Amber D. Lambert, "Open-Ended Survey Questions: Item Nonresponse Nightmare or Qualitative Data Dream," *Survey Practice* 7, no. 5 (September 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.29115/SP-2014-0024>.

¹⁰⁸ *Qualitative and Quantitative Research Techniques for Humanitarian Needs Assessment: An Introductory Brief* (Switzerland: ACAPS, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Saul McLeod, "Case Study Research Method in Psychology," *Simply Psychology*, accessed 13 October 2021.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Alex Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 105.

own communities, thereby also reaching additional subjects that met the criteria, but may not use social media.¹¹¹

Data Collection

The use of open-ended online surveys was the primary method to explore the individual, phenomenological experiences of the study participants. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Center Quality Assurance Office (QAO) approved Verint, a secure website approved for survey research, for use in this study. The QAO input the online survey questions into the Verint program and provided the researcher with a website link for distribution.

Subjects received instructions prior to beginning the online survey that included an informed consent statement. The informed consent statement included the purpose and scope of the study, a warning that the questions could potentially trigger upsetting memories, an assurance of confidentiality, and the website for mental health services through Military OneSource. The consent statement required participants to review its content prior to beginning the online survey, in which clicking the “begin” button served as both the acknowledgment of the survey’s conditions and an agreement to its terms. The online survey took an estimated one hour to complete.

The online survey included a combination of open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and questions using a Likert scale (see appendix, p. 64). The question designs considered survey bias, an example of which would be consistently asking about experiences from a negative perspective. There were no time limits or limits on how much the participants could write. The first section asked demographical, multiple-choice questions that addressed participant eligibility and the respondent’s general nature of service. The questions branched into different routes, depending on the provided answers. For example, question number one asked the subject if she is still serving in the active-duty Army. If the participant answered yes, subsequent questions asked her about her continuation of military service. If the participant responded no, follow-up questions asked about her termination of military service.

The second section asked questions utilizing a Likert scale from one to five, ranging from “extremely not important” to “extremely important.” These questions directly addressed secondary research questions one and two, as the questions asked why the subject chose to continue or end military service. Participants selected a response that reflected the importance of several factors on their decisions to continue or end military service. The survey’s retention factors referenced varied sources from the literature review and covered topics such as patriotism, education, mentorship, health,

¹¹¹ Adi Bhat, “Snowball Sampling: Definition, Method, Pros and Cons,” QuestionPro.com, accessed 30 October 2021.

evaluations, and other workplace factors. Retention factors outlined in the 2021 Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey shaped most of the factors used in this survey.¹¹² In doing so, this study has a direct parallel to ongoing Army retention efforts.

The third section utilized a Likert scale from one to five, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” These questions directly addressed secondary research question three, as the questions asked for answers specific to the phenomenological experience of being one of the first or only women in their combat arms occupation (i.e., a trailblazer). The survey defines the term *trailblazer* in the same way this study defines it, to ensure every participant approached the question with a shared definition. The questions then asked about their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences about serving in combat arms, ensuring the questions varied between both positive and negative experiences to reduce question bias. An open-ended comment box accompanied each Likert scale question and requested the subject to expound on their answer. For example, a question asked if the Army should implement strategies specific to retaining women in combat arms. The accompanying comment box requested that if the subject agrees, to list any recommended strategies or factors the Army should consider. If she disagreed, the subject had the opportunity to explain why.

The fourth section was an open comment box that requested the subjects to write any stories, thoughts, or ideas they were willing to share that did not fit within the scope of the questions already asked. This served as an opportunity for the subjects to address topics the research may not have considered. There was an additional statement in this section that assured the subject that the researcher would anonymize any personally identifiable information before the publication of the research.

The QAO and the researcher conducted a pilot survey prior to the release of the live survey, to test “both the instrument and the survey procedures.”¹¹³ An instructional systems specialist with the QAO monitored the online survey’s activity.

Data Evaluation and Analysis

This study relied on the researcher to be the primary instrument for data analysis. QAO downloaded the completed survey results from Verint and redacted any personally identifiable information, such as phone numbers or emails participants offered. The research followed a descriptive statistical strategy that assessed the measures of cen-

¹¹² *Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey First Annual Report* (Washington, DC: Deputy Chief of Staff, G-1, Headquarters Department of the Army and People Analytics, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army, 2021); and Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey, U.S. Army Talent Management, accessed 10 January 2022.

¹¹³ Paul S. Levy and Stanley Lemeshow, *Sampling of Populations: Methods and Applications*, 3d ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), 7.

Table 2. Thematic analysis process

Data Analysis Step	Means to Maintain Analytic Integrity
1. Survey responses are counted for the frequency in which certain responses appear. Highlight the content for future coding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Document reflective thoughts and potential themes; do not make any interpretations of raw data - Prolong data engagement - Referential adequacy (archiving)
2. Create initial taxonomies that sum up the meaning of high-lighted content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer debriefing - Coding framework - Triangulation (sources, methods, investigators) - Dependability audit - Reflexive journal
3. Cluster repeated taxonomies into patterned themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Triangulation - Visual diagramming of theme connections - Reflexive journal
4. For responses to open-ended responses, narrate themes with direct quotations from transcribed response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer debriefing - Committee consensus on themes - Confirmability audit
5. Produce the report with themes from "across-participants" analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer debriefing - Reflexive journal - Document report on dependability and confirmability audit

Source: created by the author based on collective research from Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," 4; Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 301–27; and "Qualitative Data Analysis Methods," Track 3, PhD Colloquia, Campus Tools, Capella University, accessed 30 October 2021.

tral tendency for the subjects' responses to the Likert scale questions. For responses to the open-ended questions, a phenomenological approach made meaning of the subjects' lived experiences and their perceptions of the phenomenon of being a combat arms female.¹¹⁴ These strategies followed Margaret LeCompte's method of doing analysis.¹¹⁵

The QAO first extracted the data into several outputs, organized categorically by response for subsequent coding. Second, text queried responses analyzed overall keyword frequency. Based on the retention factors participants scaled in section two of the survey, qualitative answers, such as thematic responses, words, or phrases, were calculated using precoded structures. Researcher-generated tables organized both qualitative and quantitative responses into groups, assembling similar items into taxonomies. An example taxonomy was equal opportunity, which included topics about policy, discrimination response, career progression perceptions, or feelings of inclusion and exclusion. This process was done in three steps. The first step was to query for the exact wording of precoded phrases. The second step expanded the query to

¹¹⁴ Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi, "Phenomenology: A Philosophy and Method of Inquiry," *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 5, no. 1 (June 2008): 215–22.

¹¹⁵ Margaret D. LeCompte, "Analyzing Qualitative Data," *Theory into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2000): 148, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_5.

include stemmed words, synonyms, and specializations. The third step was a manual review of the data relevant to the taxonomies. The researcher grouped taxonomies into themes that revealed potential patterns based on the demographic information provided in section one of the survey.

The thematic analysis provided a systematic framework for inductive reasoning with the large data set. Potentially identified variables could have influenced the participants' diverse phenomenological experiences, although not frequently enough to infer a generalization to the overall population.¹¹⁶ Inductive thematic analysis was well-suited for "examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights."¹¹⁷ This flexibility is advantageous given the diversity of the subjects' perspectives.

However, the flexibility in the analytic approach produced concerns of potential incoherence or bias in data interpretation, both of which risk the study's empirical claims or epistemological position.¹¹⁸ Content and construct validity were the two primary methods to establish trustworthiness in the data analysis, and detailed, reflexive accounts maintained study integrity, rigor, and validity.¹¹⁹ Table 2 uses Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba's trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to outline the process of this study's data analysis and how it maintained analytic integrity.¹²⁰

Ethical Considerations

As this study required human research, it also required adherence to the following three basic ethical principles prescribed in *The Belmont Report*: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.¹²¹ The researcher maintained the responsibility to "safeguard the interests of those involved or affected by this work."¹²²

¹¹⁶ Mohammad Ibrahim Alhojailan, "Thematic Analysis: A Critical Review of its Process and Evaluation," *West East Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (December 2012): 40.

¹¹⁷ Lorelli S. Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1 (October 2017): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.

¹¹⁸ Nowell et al., "Thematic Analysis," 2.

¹¹⁹ Kate Roberts, Anthony Dowell, and Jing-Bao Nie, "Attempting Rigour and Replicability in Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data: A Case Study of Codebook Development," *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 19, no. 66 (March 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0707-y>.

¹²⁰ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 301–27.

¹²¹ *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research* (Bethesda, MD: National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978).

¹²² *Statement of Ethical Practice for the British Sociological Association* (Durham, UK: British Sociological Association, 2002), 2.

Data collection that requires subjects to recount past experiences can potentially subject them to psychological harm. There can be consequences of having subjects talk about potentially sensitive topics related to their personal experiences, such as sexual harassment, discrimination, or other circumstances that trigger undesired thoughts or emotions.¹²³ Divulging personal information about their experiences may also cause emotional distress, embarrassment, or frustration. It was the ethical duty of the researcher to proactively identify and mitigate as many potential risks as possible and disclose the potential risks to the study subjects.

The survey required every participant to review an informed consent statement that disclosed that the study might include questions or topics that stimulate unwanted feelings or emotions, such as frustration, sadness, anxiety, or irritability.¹²⁴ The consent statement and recruiting message also explicitly stated that the study was 100 percent voluntary, and at any time, the subject could terminate the survey without prejudice. The researcher would safeguard the participants from an invasion of privacy with a confidentiality statement, stating the researcher would anonymize any potentially identifiable information. In addition, the researcher would carefully and securely archive all sensitive research material. Third parties would not have access to the survey's data and results, except the agencies that enforce the legal and ethical guidelines for research. The final statement was an acknowledgment that the subject had read the form, understood its contents, and by clicking the "begin" button, they would consent to the terms of the research.

This research methodology's approval and the approval for the use of human subjects for data collection were subject to the guidance and recommendations of the thesis committee chair and human protections director.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This section discusses the research survey results and presents the findings to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? This section presents the data's results by first discussing the demographics of the study sample, then by addressing the results that answer secondary research questions one and two: What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate service? Finally, the findings are used to analyze the phenomenological experiences of the par-

¹²³ "Assessing Risks and Benefits, Human Research Protections," UCI Office of Research, accessed 21 October 2021.

¹²⁴ "Understanding Potential Risks for Human Subjects Research," Guides and Resources, How to Submit, Institutional Review Board, Teachers College Columbia University, accessed 30 October 2021.

ticipants that address secondary research question three: How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service? Inductive, thematic analysis of all qualitative data gleaned from the responses to the open-ended questions resulted in three major recurring themes: 1) organizational culture/climate, 2) equal opportunity, and 3) a sense of purpose.

Summary of Research Process

This study used an anonymous, open-ended survey to conduct its phenomenological study. During a period of two weeks, the researcher conducted convenience sampling by recruiting volunteers from a private social media network containing more than 10,000 current and former female Army officers. The researcher input the submitted survey responses into a text analysis tool for First Cycle Provisional Coding.¹²⁵ Retention factors identified during the literature review, most specifically the Department of the Army's 2021 Career Engagement Survey (DACES), defined the preset codes.¹²⁶ The survey asked participants to scale the level of importance these factors have on their decisions to continue or leave military service. The researcher queried the open-ended comments for keywords suitable for categorization into the applicable preset codes, following a three-step process: 1) keyword text match; 2) stemmed words, synonyms, and specialization matches to code; and 3) manual phrase categorization into codes. The researcher input the results of the initial coding into a data journal for future analysis.

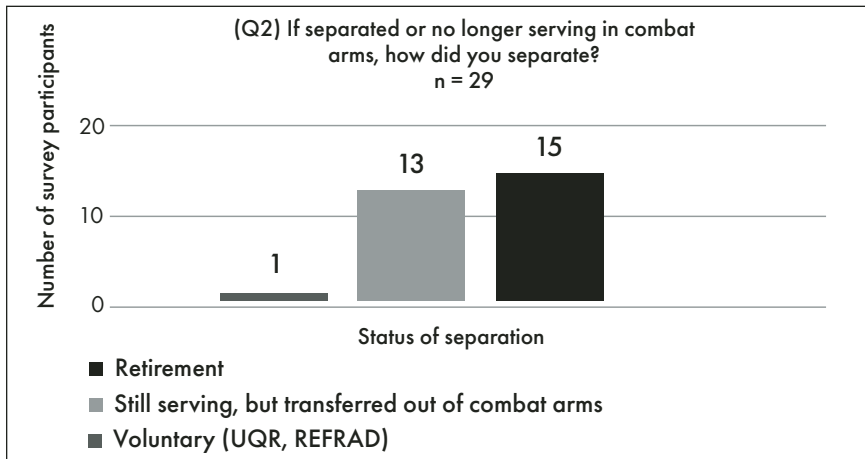
Second Cycle Axial and Eclectic Coding further prioritized and consolidated the total number of codes the first cycle generated.¹²⁷ A matrix coding query identified comments that intersected among several codes. Cross-tabulation identified similarities between the most frequently referenced codes and which retention factors the participants scaled as the most important. As a result, the researcher refined the coding framework to eight codes, corresponding to the top eight retention factors the subjects that rated as the most important in influencing their retention decisions: sense of purpose, personal morale, how the chain of command (COC) handles sexual harassment/assault and response and prevention (SHARP), overall quality of life, competence of chain of command, how the chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity (EO), culture/climate, and work-life balance. The researcher extracted the top three most referenced codes for subsequent analysis.

¹²⁵ Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie, Rebecca K Frels, and Eunjin Hwang, "Mapping Saldaña's Coding Methods onto the Literature," *Journal of Educational Issues* 2, no. 1 (2016): 138, <https://doi.org/10.5296/jei.v2i1.8931>.

¹²⁶ *Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey First Annual Report*.

¹²⁷ Onwuegbuzie, Frels, and Hwang, "Mapping Saldaña's Coding Methods onto the Literature," 134.

Figure 2. Status of service separation



Source: created by the author.

Third Cycle Pattern Coding identified meta-codes within each of the three primary codes. Identifying meta-codes supported identifying patterns and themes within the most frequently referenced codes: culture/climate, how the chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity, and sense of purpose. The researcher re-categorized how the chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity to equal opportunity. The research findings were journaled, reviewed, and triangulated.

Trustworthiness of Data

Table 2 (see p. 32) displays the data analysis process and the primary techniques to maintain the study's trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba's four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: 1) credibility, 2) dependability, 3) confirmability, and 4) transferability.¹²⁸ Participant response analysis required subjective researcher interpretations. However, the study can maintain credibility, or data truth, if the accounts of individual experiences are recognizable to others experiencing the same phenomenon.¹²⁹ The researcher reviewed subject comments against coding taxonomies, as well as existing literature, to assess any potential deviations. The retention factors in part two of the survey served as the codes for data analysis to minimize potential biases influencing interpretations of qualitative comments. This chapter's data presentation frequently displays direct subject quotes to serve as additional evidence

¹²⁸ Lincoln and Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*.

¹²⁹ M. Sandelowski, "The Problem of Rigor in Qualitative Research," *Advances in Nursing Science* 8, no. 3 (April 1986): 27–37, <https://doi.org/10.1097/00012272-198604000-00005>.

and support for this analysis's emerging themes. The researcher carefully archived all major decisions in a reflexive data journal and questioned its findings during every review. These methods also supported the data's conformability, or the neutrality or consistency of the findings, to the point the researcher could repeat the study.¹³⁰

To ensure the findings were consistent, according to Lincoln and Guba's dependability criteria, the thesis committee chair and researcher conducted an audit of the analysis to ascertain feedback and concurrence with major decisions on findings. The research maintained transferability, or the ability for findings to apply to other settings, through analyzing nonpersonally identifiable subject demographics.¹³¹ However, this study does not intend its readers to transfer these findings across other settings or groups.

Using a limiting platform like social media to recruit the study's sample introduced potential recruitment bias. Snowball sampling through participant word-of-mouth was the primary method to expand recruitment beyond the single social media group. However, without snowball sampling, this study excluded women who do not use social media or choose to be involved with this specific social media network. This further narrowed the studied population to women who, in addition to the screening criteria, were also social media users. As a result, this chapter's findings cannot lead to generalizable conclusions applicable to the entire female population serving in combat arms. This analysis instead introduces themes that suggest potential patterns for further research.

Participant Demographics

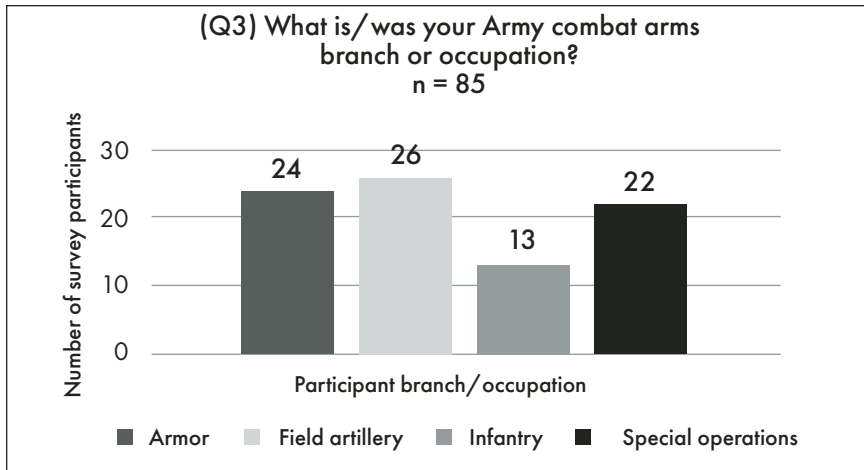
Of the 100 total survey responses, 85 participants met the eligibility criteria; 56 participants were still serving on active duty; and 29 participants were no longer serving in combat arms, with the nature of their separation described in figure 2. Of the 85 participants, 26 served in field artillery, 24 in armor, 22 in special operations, and 13 in infantry (figure 3). When asked if they deployed while serving in combat arms, 47 participants answered yes and 38 answered no. The majority of respondents served three or four years in combat arms, with a decline at five years and beyond (figure 4), supporting the Military Leadership Diversity Commission's findings that lower retention of midlevel female service members contributes to poor representation of women in senior ranks.¹³²

¹³⁰ Lynne M. Connelly, "Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research," *Medsurg Nursing* 25, no. 6 (2016): 435.

¹³¹ C. Houghton, D. Casey, D. Shaw, and D. Murphy, "Rigour in Qualitative Case-study Research," *Nurse Researcher* 20, no. 4 (2013): 12–17, <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2013.03.20.4.12.e326>.

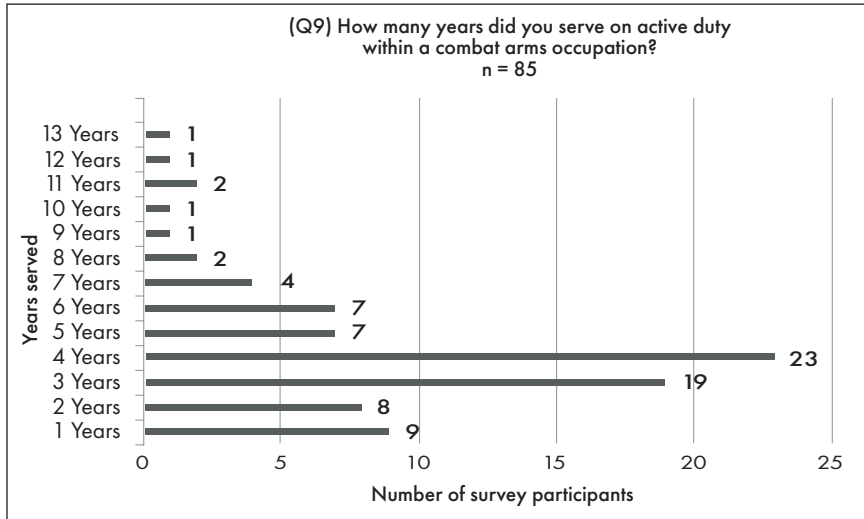
¹³² Lisa Daniel, "Panel Recommends Ways to Improve Military Diversity," *Featured News, U.S. Air Force*, 8 March 2011.

Figure 3. Breakdown of survey participants by combat arms branch



Source: created by the author.

Figure 4. Breakdown of survey participants by years served

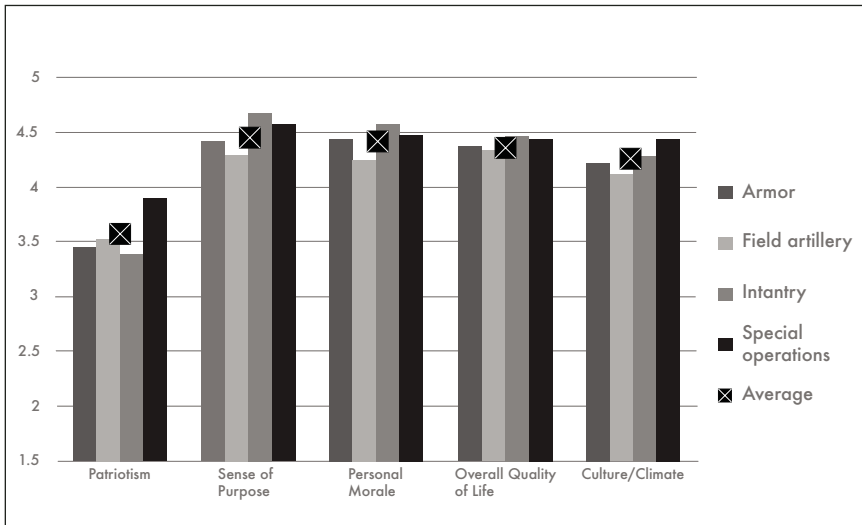


Source: created by the author.

Influence of Factors on Retention Decisions

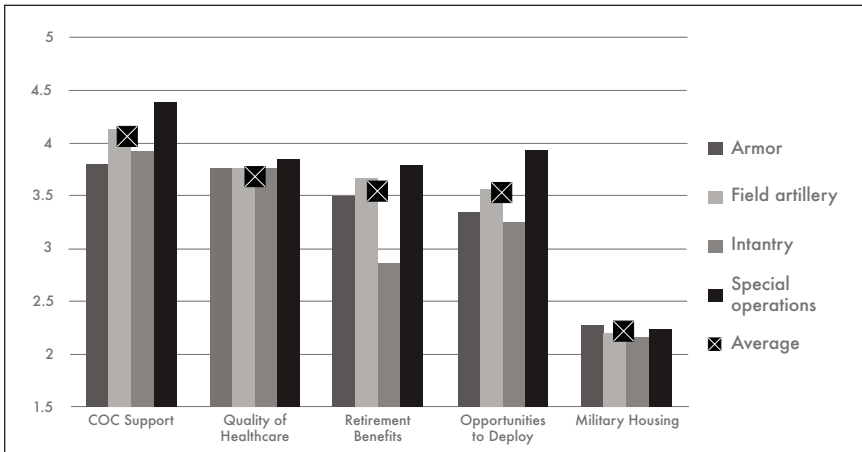
This section uses Likert scale data to potentially answer secondary research questions one and two: What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate service? The survey asked participants to scale the level of importance 39 different factors had on their decisions to continue or end military

Figure 5. Level of influence on the decision to continue or end military service



Key: level of influence factors have on decision to continue or end military service
 5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = neutral, 2 = not important, and 1 = extremely not important; n = 85.
 Source: created by the author.

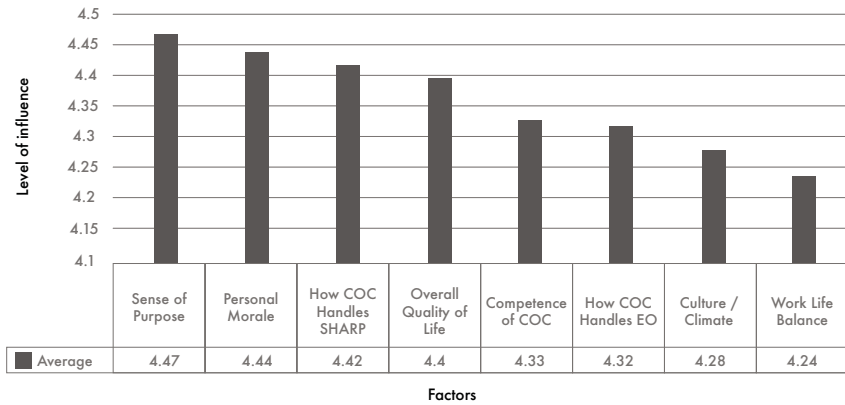
Figure 6. Level of influence on decision to continue or end military service



Key: level of influence factors have on decision to continue or end military service
 5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = neutral, 2 = not important, and 1 = extremely not important; n = 85.
 Source: created by the author.

service, ranging from 5 (very important) to 1 (extremely not important). With a score of 4.47, a sense of purpose was the most influential factor (figure 5). With an average score of 2.21, military housing was the least influential factor (figure 6). Examining the top eight factors (figure 7) developed connections and themes. Sense of purpose,

Figure 7. Highest averages for factors influencing retention



Key: level of influence factors have on decision to continue or end military service
 5 = very important, 4 = important, 3 = neutral, 2 = not important, and 1 = extremely not important; n = 85.
 Source: created by the author.

personal morale, overall quality of life, and work-life balance emerge as intangible concepts that serve as “intrinsic motivators,” with each having the ability to affect one another.¹³³ For example, a 2020 study on job morale in healthcare staff posited a connection between morale and a sense of purpose.¹³⁴ The remaining four factors (*how the COC handles SHARP, competence of the COC, how the COC handles EO, and culture/climate*) are extrinsic influences that relate to the actions of others, specifically the chain of command.

Question 26 immediately followed the Likert scale as an open-ended comment box that asked participants to share any additional explanations or factors affecting retention. The shared comments, labeled by participant numbers, suggest a relationship between how the top eight intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect each other. For example, participant 34 shared, “The biggest factor for me is the lack of support, competency, and overall integrity seen in my chain of command. . . . I think I would find greater job satisfaction and sense of purpose elsewhere.” In this case, an extrinsic factor (*competence of the chain of command*) could negatively affect this officer’s sense of purpose, suggesting this officer may consider leaving military service. Exploring

¹³³ Rajesh Singh, “The Impact of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 57, no. 2 (April 2016): 204, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jelis.57.2.197>.

¹³⁴ Alina Sabitova, Lauren M. Hickling, and Stefan Priebe, “Job Morale: A Scooping Review of How the Concept Developed and is Used in Healthcare Research,” *BMC Public Health* 20 (July 2020).

a positive relationship, participant 36 commented, “My battalion is full of strong female lieutenants/captains and it is extremely refreshing and motivating. . . . Not what I expected when I chose to branch FA. . . . I love being surrounded by likeminded highly [motivated] people. . . . I’ll stay as long as I feel I’m making a difference.” In this case, there is a suggested connection between this officer’s perceptions of their organization’s culture and the field artillery branch. Both perceptions positively affect their *morale* and *sense of purpose*, thus supporting their decision to continue serving. The quantitative nature of the Likert scale data introduced a ranked order to several connected retention factors, which also saw a relationship with the frequency in which these topics emerged in the first cycle of coding.

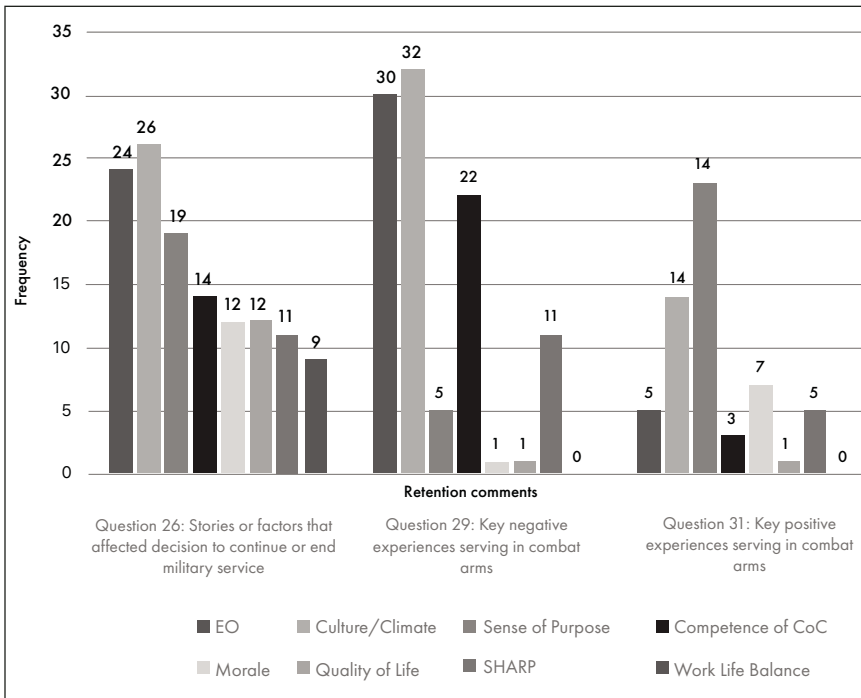
Results of Female Reflections on Phenomenon of Serving in Combat Arms

This section analyzes findings that potentially answer secondary research question number three: How do the experiences of trailblazing women influence their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service? There were three open-ended questions with responses most related to the topic of retention. The researcher applied these comments to the second cycle coding framework in three steps to identify the frequency in which specific topics appeared (figure 8). Question 26 asked respondents to share any stories or additional factors that affected their decision to continue or end military service. Questions 29 and 31 asked respondents to share any key negative and positive experiences, respectively. First, a frequency text query using the specific verbiage of the top eight identified retention factors provided initial results. Second, the frequency text query expanded to include stemmed words, synonyms, and specializations. An example of this expanded word query was expanding *competence of the chain of command* to include words like *leadership, guidance, rater, supervisor, order, CO, battery commander, troop commander, etc.* The last step was a manual review of every comment to ensure the accuracy of the text query results, as well as adding additional responses that the query did not identify. The researcher made no interpretations of these inquiries until the Third Cycle Pattern Coding process.¹³⁵

The overall most frequently discussed code from the subjects’ open-ended comments was *culture/climate*, followed by *how the chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity* and *a sense of purpose*. As such, these codes address secondary research questions numbers one and two: What factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate service? *Culture/climate* was

¹³⁵ Onwuegbuzie, Frels, and Hwang, “Mapping Saldaña’s Coding Methods onto the Literature,” 135.

Figure 8. Frequency of comments applied to retention coding framework



Source: created by the author.

the most consistently referenced topic among all comments, whether subject experiences were negative or positive. *How the chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity* and *competence of the chain of command* were the most frequently discussed topics when subjects reflected on negative experiences. A *sense of purpose* and *morale* were the most frequently discussed topics when subjects reflected on positive experiences.

Comments included under *culture/climate* encompassed thoughts surrounding “the shared meaning organizational members attach to the events, policies, practices, and procedures they experience and the behaviors they see being rewarded, supported, and expected.”¹³⁶ More specifically, recurring themes emerged involving how their organizations integrated females, the perceived equality of evaluations of their performance or behavior, and inclusion. *Culture/climate* was the most common topic respondents discussed in question 29 when the survey asked them to share key

¹³⁶ Mark G. Ehrhart, Benjamin Schneider, and William H. Macey, *Organizational Climate and Culture: An Introduction to Theory, Research, and Practice*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 69.

negative experiences or stories about their time serving in combat arms. Participant 1, who is no longer serving on active duty in combat arms, shared the following on organizational inclusion and how it affected her opportunities to lead:

When I was [redacted], the E7 who was supposed to be my [enlisted counterpart] refused to work with me because “women don’t belong on the line.” My chain of command had a closed door conversation with the other male [redacted] (not me) and they decided to support the [NCO] and they moved me to a different company.

This officer is among several who discuss the idea of a “boys club” that they feel excluded from, which in participant 1’s words, made it hard for her “not to feel like an ‘other.’” Another similar comment came from participant 60, who replied

One thing that scares me the most about career progression is that I will never be in the “good ole boys club.” When it comes down to me and another guy for MQs [most qualified evaluation] they are going to pick him if he is in the club. . . . Explicitly I know that at the end of the day I will most likely end up with the short end of the stick when it comes down to because I am not [a part] of the club. . . . By the time I am KD [key development] complete as an CPT [captain] I think at that point I am going to be burned out from constantly breaking down walls.

Kanter’s stereotyped role induction and visibility phenomenon appear in the reflections of several officers.¹³⁷ A female who has retired from serving in special operations compared walking into the unit and meetings to “walking naked into the lion’s den covered in raw meat.” Participant 70 shared

Women are getting out because being combat arms is like taking on a gale force wind on a daily basis. Constantly having to prove that your achievements are not “because [you’re] a girl” but because you earned them. I have been accused of flirting . . . for a better gunnery score when the reality is you can’t flirt a target down. If you hit 10/10 targets it’s solely based on my ability to command my track. When my male counterparts are hailed as phenomenal leaders and I am seen and called just a good mom, who takes care of my guys and they’re recognized for things I

¹³⁷ Kanter, “Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women,” 988.

have also done it makes the job even more thankless and heart breaking.

Participant 75 has submitted her paperwork to separate from the Army and reflected on how the organizational response to serving in combat arms differs between men and women.

I am constantly asked “did you choose the Infantry?,” “are you straight or branch detailed??,” “why the Infantry?”—questions I have never seen anyone ask a male Infantry LT. I think if I were to stay in, my sex would never stop being the first thing people noticed about me. Not my competence, not my physical fitness, not my intelligence . . . just the fact that I am a walking talking pair of ovaries. I want to be in a job where my sex is not constantly discussed and commented on.

On the topic of inclusion, there were several discussions about how organizations reacted to women in their previously all-male organizations. A common theme within this topic involved segregated sleeping or changing areas, which exacerbated perceptions of exclusion. Explicitly discussing the difference between her service in armor and her service in a noncombat arms branch, participant 50 commented

The culture of combat arms is different, especially for a woman. There is more segregation of women in combat arms units in barracks/the field, et cetera for fears of sexual assault. But that separation creates a very unwelcome climate for the women in these units, especially women in combat arms MOSs that are oftentimes somehow expected to lead the soldiers they’re separated from.

Participant 63 shares that her unit treated her “like a ‘glass ball’ that couldn’t be broken.” They made the women feel “ostracized and made it EXCEPTIONALLY difficult to become part of a cohesive team.” In a similar tone, participant 77, a former armor officer who is now serving in a different branch, shared

It was dysfunctional, sexist, unfair. The older officers were awkward about overemphasizing my gender. The soldiers would be subtly disrespectful and they wouldn’t be reprimanded for their subtle disrespect. There was a lot of BS I had to deal with.

Participant 63 provided more specific examples of disrespectful behavior she has encountered, especially as a trailblazer:

I have faced adversity at all of these firsts. I have faced individuals that have despised me because of my goals alone and nothing

else. I have been called a squat pisser, a bitch, and worse. And I have felt the scrutiny at each of these places to not just meet the standard, but exceed it. I dont like performances, and I felt like I was constantly under a spot light.

Of note, there are several negative reflections that the researcher considered gender-neutral and do not directly relate to the phenomenon of serving as a female in combat arms. This supports the neutral Likert response when subjects responded to whether they felt their negative experiences directly resulted from serving as a female in combat arms. Participant 34 shared that COVID-19 exacerbated structure issues within her unit, affecting its climate. Participant 60 expressed concerns that the unit's culture emphasizes "being liked" over leadership. Participant 47 shared that the command climate is negative, as "they take, take, and give nothing. . . . It's not a healthy situation."

Culture/climate was the second most frequently discussed topic for question 31, which asked respondents to share key positive experiences or stories. Participant 5 is an officer who is still serving, but no longer in special operations. She shared that she sees a "generational shift of the service being accepting of women more than older generations. It's becoming the norm . . . and that's so promising." Participant 10 shared a similar sentiment, saying that while the culture "is not there yet," every year since she's entered the Army [2018] "has been better than the last."

A common theme among the positive comments is that subjects did not feel as singled out, nor excluded, as multiple women who previously served in the unit. Participant 10 reflected that "there were already high-performing female enlisted and officers before I arrived. No one batted an eye when I took my PLT because they had already had 3 female Platoon Leaders before me." Participant 40 responded, "In my battalion there were more female combat arms junior officers than male and our leadership at the battalion level was outstanding and actually made the decision to leave more difficult." Participant 36 shared that her battalion is "full of strong female lieutenants/Captains and it is extremely refreshing and motivating."

Additional positive comments about culture relate to a welcoming environment. In these environments, subjects felt like they had a fair chance to lead and earn respect, regardless of gender. One such comment comes from participant 71, who stated

All of my guys have been super awesome really. . . . At the end of the day, they just want someone they can trust with their life. And if you meet the standards and they know they can trust you (no matter what gender you are), that's all they're looking for. My guys have also been open to all sorts of conversations on women in the Army and specifically combat arms and Infantry and they

are always interested to hear me out and they all look out for me and want to see me succeed.

The second most frequently referenced code across the data was *equal opportunity*. It was the most discussed topic in question 26, which requested stories or additional factors that contributed to subjects' decisions to continue or end military service. It ranked a close second to *culture/climate* in reflections on negative experiences and was the third-least commented topic from reflections on positive experiences. Topics under this code include adherence to U.S. Army equal opportunity and related diversity and inclusion policies, perceptions of fairness in career opportunities, and inclusionary or exclusionary comments.

There were not as many reflections of command support in positive experiences as there were in negative experiences. However, some noteworthy reflections relate to a theme of perceived genuine command support to diversity and inclusion policies, as well as subjects rising to the occasion once given the opportunity. Participant 40 commented that she was pregnant and still given an early command. Participant 49 shared that having opportunities to prove her worth makes "life easier as a female leader." Additionally, participant 37 boasted about her extremely supportive chain of command. She stated, "My boss has sat down with me to try to understand my experiences and has been looking to shift his unit culture to increase diversity and make it welcoming to all." Participant 46 shared that the unique opportunities presented to her are based on her performance and not just because she is a woman. Participant 10's command gave her a chance to "spearhead" a major initiative and believed that being a woman was a strength, as she was "the only woman in the room with a different perspective than the men."

In the reflections of negative experiences, a distinct theme contrasts the command support seen in the positive responses. Participant 25 stated, "I survived suicidal ideations and depression/anxiety from the pressure and bullsh** toxicity that was directed towards me on a daily basis up and down the chain of command, sexist and marginalizing comments from all echelons up to the BDE [brigade] level." Participant 4 shared that women who "bust their ass get passed over so that mediocre men would have career development opportunities because 'you'll all just get out when you have babies' regardless of whether or not a woman had plans to start a family." Along the theme of perceived discriminatory comments, participant 1 shared that a leader within her organization "singled" her out of a group of men and asked why her "face looked 'like that,'" and if she was "always 'so serious.'" Participant 77 provided a detailed response related to both major themes of *command support* and *exclusionary language*. She shared

I have so many stories. My [redacted] Commander constantly said he would never let his wife do the job I was doing. My [redacted] said his wife didn't want me in the office alone with him. My [redacted] [NCO] introduced me to all the other [NCOs] the week I got there. I didn't know it was because they were secretly rating my "hotness" until a few months later when one of my peers told me. It was extremely difficult and isolating. I grew up in a very gender neutral environment. I never felt like I was a minority for being a woman until I got to my first [redacted (unit)]. These men were bigots. My parents were very concerned because they went to great lengths to raise me in a society of equal opportunity for men and women. I almost felt embarrassed telling my parents stories of how I was being treated as a platoon leader.

Another theme that emerged related to equal opportunity within negative comments was perceptions of unfairness in encouragement to seek career-enhancing opportunities. This aligns with theories posited by Seo et al., presented earlier, in which group dominants may block tokens from promoting within the group.¹³⁸ When considering a potential combat-related opportunity, participant 1 shared her experience with her company commander, who encouraged her to talk to her husband about how the opportunity would impact her children. She stated, "I have no children and no desire to have children. This condescending and patriarchal attitude ensured I never returned." Participant 64, a former special operations officer no longer serving, shared that when pursuing a high-profile opportunity, her command told her that she was not selected because she "was a single, attractive female, and a male was selected instead."

Several comments discussed the dynamics of equal opportunity and discrimination from the perspective of female hostility to other females. Rones and Steder described this as "queen bee behavior," with Kanter arguing that it is a survival mechanism to assimilate into the group.¹³⁹ Participant 63 described it as "internalized misogyny," of which she was once guilty. She admitted to succumbing to the perceived pressure from the cultural mindset that believed when one female soldier is "average," then "all women suck." Participant 11 stated, "I usually despised working with other females because I assumed they were incompetent. I bought in to the narrative that surrounded me." Participant 61 shared

¹³⁸ Seo, Huang, and Han, "Conceptual Review of Underrepresentation of Women in Senior Leadership Positions from a Perspective of Gendered Social Status in the Workplace: Implication for HRD Research and Practice."

¹³⁹ Rones and Steder, "The Queen Bees and the Women's Team: A Contextual Examination of Enmity and Friendship between Military Women," 32; and Kanter, "Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women," 988.

There wasn't really a sense of camaraderie [sic] or kinship among the women in my BN. We were friendly with each other but I don't recall many close and enduring friends amongst the combat arms women in my unit. . . . I felt it was everyone for themselves, and we could either try to break into one of the male "groups" or remain a loner.

Looking at this phenomenon from an opposite perspective, participant 61's unit reprimanded her for equal opportunity violations due to her perceived "favoritism towards women." She admitted that she did indeed "champion women." Several women maintained their gender neutrality when managing the expectations of those around them, with participant 71 stating, "Just uphold the standards of the duty description."

The third most frequent code referenced across the data was a *sense of purpose*. It was the most frequently discussed topic in question 31, which was the request to share key positive experiences while serving in combat arms. In striking contrast, question 29, which asked for reflections on negative experiences, received very few comments related to a *sense of purpose*. One negative comment came from participant 34, who, while still serving, feels she "would find greater job satisfaction and sense of purpose elsewhere." A potentially neutral comment came from participant 25, who stated, "I've already passed the torch in many aspects. . . . I'm tired, time for these younger gals to take it to the next level!" This illustrates a potential relationship between an individual's sense of purpose and motivation, and how they view an organization. Jodi Berg explores this relationship, finding that "personal purpose and goals, when aligned to a company vision, appear to impact motivation and engagement."¹⁴⁰ Topics under the code of a *sense of purpose* include drive, motivation, ambition, and meaning.

The most poignant theme that emerged from comments about a sense of purpose is the resolve to continue serving to effect positive change in the Army through normalizing the presence of women in combat arms occupations and inspiring women who will follow them. For example, participant 60 shared

One of my motivations for staying combat arms . . . is that I open the door for the women that come behind me. I may not be [perfect] but I want to open more minds so that way the woman behind me has more of an opportunity to shine because everyone is over the shock of her being female and focus more on what she can bring

¹⁴⁰ Jodi L. Berg, "The Role of Personal Purpose and Personal Goals in Symbiotic Visions," *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (April 2015): 442, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00443>.

to the platoon or company. So when I have a hard day based on something I feel is not because of me but because of my gender I think about that and I pick my head up and soldier on.

This same officer continued to reflect on her sense of purpose as a mechanism to overcome the negative aspects of her experiences in combat arms.

Even if I don't always get the MQs [most qualified evaluations], respect, and awards I deserve it's the small things that keep me going. When I finally earned my soldiers' trust on even the smallest things that would normally be automatically given to a man (example: not falsely SHARPing them. Yes that is a real fear). My Commander being surprised that my guys actually are taking to me quite well when he thought it was going to be a massive issue. My Platoon Sergeant [sic] telling me without me having to say something that he can see that I am experiencing sexism and it is not right. I like to think of those moments as something that won't hinder the next woman behind me. Now my old soldiers are more likely to accept a new female PL the same way they would a male. That when a woman is having a bad experience because of sexism they will be more likely to be believed. That my PLs now when they become Commanders will have less reservations about picking a female XO because they had one when they were a PL. That to me is what makes it worth it.

While not as detailed as the above reflection, the comments supporting the theme of a *sense of purpose* are similar in sentiment and are the most consistent among all the codes within the coding framework. The following are 10 comments that further emphasize this theme.

1. Participant 11: "I hope that more trailblazing women stay because the Army is changing for the better."
2. Participant 25: "Even now, my motivation to stay in for another post assignment is to change the stigma against being an empathetic, human leader, look out for my soldiers, and raise a middle finger to the ones that said I'd never amount to anything in combat arms."
3. Participant 10: "I might make it to MAJ and not be selected for LTC but at least I will be seen by younger women behind me who will hopefully exceed my career. If not me, then who will do it?"
4. Participant 37: "All the seats at 'the table' are held by combat arms. If I give up, we have one less person in the fight to get to that table to help make change. I continue my service because it might not be me who gets there, but odds are better for all of us with one more in the fight."

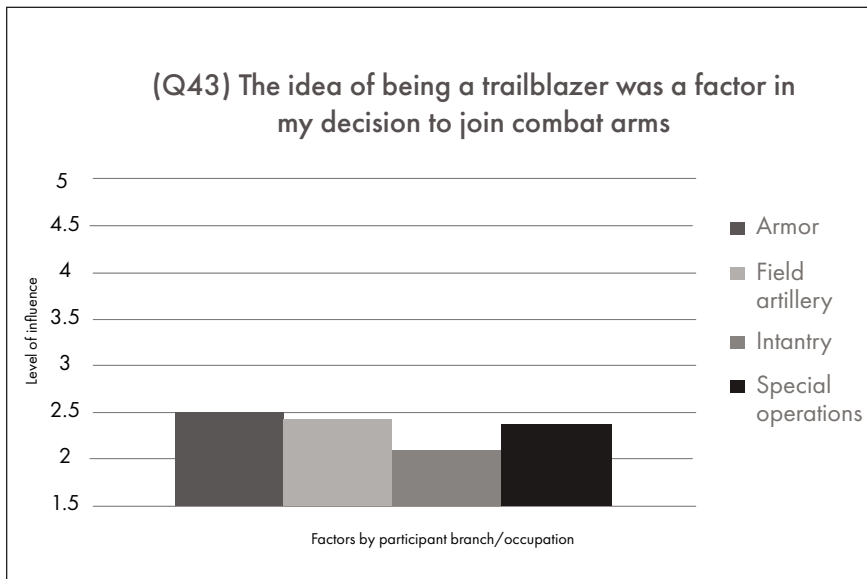
5. Participant 49: "Representation as a Female senior leader greatly motivates me to continue to serve. I hope my presence as a leader allows me to ensure fellow leaders follow sharp/EO/legal processes correctly and [treat] soldiers with dignity and respect. That is my biggest motivation to continue to serve."
6. Participant 25: "I would not let the same people that treated me so poorly turn around and treat every woman so poorly. If I had any chance at having an affect on their shitty perspectives and bigotry, I would do everything I could to dig my knife a little deeper and chip away, one person at a time."
7. Participant 35: "As the only woman in my BN that was a combat arms officer, I was the first they had seen. I felt pressure to do well to represent my gender and prove that we can do this."
8. Participant 63: "I am resilient. I felt that I couldnt change people's minds with integration briefs and words but could only action. Performance was the greatest weapon I had in this fight. As a result I turned to the relentless pursuit of excellence, and have truly internalized that mentality. While I'm not there and will never reach it, I strive for it every day."
9. Participant 70: "I'm driven by the need to show these men that women are their equals in this profession so that the women after me don't have to and they can just serve."
10. Participant 78: "I wanted to prove to others that they couldn't automatically discount a female officer in combat arms before they even had a chance to work with her. I wanted to do my job well because my soldiers deserved that, but I wanted to also be a good role model for younger soldiers, male and female, to look up to, regardless of my gender."

Despite the trailblazing nature of these previous comments, when asked if the idea of being a trailblazer was a factor in their decisions to join combat arms, most subjects disagreed. On the Likert scale, the average respondent score was 2.38, falling into the *disagree* category (figure 9). This study infers that the subjects did not join combat arms to be a trailblazer. However, they found a purpose in being a trailblazer, and the thought of trailblazing motivates them to continue serving.

Discussion of Findings

Each of the three major retention categories (*culture/climate*, *sense of purpose*, *equal opportunity*) organized comments that supported the emergence of several themes. Figure 2 illustrates the themes that connect each major retention category. Between *equal opportunity* and *culture/climate*, there were several similar comments about how leaders and soldiers in their organizations demonstrated inclusionary or exclu-

Figure 9. Participant response to whether being a trailblazer influenced decision to join combat arms



Key: level of influence factors have on decision to continue or end military service
 5 = strongly agree, 4 = important, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree
 Source: created by the author.

sionary behavior, the latter of which Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss suggest is a result of male informal group behavior that subconsciously serves to marginalize women.¹⁴¹ Several comments in the findings affirm this theory. Words such as *sexism*, *threatened*, *gossip*, *jokes*, *sexualized*, and *bitch* were common words from women who felt their units saw them as an “other” or “less than” in their organizations. Participant 66 shared, “I recall a MAJ asking me, “‘what are women in the Army good for?’ After commenting I didn’t know, he stated, ‘F*cking and sweeping the floor,’ he shoved a broom in my face and told me to pick one and get to work.” When asked about their perceptions of support from subordinates, it is noteworthy that several comments shared that despite attempts at marginalization or skepticism, being an officer gave them a sense of protection, due to their higher ranks. Their concerns lie more with the female soldiers who are not in positions of authority. It appears that “proving oneself” is a noticeable catalyst to feeling accepted or included in the group, especially when it comes to support from NCOs. For example, participant 78 commented, “I believe I spent a longer time trying to gain the trust of the NCOs and officers that I knew I could perform my job above the standard.” The support of NCOs and proving oneself were

¹⁴¹ Judith Gerson and Kathy Peiss, “Boundaries, Negotiation, Consciousness: Reconceptualizing Gender Relations,” *Social Problems* 32 (1985): 315–31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/800755>.

additional common discussions within the subjects' positive reflections. For example, participant 60 shared

Many of my peers and senior NCOs I've been able to work with have admitted to me that they were extremely skeptical of the Army allowing women in the Infantry, but after working with me for a few weeks, I changed their perspective and convinced them that there were women who deserved to "play in the mud like the rest of us."

Command support and perceptions of "proper" emphasis on gender issues within the organization also appeared in several comments. For example, participant 10 shared, "I successfully VTIP'd [voluntarily transferred] to stay Armor because my new SQDN Commander was supportive of me. I am thankful that I have had amazing, supportive male mentors in my first unit who encouraged me to stay Armor."

A *sense of purpose* and *equal opportunity* both relate to the phenomenon of trailblazing, affecting how women perceive each other and subsequently how they support and mentor each other. Overall, the Likert data showed that participants disagreed with the statement that they joined combat arms to become a trailblazer. However, their comments demonstrate a desire to trailblaze so that they may increase female opportunities in the future, without the challenges they once faced. These motivations tangibly manifest in female-to-female relations. Intangibly, the idea of trailblazing shapes the definition of equal opportunity to mean that gender is an inconsequential factor in assessing a leader's performance. That is the goal of trailblazing. From the positive experiences come discussions of female mentorship in the forms of official programs and unofficial relationships. Participant 8 shared that her mentor showed her "exactly what a combat arms female looks like." Several shared that, as the first combat arms female in their organization, they started successful women's mentorship programs. Participant 78, who served as a SHARP victim advocate, shared

While I had many officers and NCOs that made incredible contributions, I believe I was one of the first SHARP reps many of the female soldiers believed they could talk to who would listen with compassion and not be looked at as a nuisance or "attention getter."

It is important to note that several comments similar to the above discussed mentorship and relations as a gender-neutral activity and that participants saw their presence as a woman as an opportunity to break down barriers to reporting SHARP and equal opportunity concerns from male soldiers as well. Negative experiences between *equal opportunity* and *sense of purpose* come from the previously discussed

topic of perceived “internalized misogyny,” stemming from the pressure that the “few represent the many,” which supports Kanter’s tokenism theory.

Between *sense of purpose* and *culture/climate*, there was a connection between perceptions of how effective units integrated women and how resolved participants felt to either change or maintain trajectory for the future. When asked about perceptions of their male peers, superiors, and subordinates’ support for female integration into combat arms, the average response was neutral. *Change* was the most frequently mentioned word on these topics. From a positive perspective, discussions of change came from perceptions that, despite never working with a woman before, their units “were both welcoming and accepting of the change.” When it came from negative perspectives, discussions of “changing minds” inferred an inflexibility of mindsets in their organization. Participant 38, an infantry officer who has served as a first in many aspects of her organization, shared

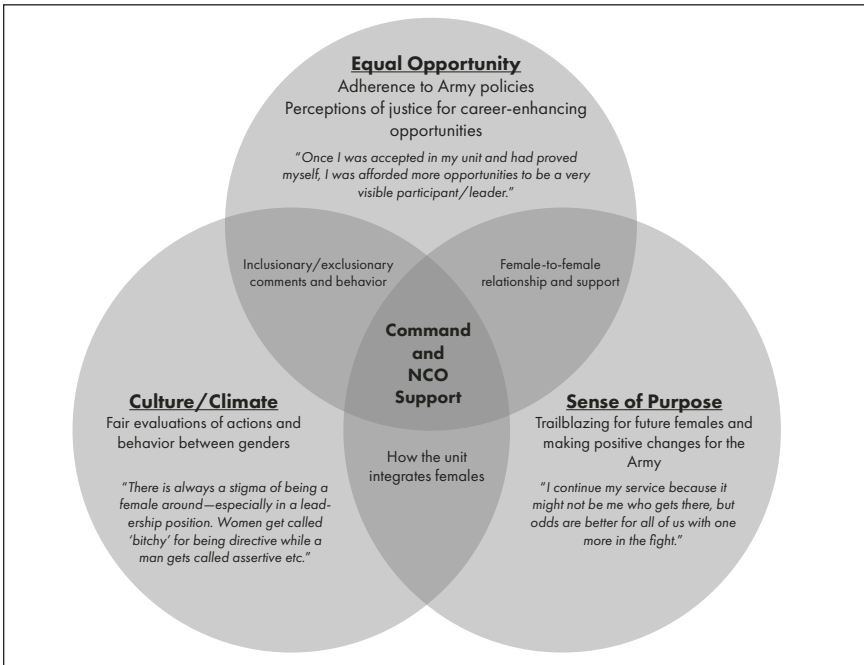
However long I stay in for, the hope is to change minds one by one. Most men I’ve worked with don’t even know how to work with women in the workplace, nevermind women in their own profession. Hopefully it becomes more normalized the more women take on the opportunity.

Inclusionary/exclusionary comments and behavior, female-to-female relationships and support, and how the unit integrates females are the three major themes that emerge from intersecting relationships between the three most influential retention factors. The overall central theme that connected all three major retention factors was *command and NCO support*. Figure 10 illustrates how these themes connect between each retention factor.

There were a total of 161 comments and concepts related to feeling *support* from NCOs and commanders. *Support* manifests in the policies, actions, and reactions of individuals in the chain of command and is related to every retention factor. When negative experiences occurred, there were several strong sentiments of feeling betrayed when the command teams either condoned exclusionary behavior, committed exclusionary actions, or ignored their concerns. Participant 10 reflected on her thoughts on this topic:

My [redacted] Commander did not like me. He wouldn’t outright say that it was because I was a woman. . . . he didn’t treat me the same as my male lieutenant peers. He would create bogus counselings for me to try and create a packet of bad performance. He tried to get me removed from position with a referred OER [officer evaluation report] and after my OER was kicked back by HRC [Human Resources Command] twice for negative comments, he took 8 months to complete it. I worked hard for him as a Platoon

Figure 10. Major themes between retention factors for combat arms females



Source: created by the author.

Leader and he never gave me a chance or even tried to coach, teach, or mentor me like a Commander is supposed to do with LTs.

This same officer discusses a new future commander who was supportive and who was one of the factors that convinced her to continue serving in combat arms. A lack of confidence in the chain of command was also evident in participant 66’s comment.

I was raped in [redacted]. . . . I didn’t report it because. . . . a specialist the week before reported a rape. Our command gave an Article 15 to this woman who reported her rape and admitted it occurred while underage drinking. She received punishment, was forced to remain living in the same barracks as her perpetrator who did not receive any punishment. Only a “local” investigation was done by a senior NCO assigned by the CO.

Several positive reflections discussed a negative event in which their chain of command did support them. Participant 9 shared

It’s not hard to tell when a man doesn’t want to listen to a woman when she’s appointed over him. I can think of two times in my 5

years that it has happened to me. Which I don't think is terrible given the amount of men I've served with that have accepted me as a woman. It was frustrating to go through but not a deal breaker. I was able to lean on my 1SG [first sergeant] and CDR [commander] to back me up so the mission wasn't affected.

Participant 14 also commented on a negative experience, in which she felt supported by her leadership:

I had someone submit a false report via anonymous email about me after I outperformed them on both an interim counseling and official OER. It made me feel targeted, ostracized and humiliated. Thankfully, my leadership rallied around me in support but this incident still made me re-evaluate if I want to continue my service.

Organizational trust results from subordinate feelings of confidence and support in their leadership, thus positively affecting subordinate morale. This reduces employee turnover.¹⁴² When asked if they felt pressured to join or not join combat arms, participants reflected on warnings they received about the potentially bad things that could happen to them. They also reflected on others' encouragement for the unique opportunity they could pursue. The responses indicate that the subjects were well-informed and not naïve about the potential challenges they were to face. In these cases, officers and NCOs in their chains of command affected their perceptions of their experiences. Positive comments favorably reflected on commanders who visibly treated gender integration as a nonissue and prioritized equal mentorship for both men and women. For example, participant 30 wrote, "BN leadership [publicized] their support [of] gender integration." Participant 15 wrote, "I have been lucky to have only support from my direct leadership. Good men make great leaders." Subjects reflected positively on NCOs who "supported without question" and corrected problematic behavior that may have exacerbated any additional personal life challenges they were facing. There were positive responses when leaders explicitly evaluated their performance or presence as Army officers and not just women. Evaluating performance based on the latter risks leaders falling into the "visibility" trap that treats individual acts as "symbolic consequences."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Hwee Hoon Tan and Christy S. F. Tan, "Toward the Differentiation of Trust in Supervisor and Trust in Organization," *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs* (2000): 241–60; and Kamalachandran Rukshani and Samithamby Senthilnathan, "A Review on the Relationship Variables to Employee Morale and Organizational Trust," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Practices* 1, no. 10 (2015): 6, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2232794>.

¹⁴³ Kanter, "Some Effects of Proportions in Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women," 973.

Inversely, several responses discussed a lack of concern for peer and subordinate opinions and behaviors, as they were either supportive or not influential enough in rank or position to affect the unit culture. Instead, there were more concerns about captains, majors, and NCOs' thoughts and behaviors, as they were the "most difficult cohort." For example, participant 2 stated

General *** and General *** were always very supportive. But some of the operational level of leadership (COLs/MAJs) weren't as supportive and they expressed their disconnect and explained all their excuses as to why men can't keep it in their pants and girls are somehow a distraction to them from doing their job. Or that it's in the males nature to protect the woman so it could be costly on the battlefield. Yada yada yada blah blah blah. Seem to be more their issue than the females.

Participant 38 similarly reflected on the disconnect between upper and lower levels of leadership:

Most of my officer leadership was very supportive and were interested in my experiences. The NCO counterparts were trickier and did not handle the transition well as a whole. The NCO leadership we relied on to make this integration work often failed and were the problem of many SHARP related issues and poor retention of the female enlisted soldiers.

Prevalent among the comments were reflections on leaders who made statements that targeted the female population in general, and not an individual's specific performance. For example, participant 4 shared, "My male superiors (officers . . . and senior NCOs) sat me down several times to make it clear just how much they did NOT support women serving with them. Even after a [redacted (successful deployment mission)], the response was 'it was a fluke, f*** y'all'." Participant 77 shared that some male officers felt "threatened" and would make comments like "being a female Armor officer is the easiest way to make General." Other participants criticized the "public" support of female presence in the ranks, accusing the leadership of putting on a "show," and that their "actions proved otherwise."

Summary

This study explored the phenomenological experiences of women who served in select combat arms branches based on their specifications in Army Directive 2016-01.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Murphy, "Army Directive 2016-01 (Expanding Positions and Changing the Army)."

First-hand accounts paired with Likert scale data determined what factors were most influential in participants' decisions to continue or end military service, thereby attempting to answer secondary research questions one, two, and three. Findings determined that *culture/climate*, *equal opportunity*, and *a sense of purpose* were the three most prominent retention factors, as highlighted in figure 10. When examining the survey's comments, the following themes emerged that connected these retention factors:

- Adherence to equal opportunity policies
- Fair perceptions in offerings of career-enhancing opportunities
- Inclusionary/exclusionary comments and behavior
- Female-to-female relationships and support
- Equal perceptions of actions and behavior
- How the unit integrated women
- Trailblazing for future women and making positive changes for the Army
- Command and NCO support

The research found these themes influenced the positive and negative perceptions of participants' experiences serving in combat arms. *Command and NCO support* was the overall theme that connected the three major retention factors and often served as the determining factor in whether subjects would consider continuing or ending military service in combat arms. For this reason, the answer to the primary research question is no, the Army does not require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms professions. The next section further elaborates on this conclusion and provide recommendations for future research and consideration.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This thesis examined the state of retention for women serving in combat arms professions to answer the primary research question: Does the Army require a unique retention strategy to retain women in combat arms occupations? After analysis of the research findings, the answer is no. The solution to retaining women in combat arms is not to create new policies. Instead, the Army must look at its current policies, specifically how it develops its leaders to consider their formations' unique populations. Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and leaders must consider how to adapt their styles to reach every individual soldier under their charge. In doing so, leaders can foster a positive culture where every member feels respected, empowered to advance professionally, and accountable for behavior that aligns with the Army's values. These are indicators of job satisfaction conducive to retaining talent within the force.

Conclusions

Secondary research questions one and two asked what factors contribute to the decisions for female officers in combat arms to continue or terminate military service. The research concluded that the three most prominent factors influencing the subjects' retention decisions were *culture/climate*, *equal opportunity*, and a *sense of purpose*, with *culture/climate* being the most frequently discussed topic. Secondary research question three, which explored how the experiences of trailblazing women influenced their personal and professional feelings about continuing military service, supported these themes.

The themes of *culture/climate*, *equal opportunity*, and a *sense of purpose* align with the GAO's findings that *organizational culture* significantly impacted women's decisions to end military service.¹⁴⁵ Further examination of each retention factor determined positive relationships between a *sense of purpose* and the phenomenon of trailblazing, as well as feeling like a meaningful part of the team. There was a negative relationship between *equal opportunity* and the exclusionary comments and behavior of others. In addition, both positive and negative experiences were frequently connected to *command and NCO support*, which is a key extension of *culture/climate*. In the case of positive experiences, influential leaders in the chain of command voiced support for gender integration, supported the subjects during challenging times, and corrected problematic behavior when subjects brought it to their attention. Inversely, negative experiences involved influential leaders in the chain of command who were poor mentors, condoned or engaged in discriminatory behavior, or demonstrated disingenuous or unsupportive behavior. These conclusions support the assertions that the Army charges its leaders with creating a "positive environment," and they have a direct impact on inspiring an organization's climate and culture that prioritizes inclusivity.¹⁴⁶

Inclusion, personal and professional support, mentorship, and authentic leadership are not revolutionary concepts in Army leadership studies, nor are they unique to this study's population. As such, the Army does not require unique retention strategies for females in combat arms. However, *unique* remains a keyword. Subject discussions of trailblazing show that there are unique experiences involved with the phenomenon of being one of the *first* or *only* in a combat arms organization.

While the concept of trailblazing remains a significant factor in influencing desires to continue military service, several comments indicate some subjects do not identify as a trailblazer, due to several women serving in their units before them. This study is approximately seven years removed from the Army's lifting of the direct combat exclu-

¹⁴⁵ Report to Congressional Committees: *Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 28.

¹⁴⁶ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 6-1, 6-5.

sionary policy for women. The fervent ambition to trailblaze for future women may have lingering effects as units continue their integration efforts. But as that time continues to pass, there may be a decrease in the potency of trailblazing as an influential retention factor. If this hypothesis proves correct, then the Army must explore other factors that contribute to a strong sense of purpose and satisfaction with meaningful service. In the meantime, this conclusion's overarching theme of *command and NCO support* will fill a critical, interim gap until further studies can better understand what develops a sense of meaning in long-term military service.

Recommendations for the Army

This study indicates a relationship between a subject's satisfaction with their service and the opportunity to be both a mentor and mentee. To support this conclusion, the Army should evaluate its leadership doctrine and how it specifically defines mentoring and counseling. *Army Leadership and the Profession*, ADP 6-22, defines counseling as the process in which leaders develop subordinates.¹⁴⁷ However, its recommended occurrences around events or evaluation timelines infer a short-term, performance-based focus. It lacks an interpersonal tone and long-term commitment to personal and professional development that mentorship seeks to address.

As defined in *Army Leadership and the Profession*, mentorship considers a longer-term approach that focuses on the growth and development of potential. However, doctrine defines mentorship as a voluntary agreement, therefore risking leaders deciding which subordinates are worth investing time in.¹⁴⁸ It also assumes subordinates understand what to look for in mentors, and risks both parties looking for people that look, think, or act as they do—an idea antithetical to diversity. Given mentorship and support's influence on retention, doctrine should remove *voluntary* from its definition. Instead, its definition should charge leaders with the professional and moral obligation to invest in every member of their formation for long-term growth. An alternative recommendation is to better distinguish between the idea of the mentor as a noun and *mentoring* as a verb. The former still maintains the concept of a voluntary agreement between leaders and subordinates based on mutual trust and respect. However, the latter mitigates the risk of creating exclusive mentoring in-groups.

Previous Army doctrine more explicitly highlighted the distinction between mentoring as a verb and the mentor as a noun. In the case of the latter, the mentor is one who can serve as wise counsel to a selected few due to their greater experience.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 6-10.

¹⁴⁸ *Army Leadership and the Profession*, 6-11.

¹⁴⁹ James R. Thomas and Ted A. Thomas, "Mentoring, Coaching, and Counseling: Toward a Common Understanding," *Military Review* 95 (2015): 1.

However, mentor-mentee selectivity to a few individuals infers a sense of exclusivity, which the idea of mentorship as a voluntary process supports. Conversely, previous Army doctrine defined mentorship as a verb that promotes inclusivity. For example, the 1999 publication, *Army Leadership*, FM 22-100, states:

Mentoring is an inclusive process (not an exclusive one) for everyone under a leader's charge. . . . Mentoring is totally inclusive, real-life leader development for every subordinate. Because leaders don't know which of their subordinates today will be the most significant contributors and leaders in the future, they strive to provide all their subordinates with the knowledge and skills necessary to become the best they can be—for the Army and for themselves.¹⁵⁰

Inclusive mentorship is an opportunity to face assumptions, foster curiosity about others' experiences, and address differences productively.¹⁵¹ Therefore, the Army should examine how it trains mentorship skills in professional military education. Not only should leaders receive additional formal training on how to mentor effectively, but education should consider the concepts of cross-cultural mentoring. Cross-cultural competency training should extend beyond the "range of missions abroad" and include the Army's own formations.¹⁵² This trains leader skills that can potentially overcome psychological barriers preventing connections between leaders and subordinates who may look or think differently. At its core, mentorship is a reciprocal process where both parties benefit from learning about each other.

In this study, *culture/climate*, *equal opportunity*, and a *sense of purpose* were the three most influential retention factors, with *command and NCO support* emerging as a recurrent topic within the subjects' phenomenological experiences. Counseling and mentorship are two concepts that officers and NCOs can use to effectively demonstrate support. They also both support career progression, therefore supporting long-term retention. The DOD emphasizes the value of the unique skills, perspectives, and backgrounds of its servicemembers.¹⁵³ As a result, current paradigms of the counseling and mentoring process must shift to consider an expanded soldier prototype, so to nurture soldiers' unique paths to advancement and success. These doctrinal and educational recommendations will not only benefit women in combat arms but will

¹⁵⁰ *Army Leadership*, 5-16.

¹⁵¹ "Inclusive Mentoring, Equity and Inclusion," Rutgers University, accessed 31 March 2022.

¹⁵² U.S. Army Human Dimension Capabilities Development Task Force, Capabilities Development Integration Directorate, Mission Command Center of Excellence, white paper, "Cross-Cultural Competence: Overview of Cross-Cultural Training Theory and Practice for the Army," September 2015.

¹⁵³ *From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st-Century Military* (Arlington, VA: Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2011).

universally apply to a greater Army population comprised of individuals exploring their unique purposes in military service.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study delimits its focus specifically to women who served in a narrowed definition of combat arms. However, there are opportunities to further develop and expand this research. The following recommended topics may contribute to a broader and deeper exploration of this study's findings.

During survey recruitment, the researcher received 72 emails or correspondence from women who were interested in participating in the research survey. However, they did not meet the study's screening criteria, and thus were not considered for this study. These women serve as a strong indicator that there are other populations in the Army who want to contribute their perspectives to the important dialogues of diversity and talent management. As such, future research should study Army retention and attrition factors across expanded study populations, with a particular emphasis on minority populations of multiple demographics. There could be thematic connections between different populations experiencing similar phenomena of minority service in underrepresented environments. Comparative analysis between different populations, including considerations for intersectionality, could further inform current and future DOD and Army DEI initiatives.

This study did not consider Army National Guard and Army Reserve populations, enlisted personnel, and women serving in direct combat occupations within other Service branches. The elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule affected DOD as a whole, albeit in different ways. For example, in 2018, the Service Women's Action Network sued the DOD, as the "Leaders First" policy prevented 48 states from integrating women into their combat arms National Guard units. As a result, the National Guard fell behind active duty in integrating women, with the last Brigade Combat Teams fully integrating in 2020—five years after the lift of the combat ban.¹⁵⁴ These important populations may uncover additional nuances not discovered within this study. Further research may reveal experiences that influence subject perceptions of how DEI policies affect leader support and thus the organization's culture and climate.

Survey responses to demographic-based questions revealed several niche groups within the subject population. An example group were women who desired to continue military service but wanted to transfer out of combat arms and into a different branch. This shows a unique combination of both continuing and ending military

¹⁵⁴ Gary Sheftick, "Women Integrating into Army's Final Infantry, Armor Units," *Army News Service*, 1 June 2020; and Swick and "The (Mostly) Good News on Women in Combat."

service. Age, relationships, education, commissioning year, children, evaluations, and other factors have the potential to identify trends that influence motivations to serve. For example, family considerations may not be as motivating a factor for women under a certain age or rank, as DOD reports show a notable increase in marriage between company grade and field grade officer ranks.¹⁵⁵ These findings could help the Army and its leaders better understand what motivates soldiers, as well as help them predict when and where potential shifts may happen.

In 2020, the U.S. Army Talent Management Task Force and Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs launched the first Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES) to improve incentives and quality of life programs for future retention efforts.¹⁵⁶ This is a notable step toward fulfilling the GAO's recommendation to "develop a plan, with clearly defined goals, performance measures, and timeframes, to guide and monitor the Army's female active-duty servicemember recruitment and retention efforts."¹⁵⁷ Further efforts to complement this retention effort could include focus groups and sensing sessions with selected populations of soldiers within their windows of reenlistment or those transitioning from obligatory to indefinite service statuses. These methods could supplement ongoing efforts by reaching populations who, due to survey burden, may not complete the DACES. It would also capture retention motivations in real time, as opposed to reflections of prior decisions that may be months or years removed.

These recommendations for future research will provide deeper insight into the phenomenon of minority service in the armed forces. This is especially so for women, who were the focus of one of the most significant shifts for social change in the military in recent years. In addition, further exploration into command, NCO, and leader influence on retention may universally benefit the greater Army population. Broad-based solutions for retention strategies may risk trading research and execution convenience for effectiveness. Policy decisions, like the redaction of race, gender, and ethnicity from selection boards promote blind, merit-based advancement. However, demographically blind methods and initiatives to explore the unique needs of the diverse force are two different approaches to diversity. These recommendations attempt to address the latter approach. All soldiers are unique, and their "input matters."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ *2016 Demographics, Profile of the Military Community* (Washington DC: Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, Department of Defense, 2016).

¹⁵⁶ *HQDA Execution Order 097-16 to the U.S. Army Implementation Plan 2016-01 (Army Gender Integration)*.

¹⁵⁷ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 40.

¹⁵⁸ *HQDA Execution Order 097-16 to the U.S. Army Implementation Plan 2016-01 (Army Gender Integration)*, 5.

Parting Thoughts

General Ann E. Dunwoody, the first female four-star general, epitomizes this study's definition of *trailblazing*. In a 2013 speech to the Leading Authorities Speakers Bureau, she stated, "I realized I was staying in the Army because I was given opportunities to work hard, tackle interesting and difficult challenges, and make a difference in every assignment in every organization I was ever assigned to."¹⁵⁹ This gender-neutral perspective of her unique phenomenological experiences is indicative of this study's conclusions. The women surveyed for this research did not indicate a need for anything special or anything more than their peers. Instead, leader support often shapes their perspectives, and as such, leaders at every echelon should seek to understand and appreciate their unique experiences. There was a diverse span of thoughts and sentiments within the survey responses, even within the scope of the narrowed population. Similar subject experiences could yield different perceptions and thus different decisions about retention. This means there is more to learn from every soldier, regardless of their demographic. More deliberate training of inclusive, cross-cultural mentorship in both doctrine and professional military education will emphasize to U.S. Army leaders the importance of knowing their people and will empower leaders with tangible strategies to help them effectively demonstrate authentic, empathetic support. In turn, Army leaders will execute skills and behaviors that genuinely reflect the principles of the *Army People Strategy*.

This chapter does not conflate retention-based performance goals or gender-based targets with quotas.¹⁶⁰ The purpose of this research was to explore how the U.S. Army could better nurture and retain genuine talent, and not lose it to the multitude of factors this study explored. Diversity is not a social experiment. It is about opportunities. It is another "tool in the toolkit" in solving problems and "maintaining a competitive edge."¹⁶¹ While Army policies underscore the effort, retention starts at the individual unit, and "leaders and leadership make the difference."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ann E. Dunwoody, speech to Leading Authorities Speakers Bureau, 11 March 2013.

¹⁶⁰ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 1.

¹⁶¹ Jim Garamone, "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Are Necessities in U.S. Military," DOD News, 9 February 2022.

¹⁶² Dunwoody, speech to Leading Authorities Speakers Bureau.

CHAPTER APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Masters Military Art and Science Survey Instrument

Are you still currently serving on active duty in combat arms?

Yes

No

(If separated or no longer serving in combat arms) How did you separate from the Army?

Voluntary (UQR, REFRAD, etc.)

Involuntary (Medical, OSB, etc.)

Retirement

Still serving but transferred out of combat arms into another branch

What is/was your Army combat arms branch or occupation?

Infantry

Armor

Field artillery

Special operations (fill in blank)

What year did you enter a combat arms branch (either commissioned or transferred)? Years from 2010 to 2022

Rank(s) you held while serving in a combat arms occupation?

(Select all that apply)

CWO1

CWO2

CWO3

CWO4

CWO5

2dLt

1stLt

Capt

Maj

LtCol

Col

How many years did you serve on active duty within a combat arms occupation?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15+

Did you deploy while serving in a combat arms occupation?

- Yes
- No

(If yes to question 5) How many times did you deploy while serving in a combat arms occupation?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

Marital status during majority of your combat arms career:

- Single
- Partnership/relationship
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced

(If married or in a partnership/relationship) Are you dual military?

- Yes
- No

Number of children you had during majority of your combat arms career:

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

During your time serving in combat arms, did you become pregnant?

- Yes
- No

To your knowledge, while serving in combat arms, how many women were in your chain of command (up through division)?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5+

To your knowledge, while serving in combat arms, how many women (of a combat arms occupation) were in your battalion (or battalion equivalent)?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

To your knowledge, while serving in combat arms, how many women (of any rank, branch, or occupation) were in your battalion (or battalion equivalent)?

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10+

Did your unit have a female mentorship program?

- Yes
- No

Have you served beyond your initial service obligation?

- Yes
- No

(If still on active-duty service) What are your intentions for continued active-duty service in combat arms?

- Serve until I am eligible for retirement
- Serve for the foreseeable future, but open to separation given the right circumstances
- Submit separation/retirement paperwork within the next 5 years or as soon as my obligation is complete
- Transfer out of combat arms
- Complete separation/retirement process
- Undecided
- N/A (for those separated)

(If separated from active-duty service) What were your initial career plans upon joining the Army?

Retire

Complete obligation

Undecided

Retention Questions

The following questions apply to those still serving and those who have separated from the service. Please select a response that reflects the level of importance the following factors would have or have had on your decision to continue or end military service.

Extremely NOT Important	Not Important	Neutral	Important	Extremely Important
1	2	3	4	5

Patriotism

Sense of purpose

Personal morale

Overall quality of life

Unit culture/climate

Workplace relationships

Quality of others I work with

Competence of my chain of command

Opportunities to travel

Pay

Family tradition

Educational benefits

Ability to use college degree

Leadership experience

Mentorship

Chain of command support

Quality of healthcare

Retirement benefits

Opportunities to deploy

Military housing

Promotion opportunities

Awards and recognition

- Opportunities for command/key development positions
- Negative officer evaluations
- Positive officer evaluations
- Stability/PCS cycle
- Reproductive health
- Personal overall health
- Physical demands of the job
- Career flexibility
- Family needs or support
- Exceptional Family Member Program needs
- Significant other's support of service
- Stress
- Work life balance
- How chain of command handles discrimination/equal opportunity issues (race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, pregnancy, genetic information)
 - Diversity in the workplace
 - Seeing women in senior officer ranks
- How chain of command handles sexual harassment/sexual assault issues
- Open Comment Box: Please use this space to share any stories or list any other factors that affect or have affected your decision to continue or end military service. Any personally identifiable information will be de-identified prior to publication of the research.

Trailblazer Questions

For the purpose of this survey, the definition of "trailblazer" is sourced from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the following: "A pioneer; a person who makes, does, or discovers something new and makes it acceptable or popular."

Please respond by selecting an option that reflects the degree to which you agree or disagree. Some questions have accompanying open-ended questions to add additional detail. These are optional but appreciated. Please give as much detail as you are able. Any personally identifiable information will be de-identified prior to publication of the research.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1	2	3	4	5	N/A

I feel that some of my negative experiences in my unit were a direct result of me being a female in combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Please share any key negative experiences or stories of your time serving in combat arms.

I feel that some of my positive experiences in my unit were a result of me being a female in combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Share any key positive experiences or stories of your time serving in combat arms.

As a woman serving or who has served in combat arms, I consider myself to be a trailblazer.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why you consider or do not consider yourself to be a trailblazer.

As a woman serving or who has served in combat arms, others have considered or called me a trailblazer. The idea of being a trailblazer was a factor in my decision to join combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly list the factors that influenced your decision to join a combat arms branch over another occupation.

(If no longer serving in combat arms) The idea of being a trailblazer was a factor in my decision to leave combat arms or military service.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, briefly how being a trailblazer affected your decision to leave combat arms.

I was advised NOT TO join a combat arms branch or occupation.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, briefly explain why you were advised to not join combat arms.

I was pressured TO join a combat arms branch or occupation.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, briefly explain how you were pressured to join combat arms.

(If transferred into combat arms from another branch) Serving as a woman in combat arms feels the same as serving as a woman in my previous branch/occupation.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

I felt personal pressure to perform equal to or better than my male counterparts.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why or why not.

I felt pressure from others to perform equal to or better than my male counterparts.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why or why not.

The female integration process for my combat arms unit was efficient.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain why or why not.

My male peers supported female integration into combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

My male superiors supported female integration into combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

My male subordinates supported female integration into combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

As a female in combat arms, I felt integrated into my unit and part of the team.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

I was treated differently in my unit due to being a female.

(OPEN-ENDED) Briefly explain.

I was not concerned with discrimination while serving in my unit.

My unit would take reports of discrimination seriously.

My unit would take reports of sexual harassment or assault seriously.

I received mentorship from males while serving in combat arms.

I received mentorship from females while serving in combat arms.

I feel like I had the same career opportunities as my male peers.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

I feel like I am/was harder on other females serving in my unit or in the Army.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

Serving in combat arms affected my decisions on marriage or starting a family.

I believe it would be easier for me to be pregnant or start a family in branches that are not combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

To this date, I have met all my personal goals while serving in a combat arms branch.

To this date, I have met all my professional goals while serving in a combat arms branch.

I feel like my Army career would be easier if I were not serving in a combat arms branch.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

Serving in combat arms is exactly what I thought it would be.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

I am happy with my decision to join a combat arms branch.

(OPEN-ENDED) Explain why or why not.

If I could go back in time, I would choose a different branch to serve in.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, what branch would you choose to serve in and why?

The Army should implement strategies specific to retaining women in combat arms.

(OPEN-ENDED) If you agree, list any recommended strategies or factors for the Army to consider in retaining women in combat arms. If you do not agree, explain why.

Additional Open-Ended Retention Questions

Please use this comment box to write any stories, thoughts, or ideas you would like to share that did not fit within the scope of the above questions. Please give as much detail as you are able. Any personally identifiable information will be de-identified prior to publication of the research.

For questions or further elaboration of survey responses, contact Major Kimberly Brutsche at kimberly.g.brutsche.mil@army.mil.

CHAPTER 2

OPERATIONALIZING WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY IN TRANSFORMING CONFLICT

By Colonel Rachel J. Wienke, USA

All of the Department of Defense (DOD) Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) principles are important to integrate into the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) campaign plan. However, the three that have the most impact for this region are the participation of women in peace and security, the protection of women and girls from violence, and the incorporation of a gender perspective into peace and security efforts. The gender analysis of the Indo-Asia-Pacific region must address all these principles and include them throughout the campaign plan for maximum benefit and minimized risk. This analysis must assess cultural and societal differences between men and women so that USINDOPACOM leaders can “understand inequities and power dynamics based on gender.”¹

The first WPS principle, *the participation of women in peace and security* (PS), not only promotes gender equality, it is also essential for effective USINDOPACOM security cooperation plans.² The UN Women’s brief “Peace and Security” makes that clear, noting that the body of evidence illustrates the importance of female participation for “operational effectiveness” in these endeavors.³ Women’s participation in PS helps minimize radicalization, speeds “economic recovery,” and enhances peace-keeping forces’ protection.⁴ Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play important roles in all three of these. Therefore, it is important to note that women serving as leaders in PS help alleviate the cultural conflict that predominantly male military leadership can cause in relationships between military forces and such organizations.⁵

There are significant risks within the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility associated with failure to integrally incorporate women in PS and capitalize on the benefits that such integration provides. The areas of reducing radicalization and enhancing

¹ *Joint Planning*, Joint Publication 5-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020), III-29.

² Figure 1 in *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 9.

³ As part of the United Nations, UN Women was created to accelerate progress in meeting gender initiatives around the world. “In Brief: Peace and Security” (PDF), UN Women, August 2016, 1.

⁴ “In Brief: Peace and Security,” 1.

⁵ Robert Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness,” *Prism* 6, no. 1 (February 2016): 78.

economic recovery hold special interest. Radical terrorism and violent extremism have a stronghold throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.⁶ For example, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime showcased a sobering report on Islamic State operations in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Not only are Islamic State activities hall-marked by brutal “beheading, suicide bombings and stabbing,” but the Islamic State is also actively working to convert countries in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region to “satellite states.”⁷ Next, for economics, international trade tensions currently lead to increased risk, impacting regional growth.⁸ The great power of China strives to continually subvert U.S. influence and improve its own by increasing economic domination over other countries through its Belt and Road Initiative, of which 25 countries in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region are members.⁹ This makes it even more critical to leverage the accelerated economic recovery that women contribute through PS processes. Additionally, the omission of women from PS efforts has a negative correlation to the long-term success of peace agreements. Research illustrates that female participation in negotiations results in a 20 percent improvement in the likelihood of peace agreements enduring past two years and a noteworthy 35 percent improvement for those enduring beyond 15 years.¹⁰

The second DOD WPS principle, *protection of women and girls from violence*, is also an essential element for a successful USDINDOPACOM campaign plan.¹¹ There are four countries in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility in which this form of violence is a major problem for girls and women despite national action plans for WPS: Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste.¹² Furthermore, an imbalance between genders is correlated with increased violence levels, and UK Ministry of Defence researchers project that several Asian countries are trending toward “significantly more men than women.”¹³

⁶ Thomas Koruth Samuel, *Radicalisation in Southeast Asia: A Selected Case Study of DAESH in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-terrorism, 2016), iii.

⁷ Samuel, *Radicalisation in Southeast Asia*, iii, vii.

⁸ Daniel R. Coats, *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community* (Washington, DC: Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 2019), 19.

⁹ Wade Shepard, “How China Is Losing Support for Its Belt And Road Initiative,” *Forbes*, 28 February 2020; and David Sacks, “Countries in China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Who’s In and Who’s Out,” *Asia Unbound* (blog), Council on Foreign Relations, 24 March 2021.

¹⁰ Joan Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace, and Security: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 138.

¹¹ *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan*, 2.

¹² “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Asia-Pacific: Putting Victims/Survivors First,” UN Women, 2017, 11.

¹³ *Global Strategic Trends: The Future Starts Today*, 6th ed. (Shrivenham, UK: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, UK Ministry of Defence, 2018), 129.

The risks of neglecting the WPS protection principle in the USINDOPACOM campaign plan are clear. Although sexual violence is not the only form of conflict-related violence that affects females, it carries a particularly devastating impact. The wide range of consequences for survivors of this violence include physical injury, psychological trauma, insecurity, social stigma and exclusion, undesired pregnancies, and decreased economic resources.¹⁴

The seventh DOD WPS principle, *incorporation of a gender perspective into peace and security efforts*, is essential to these operations in the USINDOPACOM region.¹⁵ Leaders with this perspective can have more success in engagement with survivors of the “gender-based violence” discussed for the second DOD WPS principle.¹⁶ Additionally, including women as leaders along with men facilitates broader communication and enhanced relationships with local communities that have cultural restrictions for male-female interactions.¹⁷ This also improves both the “perceived legitimacy” of units with female leaders and the “force protection of troops” in the area of responsibility.¹⁸ Finally, leveraging a gender perspective in PS will help USINDOPACOM maintain and build alliances and partnerships by “demonstrating U.S. commitment to human rights and women’s empowerment.”¹⁹ These relationships are critical for success in this geographically dispersed region.

Omitting a gender perspective from the USINDOPACOM campaign plan carries notable risks. Many of these are shared or closely intertwined with the risks for the participation and protection principles. Primarily, though, USINDOPACOM must employ the benefits of gender perspective described above to effectively defend the United States from military threats within the region. Restricted communication and weak relationships in local communities would increase the vulnerability of USINDOPACOM forces while decreasing their effectiveness. Additionally, the increasing tensions between China and Taiwan highlight the risks of weakening relationships with partners and allies in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

The DOD has established principles on Women, Peace, and Security with good reason, and USINDOPACOM must incorporate these principles into the campaign plan to ensure its effectiveness. The three principles that are most critical for the Indo-Asia-Pacific are women’s participation in PS, protection from violence for women and girls, and integrating a gender perspective throughout PS plans and operations. The USINDOPACOM mission is to “implement a combat credible deterrence strategy

¹⁴ *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Asia-Pacific*, 17–18.

¹⁵ *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan*, 2.

¹⁶ Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness,” 78.

¹⁷ Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness,” 77–78.

¹⁸ Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness,” 77.

¹⁹ *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan*, 10.

capable of denying our adversaries sustained air and sea dominance by focusing on posturing the Joint Force to win before fighting while being ready to fight and win, if required.”²⁰ Disregarding the three key WPS principles discussed here would be highly detrimental to USINDOPACOM’s capability to accomplish that mission. Conversely, using these WPS principles to inform a gender analysis and to weave them throughout the campaign plan will posture USINDOPACOM for success and reinforce the United States’ dominance as a global beacon of democracy and freedom.

²⁰ “About USINDOPACOM,” U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, accessed 29 May 2022.

CHAPTER 3

BALANCING GENDER REPRESENTATION

Investigating Strategies for the Retention of Females in the U.S. Air Force

By Mr. Joseph "Kenny" LaSalle, U.S. Congress

INTRODUCTION

For the U.S. military to stay relevant as a force that protects American national security, it needs to address its internal two-front war: recruiting and retention. This chapter addresses low female retention rates in the U.S. Air Force by explicitly answering the following question: What changes to current policies can the Air Force make to increase the retention of women?

Historically, all military branches miss their recruitment benchmarks, year after year. In addition, the recruitment pool is shrinking. Currently, “the Defense Department estimates that 2% out of 20.6 million 17–21-year-olds have the desired combination of strong academic credentials, adequate physical fitness and an interest in serving” in active duty or reserves.¹ Furthermore, a 2020 Department of Defense (DOD) study polled 3,300 Americans between the ages of 16 and 21 and found that 2 percent would “definitely” serve in the military.² Although all recruitment goals have missed the mark yearly, in fiscal year (FY) 2021, the pandemic’s height allowed the Air Force to meet its multiyear recruitment slump. Lieutenant General Richard W. Scobee, chief of the Air Force Reserve, stated at an Air Force Association conference that the “Air Force [saw] extremely high retention rates due to the economic uncertainty of the global pandemic.”³

The military has been slowly loosening its grip on policy to increase women’s inclusion and retention in the Service branches. Women have served the United States in the military for more than 200 years.⁴ As seen in figure 1, women have faced socially created and driven hurdles—first, a flat-out ban on women serving in the armed forces, and second, after women answered the call to serve in World War II, they faced discrimination and then were pushed out of their roles so men could fill them

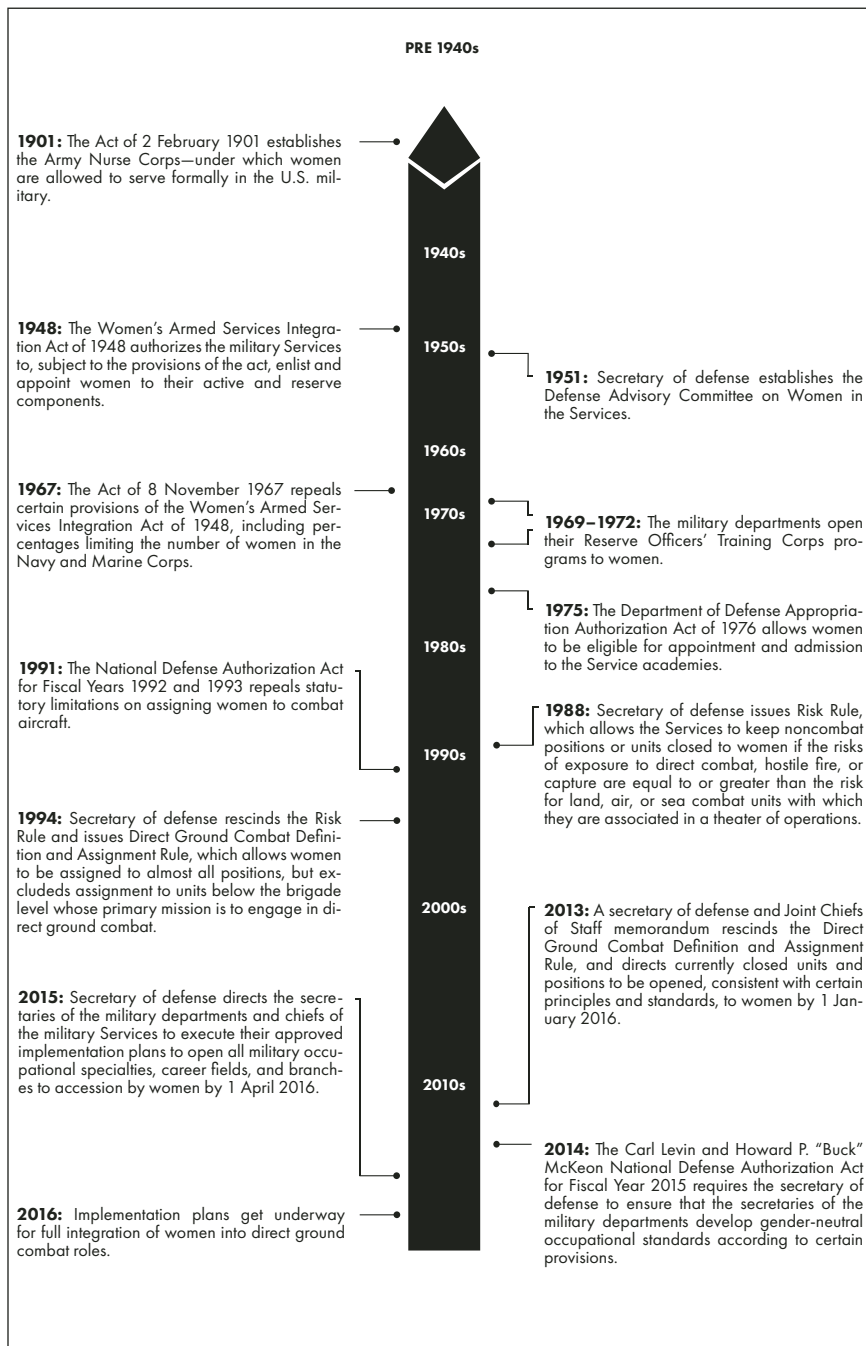
¹ Editorial Board, “The U.S. Military Needs a Lot More Recruits,” *Bloomberg*, 12 July 2021.

² “Fall 2020 Propensity Update” (presentation slides), Office of People Analytics, Joint Advertising, Market Research, and Studies, Department of Defense, 4 August 2021, 12.

³ Scott Maucione, “Air Force Meeting Recruitment Goals, Changing Mindset around Work and Training,” *Federal News Network*, 23 September 2021.

⁴ Danielle DeSimone, “Over 200 Years of Service: The History of Women in the U.S. Military,” *USO*, 11 June 2021.

Figure 1. Timeline of selected female participation in the U.S. military



Source: *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 10.

once they returned from combat. After being pushed out, it took years for the Department of Veteran Affairs to recognize their service.⁵ After World War II, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act (WASIA) was signed into law. This law touted equality and equal opportunity for women. However, it restricted the number of women joining the Services, instituted automatic discharge for pregnancy, and banned them from commanding men and from combat roles.⁶ In the 1990s, President William J. "Bill" Clinton repealed the "risk rule," allowing women to serve in every position not related to ground combat.⁷ Finally, in 2013, Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta lifted the combat exclusion policy, allowing women to fill all roles, including ground combat.⁸ Although lifting the prohibitions on women serving in all positions has increased participation, it should not be seen as a guarantee of a rewarding work experience. Removing the bans was a great start, but policies that foster a positive work culture must match the needs of the female population to result in higher retention.

Shortly after the Women's Armed Services Integration Act was signed into law in 1948, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) was created in 1951, leading the charge in recommending female-friendly policies. The advisory committee collects data from servicemembers, experts, and peer-reviewed literature, which is then analyzed with recommendations to the secretary of defense.⁹ As of 2020, approximately 98 percent of DACOWITS's recommendations have been either fully or partially adopted by DOD.¹⁰ Since 1993, DACOWITS worked to open the remaining closed positions with the first restriction lifted to allow females to fly combat aircraft, combat ships, and all combat positions.¹¹ It is not hard to believe that slow progress has been made on DOD-friendly policies toward women when the decision-making authority has been male-dominated with a natural affinity to gender bias. In fact, to this day, there has not been a female secretary of defense.

Debates against lifting many bans and favoring integration have included women being a sexual and emotional distraction for men, not being courageous

⁵ DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service: The History of Women in the U.S. Military."

⁶ Women's Armed Services Integration Act, Pub. L. (United States) 80–625, 62 Stat. 356, 12 June 1948; and DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service: The History of Women in the U.S. Military."

⁷ DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service: The History of Women in the U.S. Military"; and Subtitle D—Women in the Service, Title V, Military Personnel Policy, in National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-106, 103d Cong. (1993).

⁸ DeSimone, "Over 200 Years of Service: The History of Women in the U.S. Military"; and Leon E. Panetta, "Elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule," 24 January 2013.

⁹ "About Us," DACOWITS, accessed 14 March 2024.

¹⁰ *A Historical Review of the Influence of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)* (Arlington, VA: Insight Policy Research, 2020), 1.

¹¹ *A Historical Review of the Influence of the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS)*, 6.

or aggressive during combat, and fears over desegregation.¹² However, it is beneficial to retain women. A 2018 International Monetary Fund study found that women bring new skills to the workplace and increase productivity.¹³ The Pew Research Center studied women's public perception of political and top executive leadership positions. Pew surveyed 1,835 adults, randomly selected, and found that women in political leadership are 34 percent better at compromise and ethics and honesty compared to men at 9 percent and 3 percent, respectively.¹⁴ Also, women scored 26 percent on improving U.S. quality of life and 25 percent on standing up for beliefs, while men scored 5 percent and 10 percent, respectively.¹⁵ In business leadership, women scored around 31 percent for being honest and ethical, providing fair pay and benefits, and mentoring employees while scoring in the single digits for negotiating profitable deals and being willing to take risks.¹⁶ On the other hand, men scored in single digits in the first three categories but scored 18 percent in negotiating good agreements and 34 percent in risk-taking.¹⁷ Although this data does not look into the Air Force specifically, it should be taken into account as it showcases attributes and values of the type of talent the United States Air Force works hard to retain. An example of this talent pool includes Air Force colonel Martha E. McSally. She made history by overturning Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld's policy on women serving in Saudi Arabia needing to be escorted by male chaperons and wearing a head-to-toe abaya and headscarf each time they leave the military post.¹⁸ The court sided with McSally because the policy did not uphold American values. It took a female lens and a legal battle to overturn a discriminatory policy against American women.

There are times when DOD leadership decisions become gridlocked. In these times, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) can be a perfect opportunity for Congress to pass "organizational reform including, new or modified defense policies, and directed reports or studies among the legislation's provisions."¹⁹ From the start of FY 2009 until now, the NDAA has tried to take a more proactive role in filling gaps to address women's issues, including diversity, inclusion, and retention.²⁰

¹² Anna Simons, "Here's Why Women in Combat Units Is a Bad Idea," *War on the Rocks*, 18 November 2014.

¹³ Christine Lagarde and Jonathan D. Ostry, "When Women Join the Workforce, Everyone Benefits. Here's Why," *World Economic Forum*, 4 December 2018.

¹⁴ *Women and Leadership: Public Says Women Are Equally Qualified, but Barriers Persist* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2015), 6.

¹⁵ *Women and Leadership*, 6.

¹⁶ *Women and Leadership*, 6.

¹⁷ *Women and Leadership*, 6.

¹⁸ Ann Gerhart, "McSally: No Muslim Garb at War," *Washington Post*, 7 January 2022.

¹⁹ "Summary," in Alan Ott et al., *FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act: Selected Personnel and Health Care Issues* (Washington DC: Congressional Review Service, 2021).

²⁰ Ott et al., *FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act*, 7.

For example, in FY21, both House and Senate chambers included a provision that would have mandated that DOD increase the female representation in the armed forces but was not fully adopted after the conference.²¹ In 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a study looking into female active-duty personnel. The study focused on FY 2004–18. In this period, the study found the overall percentage of active-duty female members rose from 15.1 to 16.5, while the attrition rate declined from 33.1 to 8.6 percent.²² However, the likelihood for female servicemembers to leave the Service was 28 percent higher than male servicemembers.²³ GAO found six reasons women leave: work schedules, deployments, organizational culture, family planning, sexual assault, and dependent care needs in deployment, healthcare, and daycare. Lastly, GAO has recommended that the Air Force create and publish a concrete plan to address these issues.²⁴

Given Congress’s attention to this issue, there has been a renewed interest to fill the gaps that lead to low female retention from both DOD and the secretary of the Air Force. The DOD has stated “that recruiting and retaining women is important to reflect the nation’s population and ensure strong military leadership.”²⁵ In addition, Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall has acknowledged that the Air Force has much to do as an organization to “break down barriers” to build a force to compete in the modern arena.²⁶

In September 2021, the Department of the Air Force inspector general (DAF IG) released its disparity review. This review took a deep dive into many factors, including those affecting retention rates in women serving in the Air Force. The method used to collect the information included anonymous surveys, written feedback to DAF IG, input through the DAF IG telephone and email hotline, individual interviews of senior leaders, subject matter experts (SMEs), servicemembers, and DAF IG group discussions with airmen and guardians across all Air Force major commands and field commands.²⁷ The report found women tended to leave, on average, between years

²¹ Ott et al., *FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act*, 8.

²² *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 11, 16.

²³ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 18.

²⁴ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 22, 41.

²⁵ “Highlights,” in *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*.

²⁶ Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, “Department of the Air Force Releases Addendum to Disparity Review,” press release, 9 November 2021.

²⁷ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021).

5 and 10 of service and lacked leadership roles and promotional parity with male counterparts.²⁸ Further, the report indicated that women frequently dealt with gender bias, discrimination, work/life balance issues, and sexual harassment—contributing factors in their decision whether to continue to serve.²⁹

After a five-year slump, FY21 was a record-breaking year for Air Force recruitment efforts. Lieutenant General Scobee pointed to higher retention rates because of economic uncertainty as a potential driver. These circumstances allow a perfect opportunity to explore ways to increase retention. With this, the DAF IG took its first step in publishing multiple disparity reports to find women more than likely to leave the Air Force at a higher rate than men due to various barriers. Additionally, women’s participation in the Service has increased by 1.4 percent from FY 2004 to 2018.³⁰

Again, the chapter addresses the question: What changes to current policies can the Air Force make to increase the retention of women? The author first extracts data from reports to provide background on the issue, then discusses recently passed legislation and executive orders addressing some of the concerns, and finally offers recommendations to help swing the pendulum to positive work culture to increase female retention rates.

BACKGROUND

2020 GAO Report, *Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*

In 2015, Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter committed to building a force of the future by tapping into the diversity of talent in the United States, including women, since they have been granted access to serve in ground combat roles.³¹ He believes excluding women would “cut off half the country’s talents and skills.”³² Since then, there have been several Air Force initiatives exploring the issue of female retention. In addition, the 2020 GAO report to Congress on female active-duty personnel audits the DOD and examines trends in recruitment and retention from 2004 to 2018.

The Air Force has the highest female representation among the Services. As seen in figure 2, the Air Force has consistently hovered around 20 percent. In FY18, the GAO reported a total of 20.2 percent make-up of female representation, while males

²⁸ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 2.

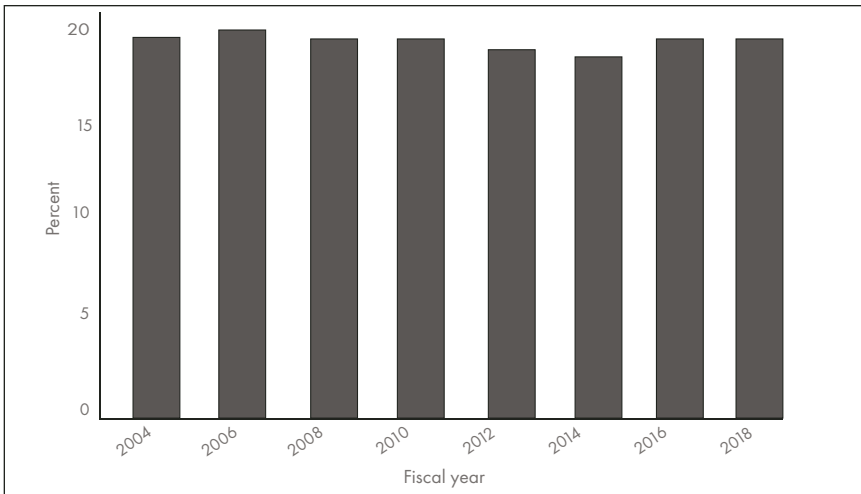
²⁹ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 6.

³⁰ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 11.

³¹ Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, “Speech: Remarks on the Women-in-Service Review,” U.S. Department of Defense, 3 December 2015.

³² Carter, “Speech: Remarks on the Women-in-Service Review.”

Figure 2. Air Force female active-duty servicemember representation, FY2004–18



Source: *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 13.

represented more than three-quarters of the force at 79.8 percent.³³ If the objective is to meet the standards of Secretary Carter when making sure the DOD taps into “more than fifty percent of the population,” the Air Force is missing the mark.

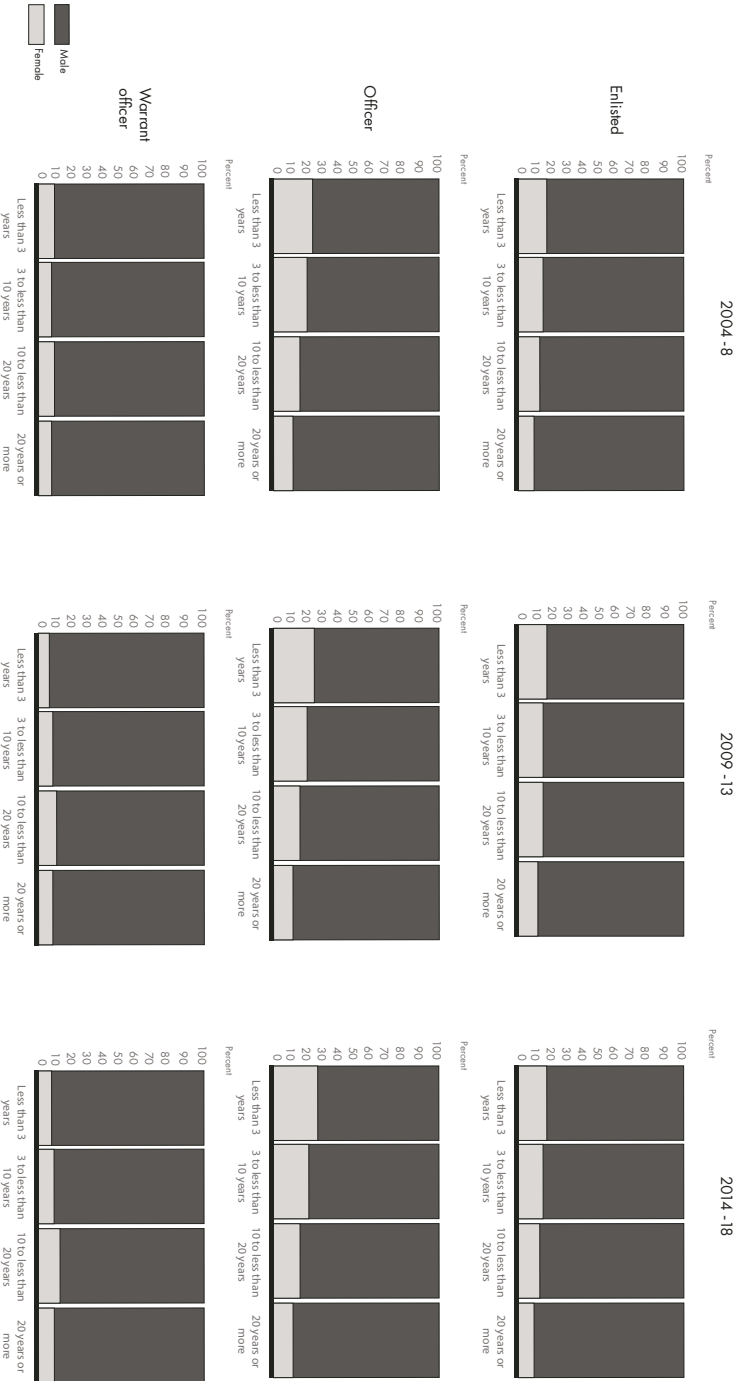
One of the reasons the Air Force cannot have better female representation across its organization is illustrated in figure 3. Disregarding the warrant officer data, in 2004–18, both enlisted and officer women trended higher than men in attrition rates. The GAO report stated that “specifically, for fiscal years 2004 and 2018, enlisted female active-duty servicemembers’ annual attrition rates were 33.1 and 8.6 percent, respectively.” Conversely, for the same period, enlisted male active-duty servicemembers’ annual attrition rates were 22.7 and 6.1 percent, respectively.³⁴ The data shows improvement in attrition rates over time. However, women still stand at a nearly 10-percent attrition rate. To add, GAO found that women, compared to men, are more than likely to leave at any point in time during their service—28 percent higher than males.³⁵ Figure 4’s line graph illustrates the attrition rates of women compared to men. In this figure, the reader can see a stark difference between the female data points

³³ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 51.

³⁴ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 16.

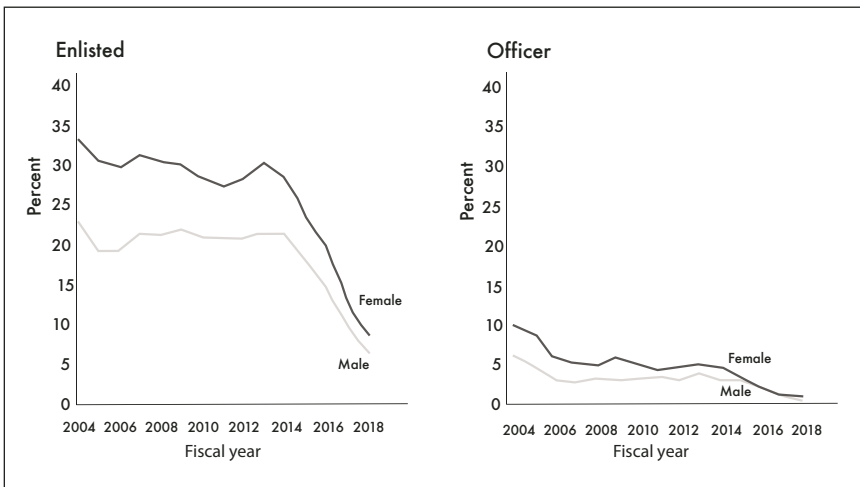
³⁵ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 18.

Figure 3. Percentages of male and female active-duty servicemembers, by years of service and pay grade, FY2004–18



Source: Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 15.

Figure 4. Active-duty servicemember annual attrition rates by gender and pay grade, FY2004–18



Source: *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts* (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 17.

dipping from 2004 to 2018. On the other hand, the male data points tend to plateau for the most part and spike upward the longer they are in service.

GAO analyzed 15 years of separation codes to examine the reasons females tend to separate at a higher rate than males. For enlisted personnel in table 1, the reasons for discharging trended higher on disability, parenthood, and pregnancy for the years 2004–13. However, no women left service from 2014 to 2018 due to pregnancy. An interesting statistical point regarding table 2 is that many female officers left service for reasons identified as “miscellaneous.” Unfortunately, this category was too broad to highlight key data points.

To paint a better picture, the GAO examined peer-reviewed research to look into other potential reasons for women leaving service. They found work schedules, deployment, organizational culture, family planning, sexual assault, and dependent care or being separated from a dependent for a long time as stated reasons.³⁶ Also, GAO consulted with and used data from multiple DACOWITS reports and found numerous recommendations that specifically target increasing representation of women but were not adopted by leadership. To that end, the GAO policy recommendation directs the secretary of defense to ensure the under secretary of defense for personnel and readi-

³⁶ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 28–30.

Table 1. The three most frequently used separation codes of enlisted active-duty servicemembers by gender and years of service, FY2004–18

Years of Service	Gender	Condition not a disability	Disability not combat (DES)	Disability, Permanent (DES)	Disability, permanent (legacy DES)	Disability, severe Ery (legacy DES)	Disability, Temporary (DES)	Disability, temporary (legacy DES)	Ery level performance and conduct	Failed medical/physical procurement standards	Miscellaneous/general reasons	Misconduct (dual)	Misconduct (official)	Parental or custody of minor children	Frequency of birth	Required for service	Subject for referral
2004-08	less than 3 years	Female	●			●									●		
	3 to less than 5 years	Female				●									●		
	5 to less than 10 years	Female				●								●			
	10 to less than 20 years	Female				●								●			
	20 years	Female				●								●			
	More than 20 years	Female				●								●			
	More than 20 years	Female			●												
	More than 20 years	Female	●														
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
2009-13	less than 3 years	Female															
	3 to less than 5 years	Female															
	5 to less than 10 years	Female															
	10 to less than 20 years	Female															
	20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
2014-18	less than 3 years	Female	●														
	3 to less than 5 years	Female		●													
	5 to less than 10 years	Female															
	10 to less than 20 years	Female															
	20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															
	More than 20 years	Female															

● One of the three most identified reasons for separation for that combination of years of service and gender.

DES Disability Evaluation System IDES Integrated Disability Evaluation System

Source: Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 23.

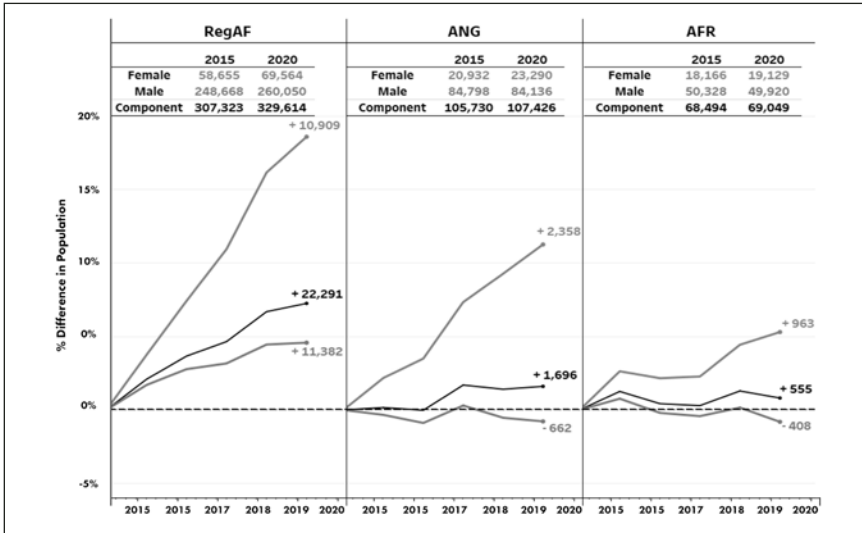
Table 2. The three most-frequently used separation codes of active-duty commissioned officers by gender and years of service, FY2004–18

		Condition, not a disability	Disability, not combat (IDES)	Disability, permanent (IDES)	Disability, permanent (legacy DES)	Disability, severance pay (legacy DES)	Disability, temporary (IDES)	Disability, temporary (legacy DES)	Entry level performance and conduct	Failed medical/physical procurement standards	Miscellaneous/general reasons	Misconduct (drug abuse)	Misconduct (serious offense)	Parenthood or custody of minor children	Pregnancy or child birth	Required active service	Sufficient service for retirement
2004-08	Less than 3 years																
	Female																
	Male																
	3 to less than 5 years																
	Female																
	Male																
	5 to less than 10 years																
	Female																
	Male																
	10 to less than 20 years																
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10 to less than 20 years																	
Female																	
Male																	
More than 20 years																	
Female																	
Male																	
2009-18																	
2014-18																	

● One of the three most identified reasons for separation for that combination of years of service and gender. DES Disability Evaluation System. IDES Integrated Disability Evaluation System

Source: Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2020), 25.

Figure 5. Change in Department of Air Force population's gender since 2015



Note(s): Component's change indicated by solid black line.

Data source: Total Human Resource Managers' Information System

Source: *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 12.

ness provides more explicit guidance, measures, and timeframes in upcoming diversity strategy plans to monitor female active-duty recruitment and retention efforts.³⁷

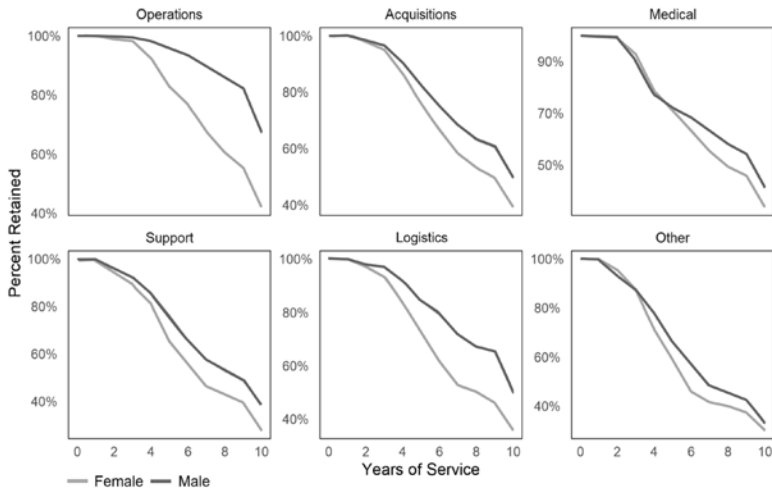
September 2021 Department of the Air Force Inspector General's Report of Inquiry (S8918P), Disparity Review

The 2021 disparity report dives into racial-ethnic and gender barriers, and the author will dissect Regular Air Force female information for this background. The inspector general's goal was to look into the Air Force's current state and hear from as many individuals as possible to understand the barriers limiting airmen's success. To capture this, they used the following methodology: "(a) anonymous surveys, (b) written feedback to DAF IG, (c) feedback through the DAF IG telephone and email hotline, (d) individual interviews of senior leaders, subject matter experts (SMEs), and service members, and (e) DAF IG group discussions with Airmen and Guardians across all MAJCOMs and FIELDCOMs."³⁸ More than 100,500 airmen voluntarily submitted

³⁷ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 40–41.

³⁸ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 2.

Figure 6. Regular Air Force gender disparity in officer retention, 2005–10



Data source: Total Human Resource Manager's Information System (THRMS)

Source: *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 89.

surveys with 16,900 pages of free-text comments.³⁹ Also, 122 small-group discussions were conducted to capture further disparities faced by the group.⁴⁰

The active-duty population of women in the Regular Air Force increased by more than 10,000 members between 2015 and 2020 (figure 5). The increase in population highlights the importance for the Air Force to accommodate issues related to gender.

Concerning retention rates, Regular Air Force Military Personnel Data System (MilPDS) data calculated that in 2005–10, 55 percent of female officers separated before 10 years of service, compared with a separation rate of 33 percent of male officers.⁴¹ Figure 6 demonstrates officer retention rates by occupation. The data points to the Air Force not doing a good job retaining women in all categories, with the highest fallout being in the operations field. According to the Department of the Air Force, it needed to retain 156 more female officers per year to match the retention rate of male officers.⁴²

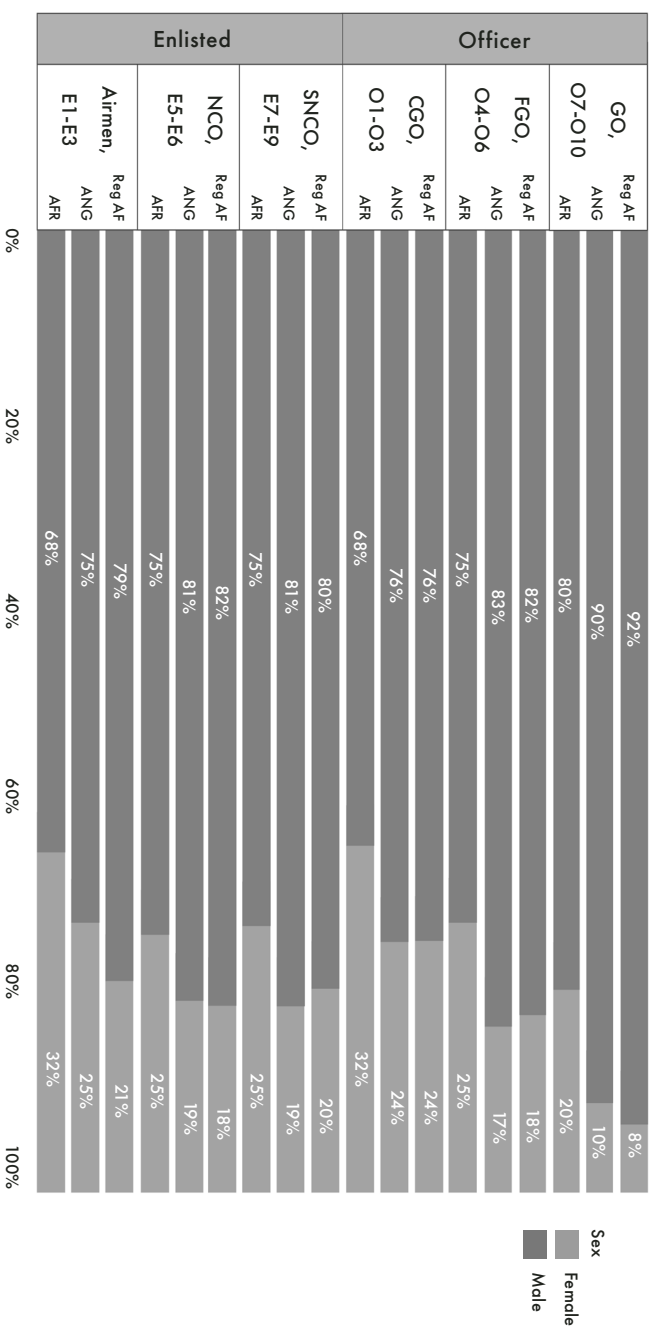
³⁹ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 2.

⁴⁰ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 2.

⁴¹ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 88.

⁴² *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 88.

Figure 7. Gender distribution by grade categories, 2015–20

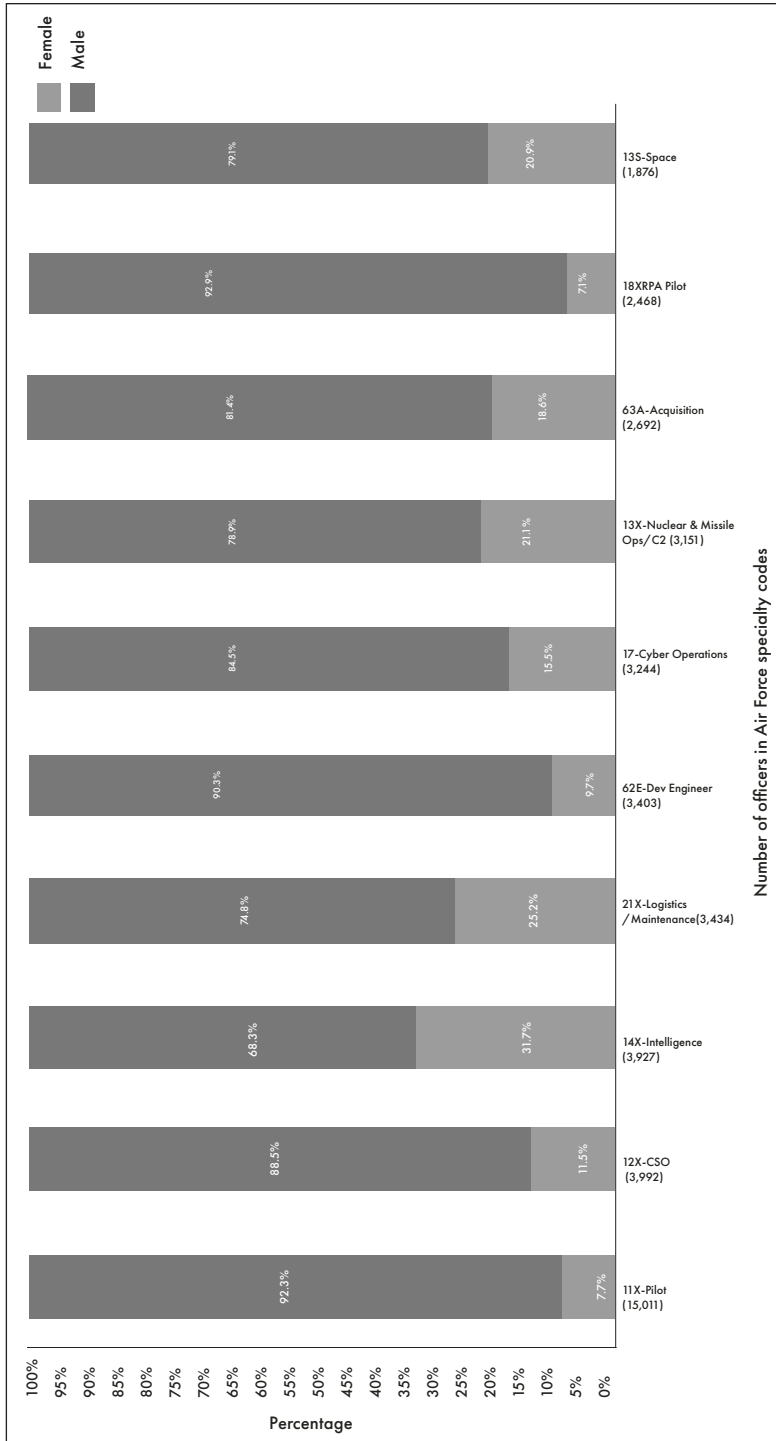


Note(s): Gender designated “Declined to Respond” are excluded from analysis. Pay Grades designated “Unknown” are excluded from analysis.

Data source: Total Human Resource Managers’ Information System (THRMS)

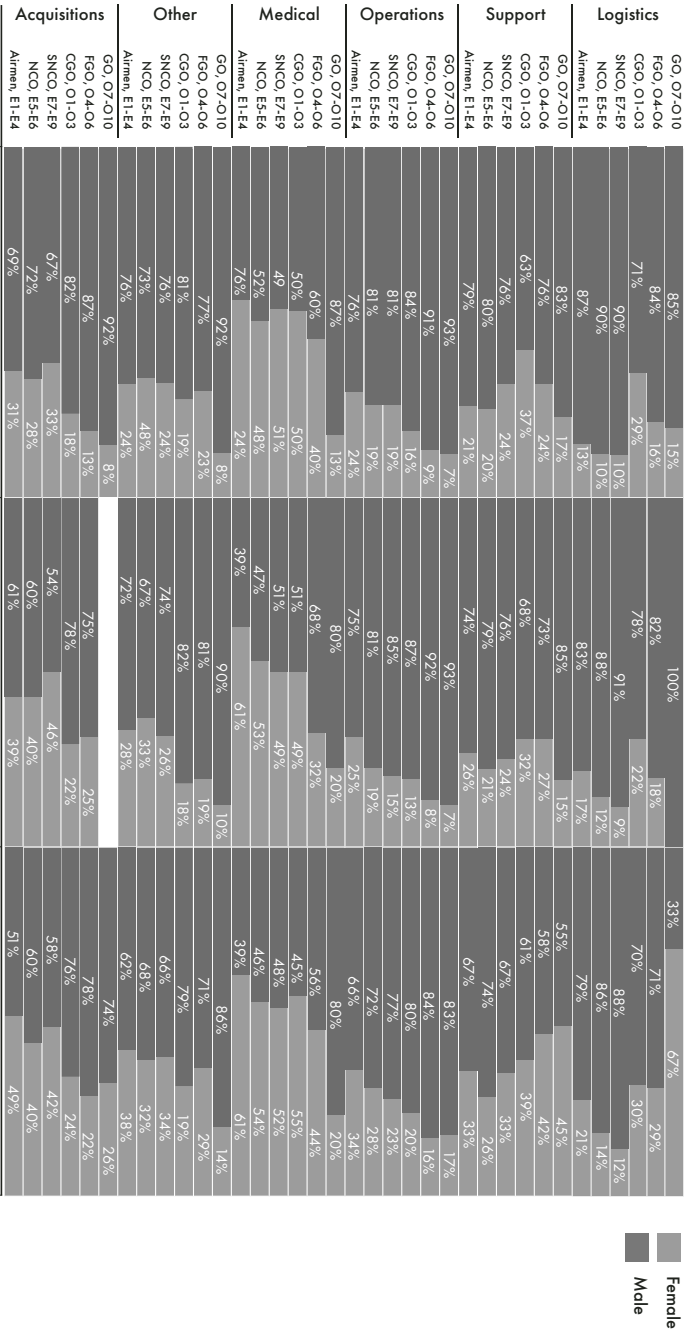
Source: Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 17.

Figure 8. Ten largest regular Air Force officer Air Force specialty codes by gender



Note: (Number of officers in AFSC)
 Source: Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 24.

Figure 9. Gender distribution: career fields by rank group, 2015–20



Note(s): Career fields categorized by prefix of AFSC ("1" = Operations, "2" = Logistic, "3" = Support, "4" = Medical, "6" = Acquisitions) Gender designated "Declined to respond" is excluded from analysis.
 Data source: Total Human Resource Managers' Information System (THRIMS)
 Source: Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 25.

Although figure 5 shows a dramatic increase of active-duty females joining the Air Force and figure 8 highlights low retention of women before 10 years of service, figure 7 provides the stark difference in military-grade comparing men to women. In a perfect world, true parity would split the percentage to an equal rate reflected by the census; however, this chart shows an overrepresentation of men in every rank. The most striking data point is within the officer O-7–O-10 grade. In this grade category, 8 percent of women achieved this rank compared to 92 percent of men. One can see that there may be issues blocking upward mobility of female airmen reaching the top.

Furthermore, figure 8 breaks down the female to the male population by occupation. The following fields have less than 10 percent of females serving: 11X-Pilot, 62E-Dev Engineering, 18X-RPA Pilot. Figure 9 continues to highlight the lack of women in different career fields.

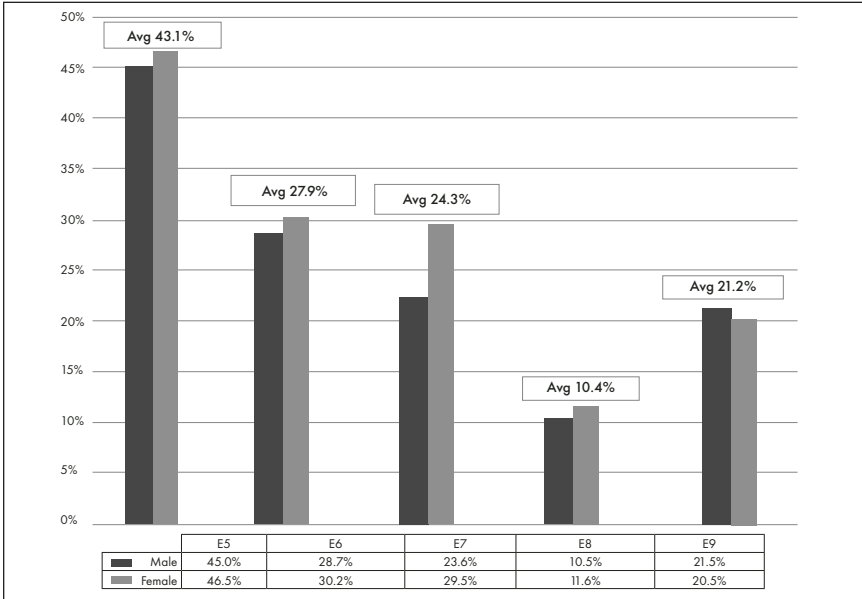
The DAF IG analyzed data on female Regular Air Force promotion and leadership. Although the data are shown above in figures 7–9 illustrate the lack of women in top grade categories and career fields, a deeper dive into the data demonstrates a gap in promotion rates for enlisted females serving the Air Force. With enlisted females, figure 10 relays they are overrepresented in the E-5–E-8 categories but fall short in the highest enlisted rank of E-9. Females are at 20.5 percent compared to their male counterparts at 21.5 percent.

On the flip side, there seems to be more parity or even an overrepresentation of female officers promoted at a higher rate (figure 11). However, the author and the DAF IG stress that the growth in the percentage of female officer promotions should not be seen as a successful program because of their decreased representation in the Air Force. Leadership opportunities for enlisted personnel are shown in figure 12. Table 3. provides the reader with published command candidate list (CCL) rates. The yellow highlights lower percentage rates. Outside of wing and group commands, women and White men have general representation among officer leadership.

The DAF IG's methodology provided an open platform and opportunity for airmen to shine light and document disparities that may contribute to the low female retention rate. Before displaying the disparities below, note that of the survey respondents, 67 percent are males while female respondents total 27 percent.⁴³ This is important to note because it underlines low female representation. The low percentage may show inconsistencies in all the disparities women face in the Regular Air Force. A top issue of concern and dissatisfaction comes from the mishandling or lack of handling sex-based discrimination or harassment from the chain of command. When a discrimination or harassment report was filed, 55 percent of the female respondents

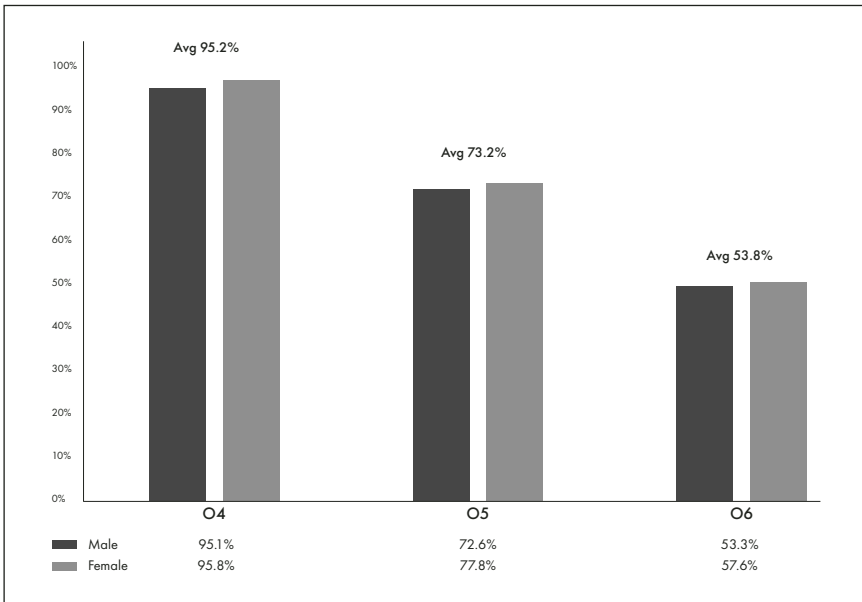
⁴³ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 173.

Figure 10. Regular Air Force enlisted promotion average rates by gender, 2016–20



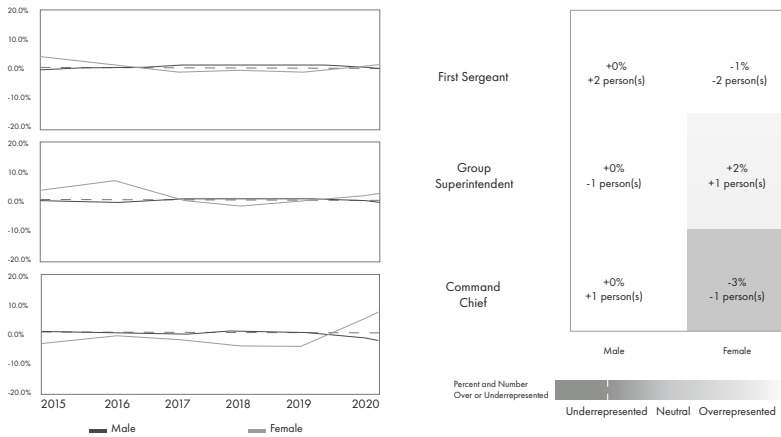
Source: Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 118.

Figure 11. Regular Air Force officer Line of the Air Force In-the-Promotion-Zone (LAF IPZ) promotion average rates by gender, 2016–20



Source: Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 128.

Figure 12. Regular Air Force gender disparity in enlisted leadership roles, 2015–20



Note: +/- person(s) are average per year

Benchmark: Corresponding Reg AF enlisted rank population

Data Source: Total Human Resource Managers' Information System (THRMIS)

Source: *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review* (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 142.

said the chain of command dismissed, ignored, or did nothing to proceed with the claim. Other women wrote that supervisors either blamed them, “females,” or told them to drop the report or stop being “too sensitive.” Sixty-six percent of female respondents did not contact the chain of command due to a lack of trust in handling claims.⁴⁴

November 2021 Department of the Air Force Inspector General's Report of Inquiry Addendum, Disparity Review (S8918P)

This report focuses on the intersection between race/ethnicity and gender. The addendum was created and filed after the September 2021 disparity report found the Air Force had an overrepresentation of white women in the data, which may have blanketed issues affecting women of color. Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall stated and believes that “where barriers exist, we need to break them down. I am convinced diversity in our force makes us a stronger team and more capable to answer our nation’s call.”⁴⁵ With this addendum, the Air Force sought to ensure the Service holistically tackles and addresses all issues affecting women.

⁴⁴ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 190.

⁴⁵ Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs, “Department of the Air Force Releases Addendum to Disparity Review,” press release, 9 November 2021.

Table 3. Command candidate list select rates, 2017–22

2017 CCL select rates									
	Overall	White	Black	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic/Latino	Female	
Wing/CC	19%	15%	15%	13%	40%	0%	14%	23%	Female
SML	48%	45%	71%	NA	NA	NA	50%	56%	56%
Group/CC	52%	54%	41%	28%	0%	50%	48%	41%	41%
HP	12%	13%	12%	8%	NA	33%	6%	19%	19%
2018 CCL select rates									
	Overall	White	Black	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic/Latino	Female	
Wing/CC	19%	20%	17%	13%	50%	0%	8%	20%	Female
SML	78%	76%	88%	67%	NA	NA	60%	78%	78%
Group/CC	57%	59%	43%	23%	NA	60%	50%	56%	56%
HP	13%	13%	16%	8%	NA	0%	7%	16%	16%
2019 CCL select rates									
	Overall	White	Black	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic/Latino	Female	
Wing/CC	32%	33%	25%	25%	NA	50%	18%	30%	Female
SML	89%	89%	84%	100%	NA	NA	100%	100%	100%
Group/CC	64%	64%	67%	14%	NA	0%	63%	71%	71%
HP	12%	12%	12%	15%	NA	0%	8%	13%	13%
2020 CSB select rates									
	Overall	White	Black	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic/Latino	Female	
Wing/CC	44%	46%	34%	33%	NA	NA	13%	54%	54%
SML	84%	84%	100%	50%	0%	0%	73%	100%	100%
Group/CC	77%	78%	74%	59%	100%	100%	83%	86%	86%
HP	16%	17%	13%	11%	0%	50%	5%	19%	19%
2021 CSB select rates									
	Overall	White	Black	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic/Latino	Female	
Wing/CC	36%	37%	29%	20%	NA	NA	46%	30%	30%
SML	84%	84%	100%	50%	NA	NA	73%	100%	100%
Group/CC	69%	71%	65%	45%	100%	NA	67%	66%	66%
HP	31%	32%	29%	7%	NA	NA	1%	31%	31%
2022 CSB select rates									
	Overall	White	Black	Asian American	Pacific Islander	Native American	Hispanic/Latino	Female	
Wing/CC	39%	39%	38%	50%	NA	0%	47%	33%	33%
SML	93%	92%	100%	NA	NA	NA	88%	100%	100%
Group/CC	72%	72%	87%	67%	100%	100%	84%	73%	73%
HP	33%	35%	20%	42%	0%	50%	44%	38%	38%

Source: Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 150.

The importance of the DAF IG and leadership's decision to further review barriers for women through the cross-section of race/ethnicity and gender are shown in table 4. Table 4 shows the Air Force civilian and military representation in 2015–20. White women's overall representation was 11.48 percent during these years, with 10.16 percent represented as active-duty personnel. On the flip side, females of color together (Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, multi-racial, Native American, Pacific Islander) totaled 9.3 percent in uniformed representation with 9.45 percent as active-duty personnel.

Women of color faced the same barriers as their White counterparts. However, the disparity was most stark with Black, multiracial, Native American, and Hispanic/Latino in disciplinary and administrative actions and promotion and leadership opportunities. Women of color were court martialed more often, promoted less often, and afforded fewer leadership opportunities.

Last, a closer look in the freeform response section of the DAF IG survey, "The Voice of the Airman and Guardian," reveals that women in all minority groups were less likely to receive the benefit of the doubt in disciplinary actions. This was in addition to all the female struggles listed in the original 2021 disparity report.⁴⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Air Force has made strides in increasing female participation in the Service. However, although the female population has increased over time, women are more likely to leave the Service at a higher pace than their male counterparts. To learn about underlying issues affecting women in the Air Force, the DAF IG published several reports in 2021. In these reports and as described above, the DAF IG disparity reports identify a plethora of concerns that miss the mark and may shed light on ways of increasing retention rates. Some of the reoccurring themes for women as a whole include gender bias, lack of trust in the chain of command, sexual harassment/assault reporting issues, and a gap in promotion and leadership roles. Particular to women of color is the addition of being court-martialed at a higher rate, with the problems stated above affecting them at a higher rate too. Fixing and addressing these barriers can increase female retention rates, and the following are author recommendations.

Although the Air Force has acknowledged its deficiencies in its disparity reports, it must increase female representation to 50.8 percent, mirroring census data. The author further advises that the Air Force reflect census data for all female race/ethnicity categories if it aims for a more factual representation of the female population. As seen above, an overrepresentation of the White female population could have

⁴⁶ *Report of Inquiry (S8918P) Disparity Review*, 177–78.

Table 4. Department of the Air Force civilian and military representation, 2015–20

DAF

CY15-CY20	Civilian		Uniformed	
	Mean annual population	Percent	Mean annual population	Mean annual population 2015-2020
Asian	Female	1.6%	4296	0.87%
	Male	2.7%	13522	2.73%
Asian				
Both (F+M)		6.58%	17818	3.60%
African American	Female	4.3%	20545	4.1%
	Male	7.2%	43602	8.80%
Black				
Both (F+M)		13.43%	64146	12.9%
Hispanic/Latino	Female	2.7%	15452	3.1%
	Male	5.3%	48738	9.84%
Hispanic/Latino				
Both (F+M)		8.0%	64189	12.9%
Multiracial	Female	0.0%	3761	0.7%
	Male	0.0%	10333	2.0%
Multiracial				
Both (F+M)		0.0%	14094	2.8%
Native American	Female	0.5%	630	0.1%
	Male	1.3%	1452	0.2%
Native American				
Both (F+M)		1.9%	2082	0.4%
Pacific Islander	Female	0.2%	133	0.2%
	Male	0.4%	3546	0.7%
Pacific Islander				
Both (F+M)		0.6%	4892	0.9%
White	Female	18.7%	56855	11.4%
	Male	72.81	261903	52.8%
White				
Both (F+M)		71.5%	319758	64.3%
Total	Female	44.4%	104691	21.2%
	Male	10544.3	390342	78.8%
Total			495334	
Declined to respond				
Female		2.0%	2101	0.4%
Male		7246	1.4%	
Both		9347	1.9%	

Uniformed (Officers + Enlisted)

CY15-CY20	Reg AF		ANG		ARR	
	Mean annual population	Percent	Mean annual population	Percent	Mean annual population	Percent
Asian	Female	0.8%	792	0.2%	870	1.2%
	Male	2.2%	2691	2.5%	2057	2.9%
Asian						
Both (F+M)		11.4%	3483	3.2%	2927	4.2%
African American	Female	4.0%	3007	2.8%	4445	6.4%
	Male	9.5%	6217	5.8%	6999	10.1%
Black						
Both (F+M)		13.5%	9284	8.7%	11443	16.5%
Hispanic/Latino	Female	3.3%	2668	2.5%	2186	3.1%
	Male	10.9%	8273	7.7%	5322	7.2%
Hispanic/Latino						
Both (F+M)		14.2%	10941	10.2%	7458	10.8%
Multiracial	Female	0.8%	475	0.4%	489	0.7%
	Male	2.5%	1223	1.1%	813	1.1%
Multiracial						
Both (F+M)		0.0%	14094	2.8%	1301	1.8%
Native American	Female	0.1%	155	0.1%	117	0.1%
	Male	0.2%	361	0.4%	187	0.2%
Native American						
Both (F+M)		0.3%	516	0.4%	304	0.4%
Pacific Islander	Female	0.2%	296	0.2%	285	0.4%
	Male	0.6%	793	0.2%	609	0.8%
Pacific Islander						
Both (F+M)		0.6%	4892	0.9%	894	1.3%
White	Female	10.1%	14426	13.5%	9950	14.3%
	Male	51.5%	63891	59.4%	33389	48.2%
White						
Both (F+M)		71.5%	319758	64.3%	43239	62.7%
Declined to respond	Female	0.4%	223	0.2%	383	0.5%
	Male	1.4%	1035	0.9%	1010	1.4%
Declined to respond						
Both (F+M)		2.0%	1257	1.1%	1393	2.0%
Total	Female	22.0%	22103	20.7%	18675	27.0%
	Male	2557.5	84482	79.2%	50385	72.9%
Total		319799	106584		68960	

Source: Report of Inquiry Addendum (S8918P) Disparity Review (Washington, DC: Department of the Air Force, 2021), 8.

created a bias gap if addressed without the last disparity report that only focused on the cross-section of race and gender.

In January 2021, Secretary Austin attempted to shut down DACOWITS. This long-standing advisory committee has focused on advocating for female-related military issues since the 1950s.⁴⁷ After much public attention, Austin determined DACOWITS would remain a stand-alone advisory committee in August 2021. However, as of this writing, DACOWITS has not restarted, and leadership positions and membership are vacant with only support staff employed.⁴⁸ Further, there was a missed opportunity to provide 2021 policy recommendations due to the temporary shutdown. The author recommends that the Air Force advocate for DACOWITS to become fully operational with a prioritized educational campaign to increase its membership and diversity. The Air Force should push DOD to retain a goal that should be 100-percent membership. The Air Force should encourage DACOWITS to create an ad hoc committee on the Air Force. This committee's first focus should be on the current disparity reports. In the past, DACOWITS members published annual reports voicing concerns and recommending practical solutions: "Between 1951 and 2020, DACOWITS made more than 1,000 recommendations to the SecDef, and approximately 97 percent of them were either fully or partially enacted."⁴⁹ The GAO found that recommendations raised by this advisory committee that addressed retention issues were not adopted.⁵⁰ If this is accurate, the reasons should be published in future reports.

In December 2021, the NDAA was signed into law, which made sweeping changes to how the military handled sexual offenses. It most importantly addressed female concerns about the lack of trust in the chain of command by removing prosecution decisions away from the chain of command pertaining to sex crimes. A month later, President Joseph R. Biden signed an executive order including sexual harassment as an offense in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ)—a recommendation coming from Secretary Austin's Independent Review Commission on Sexual

⁴⁷ Hope Hodge Seck, "DOD Quietly Calls for Shutdown of 70-year-old Committee on Women in the Military," *Military.com*, 24 June 2021.

⁴⁸ Editor's note: DACOWITS was restored and new leadership appointed in 2022. Department of Defense, "DOD Announces DACOWITS Restoration and New Leadership Cadre," press release, 22 March 2022.

⁴⁹ *Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services 2020 Annual Report* (Alexandria, VA: DACOWITS, 2020), 2.

⁵⁰ *Report to Congressional Committees: Female Active-duty Personnel—Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts*, 37.

Assault in the Military.⁵¹ The author recommends that the Air Force prioritize educating its servicemembers on these changes and to perform periodical reviews on its effectiveness from reporting to prosecution and then to publish its findings.

Table 1 and table 2 above highlight the three most frequently used separation codes. An area of concern is that the top code used for separation of active-duty commissioned officers was *miscellaneous*. All codes should be written out and recorded. Further, they should be publicly published.

A common theme found in the GAO report and DAF IG disparity reports is gender bias. A consequence of discrimination is the missed opportunities of being included in informal networking settings or discussions on promotional leads.⁵² The author's research found that females need to conform to White male culture to get ahead. In other words, women may be sacrificing their identity and uniqueness to be seen as equal or a more qualified colleagues, stifling innovation during the process. The Air Force can take steps to address bias. First, servicemembers need to understand the many types of unconscious bias by attending in-person workshops hosted by the DOD Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Then the Air Force would benefit from interrupting the unconscious bias by instituting a diversity and inclusion (D+I) competencies framework. According to Brown et al., "Companies that have instituted D+I competencies and hold employees accountable for inclusive behaviors in their job duties and responsibilities are making real progress with respect to diversity."⁵³ Some may argue that a more objective approach to female advancement is more beneficial than being accountable for adhering to a framework. For example, a study that looked into the "Navy's reliance on objective standards to prevent discrimination in promotions and retention" found that there will be bias from that person as long as there is a gatekeeper.⁵⁴ A standardized D+I framework that holds each servicemember accountable can jumpstart the way individuals think about diversity. Also, leadership can enforce repeat offenses for those who do not grade well within the D+I framework, which weakens national security in the long term. This framework can help jumpstart culture change.

⁵¹ White House, "Fact Sheet: Executive Order, 2022 Amendments to the Manual for Courts-Martial," press release, 26 January 2022; *Hard Truths and the Duty to Change: Recommendations from the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military* (Washington, DC: Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military, Department of Defense, 2021); and Exec. Order No. 14062, 8 Fed. Reg. 4763 (26 January 2022).

⁵² Brittlea Brown, Renee Carlucci, and Sarah Stewart, "The Consequences of Bias: We Live in a World Designed for Men," *Phalanx* 53, no. 4 (2020): 26–33.

⁵³ Brown, Carlucci, and Stewart, "The Consequences of Bias: We Live in a World Designed for Men," 29.

⁵⁴ Amos Golan, William H. Greene, and Jeffrey M. Perloff, "Does the U.S. Navy's Reliance on Objective Standards Prevent Discrimination in Promotions and Retentions?," *PLoS ONE* 16, no. 4 (April 28, 2021): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250630>.

CONCLUSION

The Air Force needs to make a concise and directed effort to address women's barriers and increase retention rates. The published disparity reports exposed many obstacles affecting female servicemembers. The Air Force can streamline solutions if it uses its platform to encourage DOD leadership to speed up DACOWITS selection of a diverse board and membership and create an ad hoc committee on Air Force. This committee can analyze and provide recommendations on all line items supplied by the most recent reports. Then, the Air Force leadership can set expectations for its chain of command and membership by supporting and enforcing the most recent changes to the UCMJ. The third is to expand and publicize all separation codes. This move can help provide transparency and keep track of changes to disparities in real-time. Fourth, the Air Force should explore creating a D+I competencies framework. This framework should include a grading system for the chain of command on its work to be purposefully inclusive. The Air Force can work with the DOD Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on this task. The Air Force can also encourage hosting in-person unconscious bias training as part of its framework. Dispelling stereotypes and exposing blind spots to gender bias is daily work. It can help shift the culture to be more inclusive and less white male-oriented when done intentionally, thus, a positive work culture and higher female retention rates.

CHAPTER 4

GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN SOMALIA

By Captain Brianna Burgett, USMC

Somalia's history is one filled with clan disputes, separationist movements, a fall from a semiestablished government into a failed state, and ongoing conflict with al-Shabaab, a violent extremist organization (VEO). Years of violence, poverty, dwindling employment opportunities, and political/economical marginalization drove recruitment for al-Shabaab, often by Somalis seeking to support and protect themselves and their families.¹ Exacerbating this confluence of domestic strife are failures by the international community to resolve the political, social, and military instabilities that ravage Somalia.² Yet, looking at the historic, political, and cultural aspects without considering the most vulnerable portion of the population risks repeating many of the missteps and extending the current state of disorder. If true peace and stability are the end state, then all portions of the population must have representation at the negotiating table to determine the direction of the country. Incorporating a gender perspective into the political, military/police, economic, social, information, infrastructure, physical/environment, and time (PMESII-PT) assessment framework, provides an opportunity to consider factors that influence the population and can guide the U.S. national security community and the international community as they seek to support the Somali government in rebuilding its country. To ensure a holistic and well-informed understanding of the environment, military professionals need to integrate a gendered perspective into their analysis and recommendations for the *military* in PMESII-PT by incorporating four key principles from the Women, Peace, and Security mandate: participation, prevention, protection, and peacebuilding.³ This should be done at the operational level by establishing safety and security as a priority within the military to protect all members of the forces and vulnerable portions of society, ensuring equitable participation and representation of women in the military, and incorporating women into leadership and decision-making roles in the military to increase operational effectiveness.

¹ Muhsin Hassan, "Understanding Drivers of Violent Extremism: The Case of al-Shabab and Somali Youth," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 15, no. 8 (August 2012): 18–20.

² Abdi Shuriye, "The Inveterate Failures of the International Community on Somali Impasse," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 12, no. 7 (2012): 927–37.

³ Ingvild Magnaes Gjelsvik, "Women, Peace and Security in Somalia: A Study of AMISOM," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs policy brief no. 16, 2013.

PMESII-PT AND A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE

PMESII-PT is a tool for the military to organize information, analyze data, and develop strategies that provide context to the complexities within a society that impact the operating environment. Dr. James M. Minnich expanded this framework to incorporate aspects and factors that captured the perspectives of all segments of society: men, women, girls, and boys.⁴ He emphasized the importance of applying a gender security frame or perspective to better understand all segments of the population and highlighted the value of integrating each of the operational variables of the PMESII-PT framework with the gendered security principles.⁵ Considering each aspect of the framework ensures a holistic approach to a dynamic environment such as Somalia. It focuses planners' efforts on understanding and analyzing the *military* aspect to better address existing deficiencies, including the lack of protection and participation for women in the Somali military.

PROTECTION

As is common in many protracted conflict zones and nations with structural gender inequality, Somalia has struggled to cope with a rise in gender-based violence in recent years.⁶ This is a critical concern that military leadership must address both to gain trust from the population and to encourage increased participation from women in the armed forces. Despite the existing legal protection from the government concerning sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), it continues to plague Somalia due to the weak rule of law, gender inequality, continuing insecurity, and massive displacement, which can continue to challenge any substantial improvements to women in Somalia's involvement in the military.⁷ The internally displaced persons in particular remain vulnerable due to their limited access to protection mechanisms, a lack of clan protection, and origins from marginalized groups. Not only are internally displaced persons vulnerable to SGBV from members of al-Shabaab but also from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers and government-backed military members.⁸ While laws exist that criminalize killing and raping, those laws are not frequently enforced and the negative patterns continue with impunity.⁹ Growing

⁴ Professor James M. Minnich, "Gendered Security and Gendered Security Analysis Tool (GSAT)," 4 August 2020, YouTube video, 3:19.

⁵ Minnich, "Gendered Security and Gendered Security Analysis Tool."

⁶ "Somalia," Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Sexual Violence in Conflict, United Nations, accessed 30 March 2021.

⁷ "Country Policy and Information Note—Somalia: Women Fearing Gender-based Violence," version 4.0, Independent Advisory Group on Country Information, United Kingdom Home Office policy note, 4 April 2018, 5.

⁸ "Country Policy and Information Note—Somalia: Women Fearing Gender-based Violence," 5.

⁹ "Country Policy and Information Note—Somalia: Women Fearing Gender-based Violence," 5.

public pressure drove authorities to increase prosecutions on such attacks, though, demonstrated in 2020 when the government executed two Somali soldiers after being convicted of raping a young boy.¹⁰ Similarly, in 2020, the military court prosecuted members from the Somali Army involved in raping a pregnant woman and a 13-year-old girl, insisting on upholding the troops' mandate to protect civilians and harshly condemning their actions.¹¹ Although there is little research on SGBV within the Somali military ranks, the strong stance the military is taking on accountability of their members participating in these types of crimes is a positive indicator of the increased commitment to upholding laws and regulations. Following decades of failing to protect the most vulnerable populations, the new Somali government and military leaders must address these serious challenges and prosecute those involved in perpetuating these atrocities if they are to regain the trust of the population and to pave the way for women to participate in the military. They must establish clear ethical standards to prevent further brutality and violence as well as investigate and prosecute all allegations of crimes committed by members of the military. Promoting safety and security within the military is also a critical first step to enable safe participation for women in the armed forces.

PARTICIPATION

In addition to establishing a safe and secure environment in the military for women, military leaders need to address many of the cultural norms that discourage female participation. As a conservative society, Somalia ascribes to traditional gender roles where women's responsibilities are primarily domestic and their participation within the community has historically been low.¹² Yet, a gradual shift in societal norms is incrementally increasing an acceptance in women's expanding roles. In 2016, the government established a quota of 30 percent for women's participation in a new parliament that sparked much interest in the international community.¹³ Recent changes of increased women within military ranks, though, failed to garner the same international attention and support.¹⁴ After driving al-Shabaab out of the capital in 2011, Somali Army officials began reporting an increase of female army recruits.¹⁵ This is a positive trend that demonstrates an opportunity to build momentum, yet many

¹⁰ Abdi Guled, "Somalia Executes Soldiers Convicted for Boy's Fatal Rape," Associated Press, 18 August 2020.

¹¹ Garowe Online, "Somalia SNA Soldiers Allegedly Rape Pregnant Woman and Girl in Town Liberated from Al-Shabab," *Garowe*, 16 April 2020.

¹² Omar Mahmood, "Women Claim Their Place in Somalia's Politics," Institute for Security Studies, 14 September 2018.

¹³ Mahmood, "Women Claim Their Place in Somalia's Politics."

¹⁴ Mahmood, "Women Claim Their Place in Somalia's Politics."

¹⁵ Abdi Guled, "Female Soldiers Join the Army Ranks in Somalia," AP News, 28 May 2014.

challenges and barriers for entry still exist for female soldiers. Joining the military often costs women their marriages and family relations due to the prevailing negative cultural perceptions of women serving in the military.¹⁶ Once a part of the military, women face systemic discrimination and inequality, which results in most women still being confined to menial roles.¹⁷ Despite these challenges, the number of women serving in the Somali military slowly rises. By 2021, there were approximately 1,500 women in an army of 20,000, or about 7.5 percent of the total force.¹⁸ It is important for the government to deliberately support this incremental progress in the military to continue achieving unprecedented changes for women as they begin to rise to senior ranks in the Somali military for the first time.¹⁹

Conversely, gender parity within AMISOM, which promotes its support for United Nations (UN) Resolution 1325 outlining greater protection and empowerment of women, has still not been achieved; women comprise only 1.49 percent of AMISOM's military force.²⁰ While AMISOM and similar peacekeeping missions rely on the troop-contributing countries (TCC) for personnel, and those countries decide who they send, there have been limited efforts to increase recruitment and retention of women.²¹ To have equitable participation and representation among genders in the military, the African Union, UN, and international community need to look within their own organizations and address this challenge before they try to persuade others of the value and importance of this objective. Ensuring equitable and increased participation in the military is only the first step to fully incorporating women into the organization. The goal should not only be increasing the number of women serving in the military, but also the equity and equality necessary for women to achieve parity. To succeed in this endeavor, increasing participation must be accompanied by efforts to provide access to leadership and decision-making roles for women that will increase the organization's operational effectiveness.

PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING

Although increasing levels of women's participation and representation in the military are significant milestones for Somalia, ensuring that women's roles are meaningful contributions is just as crucial. Women's participation in peace and decision-making processes have been linked to higher effectiveness in establishing sustainable peace as

¹⁶ Guled, "Female Soldiers Join the Army Ranks in Somalia."

¹⁷ Guled, "Female Soldiers Join the Army Ranks in Somalia."

¹⁸ Abdi Dahir, "Somalia's Army Told Her to Sew a Skirt. Now She's One of Its Top Officers," *New York Times*, 18 May 2021.

¹⁹ Dahir, "Somalia's Army Told Her to Sew a Skirt. Now She's One of Its Top Officers."

²⁰ Gjelsvik, "Women, Peace and Security in Somalia: A Study of AMISOM," 3.

²¹ Gjelsvik, "Women, Peace and Security in Somalia: A Study of AMISOM," 3.

well as successful early warning systems for conflicts.²² As noted earlier, women filling menial administrative positions within the Somali military has been a key challenge for breaking down the barriers to their full integration and acceptance within the organization. Similarly, female peacekeepers within the AMISOM forces typically fill supportive roles rather than high-ranking/decision-making positions, making it difficult to quantitatively analyze changes or benefits from adding women to the mission.²³ Narrowing the integration of women in the Somali military decreases operational effectiveness in the peacebuilding process and for preventing conflicts. Marginalization and exclusion of women in leadership positions in the military and in peace processes prevents their perspectives, concerns, and needs from being incorporated into the new constitutions and within their organizations. Continuing to exclude women from positions of power and from participating in peace agreements will keep gender perspectives absent from the outcomes. Many layers of society will not be recognized. This exclusion is counterproductive to the efforts as recent research has demonstrated that the more inclusive the peace processes, the higher the chances are for a successful negotiation and achieving sustainable peace.²⁴ Another key benefit to increasing women in decision-making roles is that incorporating gender-sensitive factors of instability, such as an increase of domestic violence, helps to anticipate conflict as early warning indicators.²⁵ Expanding the roles of women in the military supports increased effectiveness at achieving sustainable peace and establishing conflict indicators, which are primary aspects of a successful transition following military operations.

Complex operating environments such as Somalia require military professionals to provide the most comprehensive analysis of the operating environment. This demands integrating a gendered perspective into the analysis and recommendations to represent and better understand how conflict affects all portions of the population. By establishing safety and security for women in the military as a priority, ensuring equitable participation and representation for women in the military, and incorporating women into leadership and decision-making roles, military leaders can better account for the most vulnerable portions of society while increasing the operational effectiveness and achieving sustainable peace solutions. While there has been slow progress made in several aspects to incorporate women into decision-making processes for determining the future of Somalia, there are still massive areas of opportunity to expand their voice and representation. Doing so will allow all segments of

²² Kristin Lund and Laura Mitchell, "Preventing Crisis and Conflict: Women's Role in Ongoing Peace Processes," *UN Chronicle* 3, no. 54 (October 2017).

²³ Gjelsvik, "Women, Peace and Security in Somalia: A Study of AMISOM," 3.

²⁴ Lund and Michell, "Preventing Crisis and Conflict: Women's Role in Ongoing Peace Processes."

²⁵ Susanne Schmeidl and Eugenia Piza-Lopez, *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Framework for Action* (London: International Alert, 2002), 13, 26.

the population to be represented for the first time in Somali history as well as increase the likelihood of long-term success for these endeavors. If peace and stability are the end state, everyone must have a voice. If that is the future that Somalia and the international community hope to achieve, they need to improve how they approach the problem by supporting equitable representation and participation for all portions of the population.

CHAPTER 5

MORE EFFECTIVE COERCIVE DIPLOMACY A GENDERED APPROACH

By Lieutenant Colonel Alyssa Y. Astphan, USARNG

INTRODUCTION

Coercive diplomacy remains one of the most challenging policy options that states execute. Two studies found U.S. success in only 31 percent and 17 percent of military coercion cases analyzed.¹ Though scholars offer many explanations for the track record of more failures than successes, recent literature argues that these failures partly result from insufficient use of credible assurances.² Examining the influence of gender perceptions within a national strategic culture of hegemonic masculinity further illuminates understandings of credible assurances. Specifically, they contribute to the United States' overemphasis on credible threats and underemphasis on credible assurances, exacerbating the difficulty in achieving coercive policies. Future coercive diplomacy execution that considers and incorporates gender analysis yields greater chances for policy success and more tangibly supports the achievement of U.S. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) objectives.

BACKGROUND

Successful coercive diplomacy relies on both credible threats and credible assurances. Thomas Schelling notes the same in his seminal work on coercion theory, yet he devotes significantly more space to credible threats than to credible assurances.³ This trend continues in recent scholarship that asserts that greater relative power by the coercer negatively impacts the credibility of their assurances while increasing the credibility of their threats in post-Cold War international security policy.⁴ Further, states with a reputation for restraint positively impact future coercion attempts, indicating that perceptions of U.S. credibility in assurances are significantly more difficult due to its considerable military power and reputation for a willingness to use force versus

¹ Peter Viggo Jakobsen, "Pushing the Limits of Military Coercion Theory," *International Studies Perspectives* 12, no. 2 (May 2011): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2011.00425.x>.

² Matthew D. Cebul, Allan Dafoe, and Nuno P. Monteiro, "Coercion and the Credibility of Assurances," *Journal of Politics* 83, no. 3 (July 2021): 975, <https://doi.org/10.1086/711132>.

³ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 74. In his chapter on credibility, Schelling devotes 56 pages of 57 to credible threats, with roughly 1 page devoted to assurances.

⁴ Cebul, Dafoe, and Monteiro, "Coercion and Credibility of Assurances," 976.

restraint.⁵ This initial gendered analysis of threats and assurances builds on existing literature to reveal insights into the causes of past failures and pathways to future success in coercive diplomacy.

Attempts to engage in gender analysis first require defining *gender*, as scholars use the term in different ways. Some studies use gender to describe men and women as players in international policy. Others use gender as a construct, describing the characteristics and stereotypes informing perceptions of how actors perform gender and its relation to evaluations of power.⁶ Significantly, “gender is not just about women; men are also affected by gender norms: both women and men perform gender . . . gender norms and expectations also affect the behavior of male policymakers.”⁷ The following discussion includes both meanings, with gender as a construct used to illuminate the influence on national security and coercive diplomacy and *women or men* used to address policy implications for actors in coercive diplomacy who may or may not embody—but are bound by the perceptions and expectations of—gender stereotypes.

Expanding the participation of women in national security processes is a point of emphasis in the U.S. WPS strategy. It comprises three strategy objectives and three lines of effort that focus on increasing the inclusion of women and, to a much lesser extent, employing gender analysis to enhance government WPS activities.⁸ The widespread view of women as peacemakers frame this strategic approach.⁹ Specifically, “the possibility that the very stereotype portraying women as more peace-oriented than men—regardless of its validity—may grant women an increased capability of waging or promoting peace, through their higher ability to elicit support for peace proposals.”¹⁰ These stereotypes provide critical implications for coercive diplomacy and offer one avenue through which the United States brings gender to the fore in future policy execution.

⁵ Cebul, Dafoe, and Monteiro, “Coercion and Credibility of Assurances,” 979–81.

⁶ Carol Cohn, “Wars, Wimps, and Women: Talking Gender and Thinking War,” in *Gendering War Talk*, ed. Miriam G. Cook and Angela Woollacott (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 230.

⁷ Madison Schramm and Alexandra Stark, “Peacemakers or Iron Ladies?: A Cross-National Study of Gender and International Conflict,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 3 (May 2020): 547, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1763450>.

⁸ *United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: White House, 2019), 5–6.

⁹ Ifat Maoz, “The Women and Peace Hypothesis?: The Effect of Opponent Negotiators’ Gender on the Evaluation of Compromise Solutions in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *International Negotiation* 14, no. 3 (January 2009): 520, <https://doi.org/10.1163/138234009X12481782336267>.

¹⁰ Maoz, “The Women and Peace Hypothesis?,” 520.

GENDER IN NATIONAL SECURITY CULTURE AND COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Existing scholarship on the role of gender in related national security policy theory and application provides a framework through which alternative explanations for coercive diplomacy challenges come to light. It finds that U.S. national security culture prefers masculine-associated behaviors and policy options demonstrating strength, dominance, and aggression. This culture of hegemonic masculinity feeds perceptions of threats as masculine and assurances as feminine. These findings illuminate the influence of gender in the overemphasis of credible threats and the underemphasis of credible assurances in suboptimal coercion.

Gender in National Security Culture

Feminist critical analyses of national security highlight the role of gender in national security culture and its implications for policymaking and decision-making. These analyses posit that confidence, aggression, rationality, strength, dominance, and an inclination toward the use or threat to use force align with masculine gender norms and stereotypes.¹¹ In contrast, they find “cooperation, interdependence, accommodation, concern for others, tolerance and pacifism,” and an inclination toward peace associated with feminine gender norms and stereotypes.¹² These gender norms and stereotypes influence state and individual perceptions and expectations of national security behavior.

Critically, research finds that states value policy options and decisions that signal masculinity, comprising a culture of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity means “the markers of militarized masculinity—toughness, responsibility for protection, assertiveness in decision making, and the importance of maintaining reputation—become the standard for what it means to be ‘a man,’ and are valued above all other characteristics.”¹³ Importantly, it is not an enduring culture, but instead occurs only during periods of “heightened nationalism or threat,” indicating that the preference for masculine-associated policies underlying a state’s strategic culture exerts

¹¹ Cohn, “Wars, Wimps, and Women,” 236; Maoz, “The Women and Peace Hypothesis,” 521; and Daniel Naurin, Elin Naurin, and Amy Alexander, “Gender Stereotyping and Chivalry in International Negotiations: A Survey Experiment in the Council of the European Union,” *International Organization* 73, no. 2 (March 2019): 470, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818319000043>.

¹² Maoz, “The Women and Peace Hypothesis,” 521. Also, see footnote 11 above for supporting research with complementary findings.

¹³ Dara Kay Cohen and Sabrina M. Karim, “Does More Equality for Women Mean Less War?: Rethinking Sex and Gender Inequality and Political Violence,” *International Organization* 76, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 427, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818321000333>.

more significant pressure on behavior and decision-making in times when coercive diplomacy is most likely to occur.¹⁴

Two examples illustrate the influence of gender preferences within a strategic culture of hegemonic masculinity. A study on offense-defense balance found that gender perceptions resulted in states' over-valuing of offensive military capabilities in World War I. The author argues, "Those technologies which make it strategically advantageous for soldiers to lie in wait, to hold back, and to defend are seen as less masculine because, if employed, they would not require soldiers to display the heroism associated with courage, strength, honor, and manhood."¹⁵ Further, the U.S. response to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's withdrawal of troops from Eastern Europe illustrates the preference for displaying masculinity in national security policies. Defense analysts responded with disbelief, using derogatory, female-associated terms to describe Gorbachev's actions.¹⁶ Associating the Soviet leader's actions as feminine, undesirable, and unfathomable highlights the predominant preference for national security behaviors aligned with masculine stereotypes. This finding is particularly salient given that Gorbachev's decision was in his state's best interest, underscoring the influence gender perceptions play in national security.

Gender in Coercive Diplomacy

Like the national security policies previously addressed, hegemonic masculinity affects coercive diplomacy. Gendered analyses of related national security topics support the argument that credible threats signal masculinity, whereas credible assurances require leaders to act in ways typically associated with feminine stereotypes. As a result, hegemonic masculinity results in policy options that favor credible threats over credible assurances, regardless of whether those options are in the state's best interest, often frustrating coercive diplomacy efforts and leading to increased chances of a conflict.

Threats comprise a projection of national power and a willingness to use force should the coerced fail to meet demands. Effective threats hinge on the coerced state's belief that they are credible. Most often, threats are accompanied and believed to be more potent through demonstrations of strength, aggression, and dominance. Nikita Khrushchev exemplified this dynamic in 1959, threatening the United States, "If you send in tanks, they will burn. . . . If you want war, you can have it."¹⁷ Taking it a step further, Thomas Schelling argues that irrational, unstable leaders may increase

¹⁴ Cohen and Karim, "Does More Equality for Women Mean Less War?," 427.

¹⁵ Lauren Wilcox, "Gendering the Cult of the Offensive," *Security Studies* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410902900152>.

¹⁶ Cohn, "Wars, Wimps, and Women," 236. Cohn, in attendance for this meeting, recalls someone in the room stating, "They're a bunch of pussies for pulling out of Eastern Europe."

¹⁷ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 39.

perceptions of credibility.¹⁸ Hegemonic masculinity's influence on toughness and assertiveness suggests threats possess inherently masculine qualities, further supported by the historical analysis in the following section.

In contrast, credible assurances require leaders and negotiators to signal their willingness to collaborate and demonstrate an inclination toward peace. Moreover, restraint remains the most important predictor of whether the coerced state perceives those assurances as credible.¹⁹ Restraint includes "features that provided for at least some measure of conflict resolution and cooperation rather than simply intimidation and winning at the expense of others."²⁰ These factors correlate with existing feminine gender perceptions in national security culture. Further, the need for demonstrated restraint balanced with displays of strength and power implies that policymakers and leaders may devalue credible assurances in coercive diplomacy.

Credible assurances' connection with femininity presents two challenges within a strategic culture of hegemonic masculinity. First, hegemonic masculinity may lead to beliefs within the national security decision-making apparatus that assurances signal weakness, indicating policymakers and leaders may consider them to have lower or no viability. Second, coerced states may be less likely to perceive assurances as credible because it influences states to prefer threats as the primary means to compel or deter. These challenges insinuate that policymakers and leaders may view them as a less effective or undesirable policy option.

Hegemonic masculinity leads states to value activities that demonstrate strength, power, and aggression over options that require restraint, collaboration, and an orientation toward peace, especially when national security is at substantial risk. In coercive diplomacy, this suggests policymakers and leaders view credible threats as the first, and sometimes only, option.

Hegemonic masculinity presents a further challenge to coercion. Even in cases where states of this strategic culture opt to use assurances, their reliance on threats and the use of force in past coercion signals a lack of restraint to the coerced state and undermines policy execution. Hegemonic masculinity's influence on national security perspectives and decisions frustrates coercive diplomacy efforts, resulting in conflict more often than peace.

¹⁸ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 37.

¹⁹ Cebul, Dafoe, and Monteiro, "Coercion and Credibility," 976.

²⁰ Paul Gordon Lauren, "Coercive Diplomacy and Ultimata: Theory and Practice in History," in *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, ed. Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, 2d ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 28.

EXAMINING GENDER IN HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES

Two case studies demonstrate the impact of gender perceptions on the success and failure of U.S. coercive diplomacy. The United States' failed attempt to use coercion with Saddam Hussein in 1990 identifies hegemonic masculinity's influence on President George H. W. Bush's preference for relying on threats and using force over assurances. In contrast, President John F. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 provides the seminal case of successful coercion, brought about by a careful balance between threats and assurances. The negative backlash he received, resulting from assessments that his actions displayed weakness to the American public, its allies, and the Soviet Union, further highlights the gender dynamics underpinning U.S. national security perspectives.

Gender-induced inclinations to display strength and aversions to appearing weak or conciliatory build on existing explanations for the United States' inability to coerce Saddam Hussein in 1990. Attempts to compel Hussein to remove his military forces from Kuwait and disarm Iraq's chemical and biological weapons arsenal failed, despite a massive troop build-up and myriad threats to use force.²¹ Negotiations mediated by the Soviet Union were initially promising; they assured an uncontested withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and yielded the promise of avoiding conflict.²² President Bush complicated negotiations by issuing two ultimatums that effectively undercut his coercive policy aims, exemplifying the influence of hegemonic masculinity over the president's perceptions of strength and power:

Confident that the USA could win in a test of arms, Bush demanded unconditional withdrawal because only compliance without rewards would give the USA and its allies the unambiguous outcome they sought. Iraq's humiliation, should it withdraw under the threat of an ultimatum, would have to substitute for the destruction of its military capabilities.²³

The president's actions counteracted stated policy objectives and resulted in an unnecessary and costly conflict, particularly noteworthy given the real possibility of avoiding conflict. Moreover, it highlights the prevailing culture that values threat and use of force—to the degree that it exacts humiliation and total dominance over the

²¹ Kenneth M. Pollack, "Iran and Iraq: Strange Successes, Strange Failures," in *Military Coercion and US Foreign Policy: The Use of Force Short of War*, ed. Melanie Sisson, James A. Siebens, and Barry M. Blechman (New York: Routledge, 2020), 83.

²² Steven Greffenius and Jungil Gill, "Pure Coercion vs. Carrot-and-Stick Offers in Crisis Bargaining," *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 1 (February 1992): 47–49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343392029001004>.

²³ Greffenius and Gill, "Pure Coercion vs. Carrot-and-Stick Offers in Crisis Bargaining," 49.

coerced state—and devalues any policy option that undermines perceptions of U.S. power by adversaries, allies, and itself.²⁴ A culture of hegemonic masculinity and its influence on the president's reliance on threats and willingness to use force against Hussein in 1990 builds on existing explanations for the United States' failed coercion attempt.

In contrast, the United States successfully coerced the Soviet Union during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. President Kennedy opted for a policy that carefully balanced threats and assurances in his negotiations with the Soviet Union, deescalating tensions between the two great powers and avoiding nuclear war.²⁵ Though his policy efforts were massively successful in preventing nuclear war, the executive committee debated the merits of offering assurances to the Soviet Union, namely that the United States would remove its nuclear weapons from Turkey. The committee's chief concern was that they feared doing so would create a perception of weakness at home and abroad.²⁶ Abram Chayes, the State Department's legal advisor, described the view of some within the executive committee, stating that removing missiles from Turkey would appear "rather weak and defensive."²⁷ The president was sympathetic to this assessment, opting to offer concessions privately in acknowledgment that Turkey and NATO allies might similarly view them in a negative light. The ambassador to Turkey, Raymond A. Hare, stated Turkey would perceive "that their interests were being traded off in order to appease an enemy."²⁸ The president's eventual success in coercing the Soviet Union resulted from his willingness to balance private assurances with public threats, further illuminated through a gendered approach.

The executive committee and other U.S. officials' statements describe their belief that offering concessions would induce domestic and international perceptions of U.S. weakness. The linking of assurances to weakness indicates a correlation to gender stereotypes addressed in feminist critical analyses of security studies, where states devalue activities that they do not perceive to exhibit strength and dominance. Instead, they associate those activities with stereotypically feminine behaviors. The decision to offer assurances privately versus publicly further illustrates the presence of hegemonic masculinity within national strategic culture, where a core cultural attribute is "maintaining reputation."²⁹ President Kennedy carefully navigated the bal-

²⁴ Lauren, "Coercive Diplomacy and Ultimata: Theory and Practice in History," 28. Lauren described intimidation and winning at the expense of others to be in opposition to demonstrated credible restraint.

²⁵ Greffenius and Gill, "Pure Coercion vs. Carrot-and-Stick Offers in Crisis Bargaining," 50.

²⁶ Barton J. Bernstein, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: Trading the Jupiters in Turkey?," *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 124, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2149587>.

²⁷ Bernstein, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," 106.

²⁸ Bernstein, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," 108.

²⁹ Cohen and Karim, "Does More Equality for Women Mean Less War?," 427.

ance between threats and assurances by placing the policy objective at the center of his decision-making, demonstrating an understanding of the implications of his decision related to perceptions of U.S. strength in the international security space. Doing so facilitated his consideration of the full range of options as feasible, even within a strategic culture defined by hegemonic masculinity otherwise inclined toward policy options that relied on threats and force.

FUTURE COERCION POLICY AND THE WPS AGENDA

Future coercive diplomacy endeavors necessitate that the national security apparatus acknowledges and considers the implications of gender in determining the right balance of credible threats and credible assurances. The 2022 *National Security Strategy* addresses the critical role of integrated deterrence in countering threats from China and Russia, underscoring the need to improve coercion success rates as a key means to preserving and strengthening U.S. power.³⁰ Future coercion benefits from increasing the number of women in national security, an objective heavily promoted in the U.S. WPS strategy. Additionally, conducting gender analyses before and during coercive diplomacy execution enables policymakers and leaders to understand the unique gender perspectives and perceptions in each situation. It offers the opportunity to facilitate more successful coercion policies and achieve the United States' WPS objectives more comprehensively and effectively.

Expanding the meaningful participation of women in national security processes is a point of emphasis in the U.S. WPS strategy and remains one avenue for improved coercion efforts. Its premise that women are more inclined toward peace and are better suited to peace-making activities results from the feminine gender stereotypes previously articulated. These stereotypes provide critical implications for coercive diplomacy; in particular, women may find greater success than their male counterparts at positively influencing perceptions of credibility in negotiating assurances because those assurances are associated with gender stereotypes that favor peace over conflict.

Moreover, these stereotypes may counteract the outsized impact of the United States' willingness to resort to conflict, which previously reduced its credibility in showing restraint during negotiations. Support for boosting the number of women serving as negotiators is particularly true in cases where the coerced state has a high degree of gender inequality in its domestic environment. Researchers found that "female representatives behaving stereotypically weak and vulnerable may trigger a chivalry reaction among male representatives, increasing the likelihood that the men

³⁰ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 22.

will agree to support a bargaining proposal from the women . . . the chivalry reaction is displayed mainly by diplomats from countries with relatively low levels of gender equality."³¹ These findings suggest that the participation of women in coercive diplomacy negotiations and policymaking offers one approach to counteracting obstructive gender perceptions in U.S. coercion. However, fully incorporating processes that uncover the gender dynamics inherent in national and international security bolsters its effectiveness.

Policy-makers should acknowledge and address the role gender perceptions and expectations play in national security strategic culture by expanding the use of gender analysis as an essential and routine government activity. Doing so reduces the likelihood that misconceptions about what it means to project strength and power hinder coercion policies, enabling better and more rational coercive diplomacy. Further, it ensures the United States realizes its WPS objectives more holistically by reducing the heavy focus on increasing the participation of women and increasing efforts to gain an improved understanding of the gender perceptions and expectations influencing national security decision-making. A comprehensive, more balanced approach to achieve future coercive diplomacy and WPS goals must include both the meaningful participation of women and ingrained processes that illuminate the gender dynamics that play in national security policy and international relations.

INEFFECTIVE THREATS AS THE CAUSE OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY FAILURE

Rather than offering a solution to gender-based influences on coercive diplomacy, increasing the meaningful participation of women induces an obstructive effect in some situations. Women's participation as leaders or negotiators may yield less favorable results in coercing states with a high degree of sexism. Notably, the challenge women face in these contexts arises not because of inherent flaws in women but because of the coerced and coercing states' gender perceptions and expectations.

A heightened level of sexism within coerced states induces deleterious effects for women in coercive bargaining. One study found that women who engage with overly sexist leaders or negotiators face a disproportionate gender bias regardless of their relevant expertise.³² This gender bias adversely affects the woman's perceived credibility and competence. Similarly, another study identified that in crisis bargaining, "sexist leaders make such aggressive demands of women that even dovish types re-

³¹ Naurin, Naurin, and Alexander, "Gender Stereotyping and Chivalry in International Negotiations," 469.

³² Moran Anisman-Razin et al., "Support for Leader's Decisions in Conflict and Negotiation: Women Do Not Benefit from Relevant Expertise While Men Do," *Political Psychology* 39, no. 3 (June 2018): 633, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12434>.

ject them . . . causing female leaders to struggle in equilibrium to cultivate reputations for resolve as effectively as male leaders."³³ These findings indicate that increasing women's engagement in coercive diplomacy may sometimes be counterproductive; the gender perceptions of sexist leaders guide them to value exerting power over women, manifested through overly harsh negotiation terms and a greater willingness to engage in conflict. Contrary to the WPS strategy's outlook, both studies illustrate that increasing the participation of women yields the potential for suboptimal coercive diplomacy execution.

Although sexism presents a formidable challenge, it does not stifle the benefits of women's participation. It ignores the vast body of literature supporting the WPS strategy. Scholars contend that the very stereotypes that inform perceptions of women as more inclined toward peace than conflict, regardless of the veracity of such perceptions, benefit women's engagement in conciliatory proposals.³⁴

Common gender stereotypes that portray women as less aggressive and as more cooperative and considerate than men will cause a gendered evaluation effect, in which: 1) a compromise proposal offered by female opponents in peace negotiations will be valued more favorably, as more beneficial to one's own side and as less beneficial to the opponent's side, in comparison to the same proposal when offered by male opponents; 2) female opponent negotiators offering the compromise proposal will be perceived as significantly higher in warmth and trustworthiness and as significantly lower in assertiveness than male opponent negotiators offering the same proposal.³⁵ Women benefit from stereotypes portraying them as more inclined toward peace, illuminating the implications for their credibility in offering assurances in coercive diplomacy.

Moreover, gender perceptions that inform audience costs in bargaining present an additional avenue to counter claims that sexism reduces women's effectiveness in coercion. States receiving peace proposals from women tend to view those proposals as more credible. Researchers argue the increased credibility stems from women paying a higher domestic audience cost than their male counterparts.³⁶ These findings indicate that women facing an extreme gender-based bias may counterintuitively benefit from sexism's effects, increasing the likelihood of successful peace negotiations.

³³ Dan Reiter and Scott Wolford, "Gender, Sexism, and War," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 34, no. 1 (2022): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09516298211061151>.

³⁴ Christopher W. Blair and Joshua A. Schwartz, "The Gendered Peace Premium" (preprint paper, October 2021), 32, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3942206>; Cohen and Karim, "Does More Equality for Women Mean Less War?," 414–15; Maoz, "The Women and Peace Hypothesis," 531; and Naurin, Naurin, and Alexander, "Gender Stereotyping and Chivalry in International Negotiations," 469.

³⁵ Maoz, "The Women and Peace Hypothesis," 519.

³⁶ Blair and Schwartz, "The Gendered Peace Premium," 32.

Further, the similarities between peace-making and assurances suggest that sexism's influence on gender perceptions offers a means by which states can engage in more effective coercive diplomacy.

Finally, women's engagement in national security remains a core WPS strategy objective and reflects the reality of a more diverse and equitable international environment. The meaningful participation of women demonstrates U.S. values, shared by countless allies and partners, and normalizes their presence in the national and international security environments, thereby mitigating the influence sexism exerts in coercive diplomacy. Additionally, these findings call for an improved understanding of how gender informs the situation, allowing policymakers and leaders to consider and select the policy options that best align with stated objectives and the national interest.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the gendered nature of threats and assurances illuminates explanations for failed and suboptimal U.S. coercive diplomacy policy execution and provides practitioners with increased avenues for future success. Critically, a gendered approach to coercive diplomacy facilitates a more holistic achievement of the U.S. WPS strategy, moving the outcome from more participation of women for its own sake and toward the inclusion of gender perspectives and perceptions as a more effective means to achieve U.S. policy objectives. Policymakers should consider including WPS lines of effort and supporting goals that explicitly require gender analysis, supporting its adoption as a cultural attribute that counteracts the tendency to overvalue threat-based policy options. Finally, future research in this area might consider a comprehensive analytical review of historical coercion efforts to determine which specific gender dynamics manifest most often in credible assurances and threats and the degrees to which they do so.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

Progress, Challenges, and the Future

By Lieutenant Colonel Juan R. Matías Colón, USAF

INTRODUCTION

At a United Nations (UN) speech in 2013, Nobel Prize winner and Taliban survivor Malala Yousafzai said, “We call upon all communities to be tolerant, to reject prejudice based on caste, creed, sect, color, religion, or agenda to ensure freedom and equality for women so they can flourish. We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.”¹ This speech came 13 years after the UN Security Council adopted the resolution (S/RES/1325) on women, peace, and security (WPS). This landmark resolution paved the way for many nations to develop a consciousness of women’s vital role in global security and peace.

Despite significant progress in advancing women’s participation in peace and security, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality because there needs to be a sustained focus on addressing the structural barriers hindering women’s full and meaningful participation while ensuring future generations have a place at the table where world leaders and nations deliberate about peace and security. This chapter will trace the background of WPS and how it has progressed throughout the years. It will further explore the challenges and outlook for the future of WPS.

BACKGROUND

In 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) for Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). This landmark resolution recognized the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls and their critical role in promoting peace and security.² Since then, the WPS agenda has been expanded through other resolutions, creating a framework for promoting women’s participation in all aspects of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The WPS resolution has four pillars:

1. the role of women in conflict prevention
2. women’s participation in peacebuilding,
3. the protection of the rights of women and girls during and after conflict, and

¹ Malala Yousafzai, “Our Books and Our Pens Are the Most Powerful Weapons,” *Guardian*, 12 July 2013.

² “Landmark Resolution on Women, Peace and Security,” United Nations, accessed 23 April 2023.

4. women's specific needs during repatriation, resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction."³

From 2009 to 2019, there have been 10 other resolutions on WPS. The UN categorized these resolutions into two groups. The first category is the necessity for women's active and effective involvement in peacebuilding and peacemaking. The second category is the prevention and handling of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), acknowledging that sexual violence is used as a war tactic and threatens international peace and security.⁴ The UN has provided nations with a framework to resolve the disparity of women's participation in policymaking and placing the protection of women at the forefront of peace, enabling progress in the WPS agenda around the globe.

PROGRESS IN WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

Since adopting UNSCR 1325, many countries and regions have made significant progress in advancing the WPS agenda. Women's participation in peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, and postconflict reconstruction has increased, and there is greater recognition of the importance of women's perspectives in shaping peace and security policies. The UN has also established several mechanisms to promote WPS, including the UN Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Outside the UN, countries have created national action plans and made efforts to include women in conflict resolutions and the rule of law, thus enabling the successful integration of woman's perspectives in critical aspects of peace and security with lasting impact on their societies.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325, 104 UN members (54 percent of member states) have adopted the resolution, and 54 of them have developed national action plans (NAP).⁵ NAPs are strategic documents created at the national level to implement UNSCR 1325—a government's strategy and action plan toward the WPS agenda. A NAP outlines a country's domestic and international objectives and actions to safeguard the human rights of women and girls in conflict settings; to prevent armed conflict and violence, including against women and girls; and to ensure the active participation of women in peace and security.⁶ For example, the United States

³ "Gender, Women, Peace and Security," Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations, accessed 23 April 2023.

⁴ "Gender, Women, Peace and Security."

⁵ "National Action Plans: At a Glance," 1325 National Action Plans Women, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, accessed 23 April 2023.

⁶ "National Action Plans: At a Glance."

created its NAP in 2011 under President Barack H. Obama's administration. Later in 2017, the U.S. Congress enacted, and President Donald J. Trump signed the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, codifying the NAP into law.⁷

In conflict resolution, author Joan Johnson-Freese points out that when countries include women in the peace process, there is a 20-percent increase in the probability that an agreement will last at least two years and a 35-percent probability of lasting 15 years.⁸ To this effect, the Community of Democracies published *Engaging Women in Sustaining Peace: A Guide to Best Practices*. This publication highlighted the success stories when women are included in peace negotiations, as was the case for integrating women's perspectives in peace talks in Colombia.⁹ In Colombia, the integration of women in the peace talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was critical in ensuring the negotiating parties included crucial language in the agreement addressing the interests of women. Ironically, no women were among the delegations when the negotiating parties started the peace talks. It was not until a mass movement of about 500 women met at the National Summit of Women for Peace to review more than 800 proposals addressing women's demands regarding peace that the Colombian president appointed two women to participate in the peace talks. Their contributions were the cornerstone for the lasting peace agreement that persists to this date. Including women proves that when their voices and proposals incorporated, the probability of the conflict reigniting is lower, something that cease-fire, political accommodations, and disarmament alone cannot do.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

Despite progress, significant challenges still exist in advancing women's participation in peace and security. Women are still underrepresented in peace negotiations, and their perspectives are often not fully considered in decision-making processes. Fighting forces continue to use sexual and gender-based violence as a tool of war, and women often face multiple forms of discrimination and violence in conflict situations. Despite significant efforts to create NAPs, these are not legally binding documents but an expression of national will to address WPS issues.

An example of slow progress is the United States. It took 11 years to create a NAP and another 6 to codify it into law. The Department of Defense (DOD) directed

⁷ Office of the Press Secretary, White House, "Executive Order—Instituting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security," press release, 19 December 2011; and Joan Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace and Security: An Introduction* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2019), 18.

⁸ Johnson-Freese, *Women, Peace and Security*, 138.

⁹ *Engaging Women in Sustaining Peace: A Guide to Best Practices* (Warsaw, Poland: Community of Democracies, 2019).

the implementation of WPS in 2012, recognizing its importance in national security, and in 2016 implemented steps to include WPS in Joint professional military education. Yet, as of 2023, WPS programming is relegated to elective classes at the National Defense College, Air War College, and Naval War College, while the remaining schools fail to integrate WPS as part of their curricula.¹⁰ While there is a will to promote WPS efforts, the actions taken for implementation have gone without tools to measure or quantify its effectiveness.

On the other hand, military spending is rising in the billions, and the DOD only spent \$5.5 million in 2021 to advance the WPS agenda across the entire department. To put this figure into perspective, in fiscal year 2017, DOD spent roughly the same amount on maintenance and repairs to Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean for Air Force operations, a base composed of approximately 40 personnel. The disparity in spending reflects the low priority of the WPS agenda across the department. The low budget and the lack of WPS awareness in the department indicate that the strategy lacks priority and tangible support, perpetuating institutional barriers for women seeking a place at the table or integrating their perspectives into strategic planning and operations.

Research from the Middle East Institute argues that “DOD’s counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism initiatives were disproportionately influenced by gender stereotypes, resulting in stove-piped efforts between conflict prevention, conflict, and conflict resolution, with regional women’s participation only requested in the prevention and resolution rather than in the execution of the conflict itself.”¹¹ The research points out the deficiency in understanding the role of women in WPS by relegating women to just victims and not enablers of peace resolution or combat. The lack of understanding around what women can bring to the fight perpetuates the challenge of integrating women’s perspectives into operational design planning and peace efforts.

In other parts of the world, where men lead governments and tribal systems, the patriarchal systems fail to address the social issues affecting women. For example, most Middle East and North Africa-region (MENA) countries have a NAP or are part of the Arab League, which has a NAP, but the region remains in the lower rankings for WPS indexes with 12 of the 25 worst-performing countries globally.¹² According

¹⁰ Joan Johnson-Freese, “Women, Peace, and Security: Moving Implementation Forward,” *War on the Rocks*, 24 July 2021.

¹¹ Katie Crombe and Erin Moffitt, “Reassessing Women’s Role in Peace and Security in the Middle East,” Middle East Institute, 31 January 2022.

¹² Sarah Rutherford, “WPS Index: A Tool to Measure Women’s Progress in MENA Region,” Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 20 July 2021; and Zoe Danon and Sarah Collins, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2021), 3.

to the Arab Barometer 2019 survey: 67 percent of respondents think men are better leaders, 67 percent think women should not be allowed to travel independently, 75 percent think men should have a greater share of inheritance than women, and 60 percent think husbands should have final say in family decisions.¹³ The male-centric governance leads to lower integration of women into politics and critical leadership positions where they can advocate for social issues affecting them and their communities. In addition to this public opinion favoring men, other vital elements contributing to the MENA region's lower WPS ranking performance are

- lack of women's participation in governance,
- constraints on economic participation and opportunity,
- underrepresentation in political processes,
- conflict and displacement,
- lack of representation in conflict resolution and peace negotiations, and
- roles in radicalization, terrorism, and violent extremism.¹⁴

Although countries in the MENA region have made progress including women in military roles and government jobs, the percentage of women in these roles remains relatively low, with only a 29 percent participation rate, 18 percent below the global average of 47 percent.¹⁵ The challenges above continue to make it difficult to thoroughly advance the WPS agenda in the region. The lack of fast progress enables unstable and failed states where human rights—specifically women's—are violated and their perspectives are not a priority. The international community—specifically the United States—needs to refocus on this region to counterbalance the robust military aid with aid that directly impacts the civilian population, specifically women.

THE FUTURE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

For WPS to advance, there needs to be a sustained focus on addressing the structural barriers that hinder women's full and meaningful participation. This includes challenging patriarchal norms, promoting women's leadership, ensuring women's safety and security, and providing resources and support for women's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. There also needs to be a greater focus on the intersectionality of women's experiences, recognizing the unique challenges faced by women with diverse backgrounds and identities.

¹³ Danon and Collins, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress*, 3.

¹⁴ "Summary," in Danon and Collins, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress*.

¹⁵ Danon and Collins, *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Issues for Congress*, 11.

The future of WPS is promising, but the international community must address the challenges that are limiting the agenda's potential. One of the critical challenges is the persistent gender inequality that hinders women's participation in peace and security decision-making. Women are still vastly underrepresented in peace negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and security institutions.¹⁶ This exclusion undermines the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts and perpetuates the cycle of conflict.

Addressing this challenge requires increasing women's participation in peace and security at all levels, ensuring women's inclusion in peace negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and leadership roles in security institutions. Governments, international organizations, and civil society must work together to create enabling environments that empower women to participate in decision-making and must hear their voices.

Another challenge is the persistent and pervasive nature of gender-based violence in conflict and postconflict situations. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, which militants (from both fighting sides) often use as a weapon of war.¹⁷ Gender-based violence harms individual women and girls and undermines communities' and countries' social fabric and stability. Addressing this challenge requires strengthening prevention, protection, and accountability mechanisms for gender-based violence in conflict and postconflict situations. This includes increasing support for survivors, improving access to justice and reparations, and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. Therefore, the international community must try to expand the International Criminal Court's Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) to protect all women and girls. The international community created this fund to help prosecute perpetrators and aid victims of war crimes. The TFV has \$2.1 billion and about 630 million women (and children) are victims of war crimes.¹⁸ This figure demonstrates that if each victim is to receive help, only \$3.33 is available to help each potential victim. In contrast, the total defense spending of the top eight countries (not counting China and Russia) is \$1.1 trillion. The overwhelming defense spending has not fixed the problem of social inequities for women, as was evidenced in the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, where the Taliban reversed 20 years of progress in just three weeks.

Despite these challenges, there are several reasons to be optimistic about the future of Women, Peace, and Security. First, there is a growing recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's participation in peace and security decision-

¹⁶ "Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security," UN Women, 14 October 2022.

¹⁷ "Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security."

¹⁸ "Crime Victims Fund," Office for Victims of Crime, accessed 25 April 2023; and Eran Benda-vid et al., "The Effects of Armed Conflict on the Health of Women and Children," *Lancet* 397, no. 10273 (February 2021): 522–32, [https://doi.org/10.1016%2FS0140-6736\(21\)00131-8](https://doi.org/10.1016%2FS0140-6736(21)00131-8).

making. This is reflected in the increasing number of countries and organizations that have adopted National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security and are implementing the WPS agenda.¹⁹

Second, a growing body of evidence demonstrates the positive impact of women's participation in peace and security decision-making.²⁰ Women's involvement leads to more inclusive and effective peace processes, better protection of civilians, and more sustainable peace agreements.

Third, a growing movement of women peacebuilders and activists is working to advance the WPS agenda at the local, national, and international levels.²¹ These women are often on the frontlines of conflict and deeply understand the root causes of violence and the needs of their communities. They are powerful agents of change and drive progress on the WPS agenda.

CONCLUSION

The WPS agenda has significantly progressed since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000. Women's participation in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution has increased, and there is greater recognition of the importance of women's perspectives in shaping peace and security policies. The UN has established several mechanisms to promote WPS, including the UN Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Countries have created NAPs and efforts have been made to include women in conflict resolutions and the rule of law, enabling the successful integration of women's perspectives in critical aspects of peace and security with lasting impacts on their societies. Despite these positive developments, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality. Therefore, addressing the structural barriers hindering women's full and meaningful participation is crucial while ensuring future generations have a place at the table where world leaders and nations deliberate peace and security. With continued progress, the WPS agenda can help to create a world where all individuals have an equal opportunity to flourish and succeed.

The WPS challenges are a matter of national security and put the stability of the international world order at risk. Nations need to ensure leaders at all levels are educated and actively engaged in advocating and seeking women's perspectives when designing strategies and driving institutional culture changes. Katie Crombe

¹⁹ "Facts and Figures: Women, Peace, and Security."

²⁰ "Women's Participation and a Better Understanding of the Political," in Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015), 40.

²¹ *Building Peace from the Grassroots: Learning from Women Peacebuilders to Advance the WPS Agenda* (New York: Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2022).

and Erin Moffitt could not have said it better: “WPS is an important thread that should run through and cohere in emerging national security, defense, and military strategy, and Joint Warfighting Concept documents. Women serve as both the vanguard and foot soldiers of much of the [geopolitical] change and must be accounted for in our strategic calculus and planning.”²²

²² Crombe and Moffitt, “Reassessing Women’s Role in Peace and Security in the Middle East.”

CHAPTER 7

SYRIA

Effects of Women's Participation during Conflict and Its Lasting Effects

By Major Miranda Justice, USA

There is an old story about war. It starts with war being conceived of as a quintessentially masculine realm; in it, it is men who make the decisions to go to war, men who do the planning, men who do the fighting and dying, [and] men who protect their nation.¹

The reality of war is far more complex than the old story portrays, requiring a gendered understanding, perspective, and approach. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) recognizes women are significant agents of change in preventing and resolving conflict, countering terrorism and violent extremism, and building postconflict peace and stability.

WPS initiatives are a social movement that has progressed in the contemporary security environment. One initiative includes strengthening women's capacity to participate in conflict to counter violent extremism and terrorism. The emergence of the United States' WPS policy has influenced the global implementation of WPS agendas to increase women's participation across security efforts. To understand the scholarship regarding a gendered understanding, perspective, and/or approach as it relates to gender equality in the military and security sector, leadership within the military, counterterrorism and irregular warfare, and other areas of advancement and to help close WPS research gaps on the effects of women's agency, this paper focuses on women's participation as military and security actors during conflict in the Middle East. This analysis examines women's participation in conflict, beginning with a literature review that explores how scholars explain the phenomenon of women as participants in conflict. Women's agency in the military and security sector is a modern phenomenon arising from conflict especially in the Middle East. Following the literature review is a case study of female Kurdish fighters in Syria, specifically the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), followed by an explanation of the effects of maximizing the opportunity for women participating in conflict, with the understanding that with effects come challenges.

¹ Carol Cohn, *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 1.

DEFINITIONS AND PLACEMENT

Key terms for examining women's participation are *gender* and *conflict*. This chapter uses a feminist international lens to address conflict and why gender should be taken seriously in understanding conflict. Gender has been widely used as a lens of application for WPS initiatives, including equality, equity, centrality, and fundamental rights. Gender is a structure that crosses sociostructural determinations, such as class, age, position in the world order, and sexual orientation.² Jose L. Ruiz explains that *gender* refers to the stereotypes, social roles, acquired conditions, positions, behavior, activities, and appropriated attributes that each society individually assigns to males and females.³ Gender is a way to express and propagate core notions of identity at individual and structural levels by referencing social, cultural, and biological differences. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Diana Francesca Haynes, and Naomi Cahn have a similar definition to other scholars, defining gender as the social construction of what is defined as masculine or feminine within any particular culture, including reflections on symbols, theories, practices, institutions, and individuals.⁴ From a gender binary lens, masculinity is a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles associated with males, and femininity is associated with females.

Laura Sjoberg, Cohn, and Ruiz each argue that in comparison to other realist or critical mechanisms, gender serves as a better mechanism to appreciate the human dimensions of conflict and statecraft.⁵ Cohn continues the argument by explaining there are alternative ways to view conflict; for example, traditional identification of men as warlike and women as pacifists suggests a static attitude of men and women toward conflict.⁶ Some scholars argue gender should be taken seriously and utilized as a lens when considering both the causes and the impacts of conflict. According to Sjoberg, security studies, from realist to critical, fail to explain why and how states go into conflict; without feminist theories, arguing conflict cannot be understood without the use of gender as a primary analytical category.⁷ In conflict, it is not simply knowing that the actors are gendered that can help us to understand, but also recognizing the gendered nature of international relations as a system and a structure conducive

² Jose L. Ruiz, "Gender in Military Operations," in *The Role of Women and Gender in Conflicts*, Strategic Dossier 157-B (Grenada: Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012), 24.

³ Ruiz, "Gender in Military Operations," 24.

⁴ Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, Diana Francesca Haynes, and Naomi Cahn, *On the Frontlines: Gender, War, and the Post-Conflict Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195396645.001.0001>.

⁵ Cohn, *Women and Wars*, 238; Ruiz, "Gender in Military Operations," 24; and Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), chap. 1.

⁶ Cohn, *Women and Wars*, 238.

⁷ Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, chap. 1.

to violence and conflict. That is, “gendered states make and are made by gendered strategic cultures that lead both to gendered conflict decision-making and gendered conflict-justificatory narratives.”⁸ Counter to Sjoberg, the use of gender as the only lens to understand conflict and statecraft is problematic. When understanding conflict, one should not put exclusive weight on one variable like gender and should utilize multiple variables including social, economic, and military, to name a few.

EFFECTS OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICT

Conflict creates opportunities for women to act as participants in society. Women have a positive effect on society by participating as military actors because their newly gained independence and autonomy produces new social, economic, and political realities. Gayle Lemmon and Ofra Bengio argue that the female Kurdish fighters in Syria, the “Kurdish Experiment,” serve as evidence of the positive impact on society brought on by women’s participation during conflict.⁹ Bengio’s comparative analysis of women living in the Arab part of Iraq and those living in Iraqi Kurdistan, carried out to appreciate the depth of the change in Kurdish women’s status in societies, highlights evidence supporting Bengio’s argument.¹⁰

Ní Aoláin et al. and Ruiz argue that women’s participation in conflict can serve as an empowerment movement but also that the empowerment experienced by women can have a negative effect. Women who have participated in armed forces may be stigmatized by being actors in conflict, but also because they failed to conform to traditional gender-role expectations. Women then become victims of hypermasculinity, as seen by examples in South Africa and in Afghanistan. As a South African woman stated, “These so called empowered women will always be the subject of abuse everywhere you go and if you are perceived to be an empowered woman you are subject to a lot of abuse from society in general.”¹¹ Ruiz argues empowered women in Afghanistan were specifically targeted by the Taliban, as seen by members of the police force who would wear burkas to work and even hide their profession from their family members in order to survive.¹² Policewomen in Afghanistan describe being specifically targeted by the Taliban, too, with accounts of seeing female peers killed with multiple shots in their head.¹³ These examples reflect the dangers and diffi-

⁸ Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*, 140.

⁹ Gayle T. Lemmon, *The Daughters of Kobani: A Story of Rebellion, Courage, and Justice* (New York: Penguin Press, 2021); Ofra Bengio, “Game Changers: Kurdish Women in Peace and War,” *Middle East Journal* 70, no. 1 (2016): 44, <https://doi.org/10.3751/70.1.12>.

¹⁰ Bengio, “Game Changers.”

¹¹ Quoted in Ní Aoláin, Haynes, and Cahn, *On the Frontlines*, 54.

¹² Ruiz, “Gender in Military Operations,” 179.

¹³ Ruiz, “Gender in Military Operations,” 179.

culties for Afghan policewomen and the broader Western effort to engineer gender equality not only in Afghanistan but in the Middle East.

OPERATIONAL NEEDS AND READINESS

Gender has been integrated into operations as part of the human terrain—“the decisive terrain in operations”—and will no doubt be essential in a future conflict.¹⁴ Incorporating women as participants during conflict impacts operational needs and readiness. Ruiz also argues there are benefits of incorporating women into the various military specialties during conflict. He argues that women’s participation is necessary not only for women but for everybody. Currently, militaries are severely troubled by falling retention and recruitment rates, and accepting women widens the applicant pool for jobs. Ruiz argues women serve operational needs and increase operational readiness by allowing a mixed-gender force to keep the military strong. An example he provides is women in the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), who increased the security efforts by guarding checkpoints, security controls at the entrances of key locations, and roadblocks, which in turn decreased insurgents’ ability to move illicit munitions.¹⁵ Ruiz and Reed Wood both explain that utilizing women increases the current talent pool and serves as an inspiration to fulfill future recruitment needs.¹⁶

OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Women impact operational readiness but also operational effectiveness as one set of participants during conflict. Scholars argue that the women within the ANSF affected operational readiness and effectiveness. Women are more effective than men in some circumstances, including delicate or sensitive jobs that require interpersonal skills that not every male soldier has. Female military actors can communicate with the female segment of the host nation to gain information and atmospherics, particularly in the Middle East and in West African cultures where restrictions are in place against women talking directly to men.¹⁷ As argued by Ní Aoláin et al., studies have shown that the presence of women in military units is positive for both women in the local community and women in the military infrastructure because the presence of women improves access and support for local women.¹⁸ Female military actors are better able to relate to and understand gender issues because of their ability to work directly with local women.

¹⁴ Ruiz, “Gender in Military Operations,” 128.

¹⁵ Ruiz, “Gender in Military Operations,” 173.

¹⁶ Reed M. Wood, *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 135.

¹⁷ Ruiz, “Gender in Military Operations,” 131.

¹⁸ Ní Aoláin, Haynes, and Cahn, *On the Frontlines*, 127.

Associated with operational effectiveness is the use of women as interrogators of both women and men, which serves a dual purpose. The use of a female interrogator to question another woman is respecting cultural traditions, but using a female interrogator to question a man is an extra tool in the military arsenal, considered irregular but effective by both Sjöberg and Ruiz. Specifically, with the ANSF, women could interact with women in any situation, including willing conversations, and could interrogate female witnesses, gathering more detailed intelligence about current situational awareness.¹⁹ Sjöberg goes on to argue that female interrogators were able to gain information during their rotations at Guantánamo Bay by exploiting taboos and using humiliation tactics specifically associated with Middle Eastern traditions.²⁰

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

During conflict, freedom of movement is limited, whether by fear or force, for individuals located within the boundaries of the conflict. But the most important aspect from the point of view of gender is the lack of freedom of movement, which affects women more than men. As Ruiz explains, freedom of movement is complicated and difficult to resolve in the Middle East, because the restrictions proposed by insurgents are in line with certain Muslim traditional practices in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. These traditions affect women and their freedom to leave the home and to use the roads and the freedom to send girls to school.²¹ Women can increase their freedom of movement by participating in conflict as military actors. Being a security actor increases a woman's ability to leave home and to walk the streets as part of an organization—versus being accompanied by a man and covered head-to-toe with a burqa.

CHALLENGES OR LIMITATIONS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Along with the beneficial effects of women's participation in conflict as military or security actors, there are limitations or restrictions to women's participation. The challenges associated with women's participation vary around the globe and include various cultural, social, and religious factors that affect how women are perceived and treated in a given region. An example in the Middle East is that women joining the military violates gender norms and impacts family dynamics. In many Middle Eastern cultures, women are expected to fulfill traditional roles as wives, birthing children and being caretakers of the home, including taking care of their husband's and

¹⁹ Ruiz, "Gender in Military Operations," 173.

²⁰ Sjöberg, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War*, 236.

²¹ Ruiz, "Gender in Military Operations," 179.

children's needs.²² The idea of women leaving the home to serve in the military can be seen as a challenge to these cultural expectations and may lead to family conflict and tension, as Zeynab Serekaniye testified to as a 26-year-old Kurdish female soldier of the YPJ whose choice to join the YPJ caused initial tension in her family because of the expectation that wars are only fought by men.²³ Overall, the negative effects of women serving in the military are complex and multifaceted, reflecting the cultural, social, and religious factors that shape gender norms and expectations in regions around the globe.

THE KURDISH EXPERIMENT

The Syrian Civil War is an ongoing conflict that began in 2011 as part of the wider Arab Spring movement. The war was sparked by a series of protests in the city of Daraa, which were met with violence from the government of President Bashar al-Assad.²⁴ The origins of the Syrian Civil War can be traced to several factors, including political and economic grievances as well as sectarian tensions. The Assad regime, which is dominated by the Alawite minority, has long been accused of discriminating against the Sunni majority in Syria.²⁵ This reported discrimination has created a sense of marginalization among many Sunnis, who have been excluded from political power and economic opportunities. The conflict in Syria has escalated into a complex conflict involving a wide range of domestic actors; international actors including Iran, Russia, Turkey, and the United States; and extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Domestically, the Syrian Civil War saw the involvement of women combatants. The role of women has been significant on multiple sides, whether they are supporting Assad, the opposition Syrian Democratic Forces, or ISIS. This diversity leads to a controversial issue: on one hand the image of women warriors inspires freedom for all and gender equality, and on the other hand, some women are supporting the application of extremist interpretations of Islam.²⁶ To set the parameters for participation, this case study focuses solely on female Kurdish fighters in Syria, specifically the

²² Brammy Rajakumar, "Nowhere to Turn: Women in the Syrian Civil War," *Harvard International Review*, 2 February 2020.

²³ Elizabeth Flock, "'Now I've a Purpose': Why More Kurdish Women Are Choosing to Fight," *Guardian*, 19 July 2012.

²⁴ Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2018): 142–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2012.01059.x>.

²⁵ Jubin M. Goodarzi, "Middle East Authoritarianism: Governance, Contestation and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran," *Perspective on Politics* 12, no. 2 (2014): 152–65.

²⁶ Emanuela C. Del Re, "Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process," in *Female Combatants in Conflict and Peace: Challenging Gender in Violence and Post-Conflict Reintegration*, ed. Seema Shekhawat (New York: Macmillan, 2015), 84.

YPJ, acknowledging, first, that women play critical roles in various other aspects of the conflict, including intelligence collection and dissemination, logistics support efforts such as smuggling weapons and supplies, and providing medical care and, second, that women's involvement in combat is not a new phenomenon in the region.²⁷ Women have previously participated in armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, including the Lebanese Civil War, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the Peshmerga's fight against Saddam Hussein. There has been a tradition of female combatants in Kurdish history, but there was a break in experience by the "new generation" until 2011, when women joined the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) as volunteers.²⁸

PARTICIPATION IN THE YPG AND YPJ

Women and men voluntarily joined the YPG to fight for Kurdish autonomy and democratic governance after the outbreak in 2011. The modern-day YPG was formed after the Qamishli uprising in 2004 by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and received increased international recognition in 2011. The YPG is the national army of Syrian Kurdistan, is engaged in the defense of the Kurdish areas of Syria, and is one of the most successful groups fighting against ISIS in the region.²⁹ Women filling the ranks of the YPG as armed soldiers challenged traditional gender roles and norms in Syrian society.³⁰ Brammy Rajakumar highlights the conditions in Syrian society where women are conditioned to take on stereotypical female roles, such as childcare and housework, and husbands are allowed to prohibit their wives from working.³¹ Women throughout the region face high rates of harassment and sexual and domestic violence and are conditioned not to seek help once traumatic events occur because of the associated humiliation and shame.³² In Syrian society, young girls around the age 14 are often forced into child marriage, almost half of the time to men at least 10 years older. Further, "girls' childhoods and educations end prematurely, resulting in high-risk pregnancies at very young ages and perpetuating cycles of domestic violence and poverty."³³ Although society rendered women socioeconomically and politically vulnerable, susceptible to male oppression, gender prejudices, and in-

²⁷ Ní Aoláin, Haynes, and Cahn, *On the Frontlines*, 43.

²⁸ Del Re, "Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process," 84.

²⁹ Del Re, "Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process," 86.

³⁰ Meral Düzgün, "Jineology: The Kurdish Women's Movement," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 12, no. 2 (2016): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3507749>.

³¹ Rajakumar, "Nowhere to Turn: Women in the Syrian Civil War."

³² Rajakumar, "Nowhere to Turn: Women in the Syrian Civil War," paras. 3–4.

³³ Rajakumar, "Nowhere to Turn: Women in the Syrian Civil War," para. 4.

equality, the YPG was committed to gender equality and women's rights, which was a significant factor in attracting female fighters to the group.³⁴

YPG AND THE PKK

There is a link between the YPG fighting groups and the PKK, the Kurdistan Worker's Party. One of the strongest opponents of the Islamic State, the PKK is listed as a terrorist group for its activities throughout the region and specifically in Turkey.³⁵ Del Re argues the link between YPG and PKK is important for the analysis of female combatants, because it reveals the influence that the PKK has on Kurdish fighters in the Syrian region.³⁶ PKK's long tradition of ensuring equality between men and women is evident in that almost half of PKK's ranks consist of women. PKK's leader Abdullah Ocalan challenged traditional gender roles and coined the idea of "democratic confederalism" to highlight a move away from patriarchal nationalism—a move that promotes women's emancipation to the point of enforcing copresidency at all levels.³⁷ The PKK promotes the term *jineology*: "a fundamental scientific term in order to fill the gaps that the current social sciences are incapable of doing. Jineology is built on the principle that without the freedom of women within society and without a real consciousness surrounding women no society can call itself free."³⁸ The YPG has promoted gender equality by ensuring that women hold leadership positions and receive equal pay for equal work. The group also has a strict policy against sexual harassment and violence against women, and women have been given the opportunity to participate in all aspects of the group's operations.³⁹

YPG'S STRUGGLE FOR KURDISH AUTONOMY

Additionally, the YPG's struggle for Kurdish autonomy and the establishment of democratic governance in northern Syria was a significant factor in attracting female fighters. Many women saw the YPG's struggle as an opportunity to fight for their communities.⁴⁰ Zeynab Serekaniye, a 26-year-old Kurdish female soldier of the YPJ, recounted her to decision to join the YPJ. Zeynab grew up in Ras al-Ayn, a town in Northeast Syria, and was the only girl in her family. She did not get to attend school like her brothers and did not challenge the decision because she accepted it as reality

³⁴ Düzgün, "Jineology: The Kurdish Women's Movement," 284.

³⁵ Del Re, "Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process," 84.

³⁶ Del Re, "Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process," 86.

³⁷ Düzgün, "Jineology: The Kurdish Women's Movement," 284.

³⁸ Düzgün, "Jineology: The Kurdish Women's Movement," 285.

³⁹ Flock, " 'Now I've a Purpose': Why More Kurdish Women Are Choosing to Fight."

⁴⁰ Düzgün, "Jineology: The Kurdish Women's Movement," 284.

for girls who lived in the region. Zeynab farmed vegetables with her mother until the outbreak of 2011 occurred. After her family was forced to resettle, she wanted to join the YPJ, stating, “We’ve been pushed outside of our land, so now we should go and defend our land. . . . Before, I was not thinking like this. But now I have a purpose—and a target. In discussions growing up, it was always ‘if something happens, a man will solve it, not a woman.’ Now women can fight and protect her society. This, I like.”⁴¹ Kurdish women join the YPJ ranks because they offer the possibility of achieving freedom and equality. In her testimonial, Bejan Ciyayi, a member of the YPJ, wrote: “There are ideological, political and sociological reasons behind my desire to fight against ISIS. I have sworn to defend the Kurdish people against all evil.”⁴² The YPG’s commitment to gender equality and women’s rights, as well as its struggle for Kurdish autonomy and democratic governance, were significant factors in attracting female fighters to the group. But female fighters have faced discrimination and violence from other groups, including ISIS and the Turkish military. As Ruiz stated, a comparison can be made between YPJ members being targeted and female police officers in Afghanistan being targeted by the Taliban because they are empowered women.⁴³ Azeema, a commander within the YPJ, testified about how ISIS would target female members of the YPJ during battle: “During the Battle of Kobani, an ISIS sniper targeted and killed one of her fighters who was a friend. Two other ISIS men ran out, grabbed her body, and dragged her toward their position. Then they took out their knives and beheaded her corpse right there on the street for all their men to see. Azeema watched as her friend’s head rolled away from her body.”⁴⁴ Azeema later discussed how in the moment she knew what ISIS would do to her or her female soldiers if captured. Occasionally, ISIS would share images of beheaded YPJ fighters on social media to try and intimidate females in the current ranks or to discourage potential recruits from joining.

A SHORT HISTORY OF YPJ

The YPJ was founded in 2013 as an autonomous women’s army and carries out independent operations, side by side with the YPG.⁴⁵ The all-female brigade aims to protect the people and women of Rojava (Western Kurdistan) and their right to self-administration. The YPJ states:

⁴¹ Flock, “ ‘Now I’ve a Purpose’: Why More Kurdish Women Are Choosing to Fight.”

⁴² Düzgün, “Jineology: The Kurdish Women’s Movement,” 284.

⁴³ Ruiz, “Gender in Military Operations,” 179.

⁴⁴ Gayle Lemmon, “The Women Who Fought to Defend Their Homes against ISIS,” *Time Magazine*, 22 February 2021.

⁴⁵ Del Re, “Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process,” 86.

The pledge we made is to guard all the different peoples, and especially women, of North and East Syria against all forms of terrorism, occupation, and attacks on the people's right to self-determination. We are willing to continue to protect our people and humanity against ISIS and all those supporting them. We are fighting for a peaceful and democratic future for the Middle East.⁴⁶

Battle of Kobani

In 2014, ISIS besieged and attacked the city of Kobani on the Syrian-Turkish border for several months. Employing a range of tactics including guerrilla warfare, the YPG and YPJ were the primary forces defending the city from ISIS militants. The YPJ in particular, 7,000 members strong, played a critical role in the battle, with female fighters often taking on key leadership roles and fighting on the front lines alongside their male counterparts. According to Gayle Lemmon, the YPJ played a key role in turning the tide of the battle in favor of the YPG. The YPJ's willingness to fight on the front lines, as well as its ability to mobilize and coordinate with other Kurdish forces in the region, was instrumental in the defense of the city.⁴⁷ The Battle of Kobani was ultimately won by the YPG/YPJ, with support from U.S.-led Coalition airstrikes striking key targets and dropping military supplies. The victory was a major setback for ISIS and a significant morale boost for the Kurdish forces in the region. Skepticism of the women's efforts diminished after the Battle of Kobani, when YPJ members toting AK-47s and serving multiple roles including as snipers, rifewomen, and battlefield commanders helped to deal ISIS its first loss, a turning point in the war.⁴⁸ The role of the YPJ, for their courage and resistance, in the Battle of Kobani helped to establish them as a key military force in the region and drew international attention to their fight for autonomy and self-determination.⁴⁹ YPJ members became role models for women around the world fighting for freedom, self-determination, and gender equality.⁵⁰ The YPJ, through its success at Kobani and being showcased as an international phenomenon, increased in operational readiness from 7,000 members to between 7,500 and 15,000, a number that can vary immensely for political gains.⁵¹

Following success in the Battle of Kobani, the YPJ became part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) military alliance founded in 2015, which brings together

⁴⁶ "Who Are the Women's Protection Units?," YPJ Information and Documentation Office, accessed 20 February 2023.

⁴⁷ Lemmon, *The Daughters of Kobani*, 61–105.

⁴⁸ Lemmon, *The Daughters of Kobani*, 61–105.

⁴⁹ "Who Are the Women's Protection Units?"

⁵⁰ "Who Are the Women's Protection Units?," para. 6.

⁵¹ Del Re, "Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process," 87.

different groups fighting ISIS in North and East Syria. The SDF is considered to be a “broad spectrum security apparatus that conducts counterinsurgency operations, (local) patrols, checkpoint operations, detention operations and clearance patrols.”⁵² The Kurdish forces have been the United States’ main ground force partner unit of choice in the fight against ISIS and have been supplied with training and military equipment in the recent years. As of November 2022, the SDF continue to retain significant security roles in northeast Syria, but the situation is subject to rapid changes.⁵³

The YPJ has continued to grow and evolve over time. In 2015, the YPJ played a critical role in the wrath of the Euphrates military campaign aiming to liberate the Syrian city of Raqqa from ISIS militants. The YPJ led the campaign against the capital of the Islamic caliphate to liberate the thousands of Yazidi women held captive by ISIS.⁵⁴ The SDF was successful in liberating Raqqa from ISIS but unsuccessful in the protection of Afrin from a Turkish invasion. In 2018, the Turkish state initiated a brutal invasive war against the western canton of Afrin. The YPJ supporting the SDF faced significant challenges in this conflict, including losing hundreds of their fighters by being targeted by Turkish military operations and facing accusations of terrorism from the Turkish government.⁵⁵ Despite these challenges, the YPJ has remained committed to its mission of ridding the autonomous region of the Islamic State and the Assad regime while also promoting gender equality and fighting for women’s rights in the region.⁵⁶

After the resistance of Afrin, YPJ forces participated in the battle against the last ISIS-controlled territory: the Battle of Baghuz.⁵⁷ In March 2019, ISIS lost its last stronghold in Syria to the SDF, who were backed by U.S., British, and French special operations forces. Mustafa Bali, head of the SDF press office, tweeted, “Syrian Democratic Forces declare total elimination of so-called caliphate and 100% territorial defeat of ISIS.”⁵⁸ The forces of YPG and YPJ lost 11,000 lives. As stated by the YPJ Information and Documentation Office, “We paid this price knowing that we are not just protecting Syria and the Middle East, but the whole of humanity against the risks posed by ISIS’ ideology and organization.”⁵⁹ Following 2019, the YPJ has contin-

⁵² “Syrian Democratic Forces and Asayish,” European Union Agency for Asylum, last modified November 2022.

⁵³ “Syrian Democratic Forces and Asayish,” para. 1.

⁵⁴ Hussain Zaidou, “When Female Fighters Lead the Charge,” Washington Institute, 20 July 2017.

⁵⁵ “Turkey Targets Kurdish forces in Afrin: The Short, Medium and Long Story,” BBC News, 22 January 2018.

⁵⁶ Del Re, “Female Combatants in the Syrian Conflict, in the Fight against or with the IS, and in the Peace Process,” 87.

⁵⁷ “Who Are the Women’s Protection Units?”

⁵⁸ Ben Wedeman and Lauren Said-Moorhouse, “ISIS Has Lost Its Final Stronghold in Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces Says,” CNN, 23 March 2019.

⁵⁹ “Who Are the Women’s Protection Units?”

ued to support military operations against Turkey and ISIS sleeper cells, upholding their commitment as the Women's Protection Unit. While the group has faced ongoing challenges and obstacles in its efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights, its work in the fight against ISIS highlights the important role that women can play in shaping the future of the region.

YPJ ENCOURAGES EQUALITY MOVEMENT

The YPJ's emphasis on fighting on the front lines has been a unique feature in the region, where women have traditionally been excluded from combat roles. For the YPJ, women participate in combat training, exercise a great degree of independence, and are active decision-makers in the Syrian Civil War, leading both men and women in combat. But women have nominal and weak roles in other combat forces "such as the regime's all-female force within National Defense Forces, ISIS's al-Khansaa Brigade, and the Syrian Security Office's female force."⁶⁰ YPJ's drive and commitment for gender equality influenced changes in the military spectrum and across other operational variables and instruments of national power. As Dilar Dirik argues, wartime, uprisings, and social unrest provided YPJ women with the space to assert themselves and to demand representation in ways that normal civilian life would not permit.⁶¹

The YPJ's influence in the security sector has expanded into the political spectrum in Northeast Syria through its involvement in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The YPJ was welcoming to female fighters whom they had liberated during battles against ISIS and became an ethnically diverse force, as women from Arab, Assyrian, Armenian, and other origins joined their ranks. The YPJ influenced "the civil self-administration of Rojava, which changed its name to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) to indicate the multi-ethnic character of the self-administration's areas."⁶² AANES was established at the Third Conference of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) on 16 July 2018 in the city of al Tabqa.⁶³ The feminist consciousness of the YPJ is alive and active; the political beliefs of the YPJ units are consistently foregrounded in the Kurdish movement. Dirik argues, "The strength of the resulting women's movement illustrates that the point in establishing structures such as co-presidency (one woman and one man sharing the

⁶⁰ Zaidou, "When Female Fighters Lead the Charge."

⁶¹ Dilar Dirik, "What Kind of Kurdistan for Women?" *Kurdish Question.com*, 1 June 2014, as cited in Düzgün, "Jineology: The Kurdish Women's Movement," 284.

⁶² "Who Are the Women's Protection Units?"

⁶³ "Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria," U.S. Mission of the Syrian Democratic Council, accessed on 22 February 2023.

chair) and fifty-fifty gender splits in committees on all administrative levels is no mere tokenism to make women more visible.”⁶⁴

The YPJ’s involvement in the AANES has been significant, with women playing key roles in various political and administrative bodies. YPJ members hold leadership positions in the women’s councils, which are responsible for building resilient communities by establishing women’s centers and safe houses for victims of sex-based violence and domestic violence, as part of the Democratic Confederal System of Women.⁶⁵ Through these councils, the YPJ has been able to advocate for women’s issues and promote their participation in decision-making processes. In addition to the women’s councils, the YPJ has been involved in other political bodies within the AANES. For example, women hold seats in the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) and negotiate for the SDC and the AANES in peace talks with the government of Syria, rebel groups, and/or regional actors.⁶⁶ Women like Amina Omar hold leadership positions in the SDC and have been involved in negotiations and discussions on issues such as federalism and autonomy for the region.⁶⁷ Because of the YPJ’s influences, other Kurdish women have also endeavored to make their presence known. In the region’s administrative system, other stand-alone women’s agencies and active organizations operate in all domains of life, including the educational sector, economic sector, and health services.⁶⁸ The economic sector has experienced an increase in female autonomy and empowerment. More women are gaining employment, setting up small informal businesses, or creating cooperatives, such as soap-making and cultivating co-op food. In some parts of Syria, women fill 90 percent of the agricultural workforce.⁶⁹ Overall, through its participation in the AANES, the YPJ’s influence in the security sector has evolved into a role in the political sphere of Northeast Syria. Women from the YPJ have played a key role in promoting women’s rights and gender equality in the region and have been involved in various political bodies and decision-making processes.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH THE YPJ

As a team commander during a 2020 rotation to Northeast Syria, the author walked into a room and was greeted by Kurdish women wearing olive-green and black fatigues who introduced themselves as members of the YPJ. My presence was requested as the only female team leader in the area working for special operations, and the

⁶⁴ Dirik, “What Kind of Kurdistan for Women?”

⁶⁵ “About AANES,” Representations of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria in Europe, para. 4, accessed 23 February 2023.

⁶⁶ “Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.”

⁶⁷ “Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria,” para. 3.

⁶⁸ Zaidou, “When Female Fighters Lead the Charge.”

⁶⁹ Rajakumar, “Nowhere to Turn: Women in the Syrian Civil War.”

YPJ wanted to discuss gender-specific issues affecting women in the region. During this engagement, YPJ leadership shared their stories of countering the Islamic State on the front lines alongside male counterparts since the beginning of the war. YPJ leadership led both men and women and continues to lead during times of uncertainty and change in a depleting security environment. The YPJ revolutionized the concept of incorporating minority personnel into different positions of responsibility to support joint operations and specifically special warfare. The female Kurdish fighters have access to personnel that extends past their own ranks of soldiers. They have access to detainees in women's detention centers, internally displaced persons, women's committees, and councils—all due to their gender. In these instances, gender is used positively to gain information and intelligence to support strategic-level initiatives. Working alongside the YPJ furthered the author's interest in better understanding the effects of women's participation in conflict.

CONCLUSION

The Middle East and the Horn of Africa/North Africa are regions prone to conflict having effects on societies, men, women, and children. Literature reviewed considers the effects of women's participation during conflict versus the effects of conflict on women; the latter presents the prevalent view of women as victims, which overlooks women as actors. The conceptual issue can be divided between positive and negative effects of women's participation. Women have a positive effect on society by participating as military actors and by supporting operational outcomes including effectiveness and readiness as well as new social, economic, and political realities derived from their newly gained independence and autonomy. The empowerment experienced by women can also have a negative effect on women's lives, including being stigmatized by society and worse, such as being murdered by insurgent groups.

Recognizing the multiplicity of effects remains essential to developing a gender-centric approach during conflict resolution. To protect the momentum women gained in conflict, women must have a seat at the negotiating table during conflict resolution. The dream of obtaining political and social freedom inspired members of the YPJ and other Kurdish women to challenge traditional customs and join the fight against terrorism to pave the way for becoming decision-makers in the future.⁷⁰ The case study of the YPJ is just one example, which should encourage current decision-makers to find critical solutions to the region's problems that will enable women to recover their stolen rights.⁷¹ Placing women centrally in defining the problems to be solved, the options that should be activated, and the application of those options is pivotal to fa-

⁷⁰ Zaidou, "When Female Fighters Lead the Charge."

⁷¹ Zaidou, "When Female Fighters Lead the Charge," para. 3.

ilitating outcomes that value, address, and offer opportunities for women across the spectrum from conflict to conflict resolution.⁷² Conflict provides challenges to women and conflict resolution is no different. Women continue to face challenges to be present in key deliberations, to be heard, and to have influence for the greater good—not just for women but holistically.

⁷² Ní Aoláin, Haynes, and Cahn, *On the Frontlines*, 55.

CHAPTER 8

OPERATIONAL GENDER ANALYSIS

IRAN

By Major Melissa Blyleven, USMC

BACKGROUND

This gender analysis considered three factors detailed in the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations' Military Gender Analysis Tool. Open-source data was used to answer indicator questions regarding Factor 1.1 Rule of Law, Factor 4.3 Community and Household, and Factor 6.1 Media. The 2022 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) informed the selection of these factors, based on the relevance to the NSSs' stated goals and posture regarding Iran which are as follows:

We will pursue diplomacy to ensure that Iran can never acquire a nuclear weapon, while remaining postured and prepared to use other means should diplomacy fail. Iran's threats against U.S. personnel as well as current and former U.S. officials will not be tolerated, and as we have demonstrated, we will respond when our people and interests are attacked. As we do so, we will always stand with the Iranian people striving for the basic rights and dignity long denied them by the regime in Tehran.¹

Factor 1.1 Rule of Law

Indicator 1.1.1 Legal System

The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), Iran's current regime, came to power in 1979 in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and the overthrow of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Iran is officially a theocratic republic based on the tenets of Twelver Shia Islam, and its current supreme leader is Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who was appointed to a lifetime term by his predecessor Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Iran has a popularly elected president and legislative branch, and there is universal suffrage starting at the age of 18. However, a guardian council under the control of the supreme leader approves all potential candidates prior to the election. Women hold a small minority of seats in parliament. While Iran's constitution does not officially bar women from running for president, the guardian council rejected all female candidates in the last two elections.²

¹ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 49.

² "Part 2: Profiles of Women Politicians, Activists," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institutes of Peace, 3 December 2020.

Iran has an independent judiciary that governs by its interpretation of Islamic law. Under this interpretation of the law, women and girls have fewer rights than men and boys. Women's freedom of movement and participation in public life may be severely restricted by their male relatives. Women are also banned from watching men's sports, are required to wear a hijab in public, and cannot leave the country without their husband's permission.³ In the formal legal system, panels of judges decide civil and criminal issues. In situations that are not specifically addressed by statute, judges base their decisions on their interpretation of Sharia law.⁴

Indicator 1.1.2 Equality before the Law

The U.S. Department of State reports, "Iran's constitution bars discrimination based on race, gender, disability, language, and social status 'in conformity with Islamic criteria'."⁵ However, in practice, women and girls face discrimination in many areas under the law. Iran's score on the Georgetown Women Peace and Security (WPS) Index for the absence of legal discrimination is 31.4, the worst in the South Asia region. This score is based on the degree (0–100) to which laws and regulations differentiate between women and men, or protect women's opportunities, across 35 aspects of life and work.⁶ Per Iranian observer Fariba Parsa, "Iranian law treats citizens differently depending on their gender: If a car hits a pedestrian, the punishment for the driver and compensation to the victim are halved if the latter is a woman."⁷ Moreover, in cases of inheritance, male heirs receive twice the inheritance of their female counterparts.⁸

The legal age for marriage in Iran is 13 for girls and 15 for boys, however, girls younger than 13 may be married with their father's consent. In 2018, the Iranian legislative branch rejected a proposed law that would have completely banned marriage for girls under the age of 13 and required her father's consent up to age 16, due to fierce conservative opposition to the law.⁹ While divorce is relatively common (one in three marriages end in divorce), adultery is still punishable by stoning.¹⁰ Polygamy

³ "Women's Rights in Iran," *Human Rights Watch* (blog), 27 October 2015.

⁴ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Department of State, 2020), 19.

⁵ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 70.

⁶ *Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security, Georgetown University, 2022), 21.

⁷ Fariba Parsa, "The Role of Women in Building Iran's Future," *Middle East Institute* (blog), 24 March 2020.

⁸ "Part 3: Iranian Laws on Women," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institute of Peace, 8 December 2020.

⁹ "Marriage Age Increase Rejected by Iran Parliament," *NCR-Iran* (blog), National Council of Resistance to Iran, 25 December 2020.

¹⁰ "Part 5: Statistics on Women in Iran" Profiles of Women Politicians, Activists," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institute of Peace, 9 December 2020.

and temporary marriages remain legal and men generally have greater rights in family law.¹¹ For example, a woman has the right to divorce if her husband signs a contract granting that right, or if she proves he cannot provide for his family, has violated the terms of their marriage contract, is a drug addict, insane, or impotent. Meanwhile, men are not required to cite a reason for divorcing their wives.¹²

Women may be reluctant to leave abusive situations because custody of children older than age seven generally goes to the father. Moreover, Iran's penal code does not prohibit domestic violence, and Iran's laws against sexual assault specifically exclude marital rape, so a woman is unlikely to find relief through the courts.¹³ The law recognizes a divorced woman's right to a share of the marital property and alimony, but these laws are sporadically enforced.¹⁴

While sexual assault is illegal in Iran, many victims do not report it. The punishment for rape is the death penalty.¹⁵ The criminal code, moreover, requires four Muslim men or a combination of three men and two women or two men and four women, to have witnessed the act. In addition to the high bar for a rape conviction, a woman or man found guilty of making a false rape accusation is subject to 80 lashes.¹⁶ Human Rights Watch also points out that "Iran's legal system criminalizes consensual sexual relationships outside of marriage, which are punishable by flogging, so a victim risks being prosecuted if the authorities do not believe her."¹⁷ This combination of factors discourage many women from reporting their sexual assaults.

Due to its declining birth rate, Iran recently introduced laws that cut back on reproductive rights, including outlawing abortion and restricting access to contraceptives. These laws may have the effect of further limiting opportunities for women and girls. Moreover, contraceptives have long been prohibited for single women, though women in urban areas tended to have good access to contraceptives despite the prohibition.¹⁸

Women in Iran enjoy relatively high financial inclusion. While husbands or fathers can prevent their wives and daughters from opening their own bank accounts, 91.6 percent of adult women report having access to banking services. This is the highest

¹¹ Hamed Shahidian, "Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Culture of Iran* (blog), accessed 1 April 2024.

¹² *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 53.

¹³ "Iran Is Having Its #MeToo Moment," *Human Rights Watch* (blog), 9 September 2020.

¹⁴ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 53.

¹⁵ "Iran Is Having Its #MeToo Moment."

¹⁶ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 49.

¹⁷ "Iran Is Having Its #MeToo Moment."

¹⁸ "Iran Death Penalty Threat for Abortion Unlawful: UN Rights Experts," *UN News*, 11 November 2021.

percentage in the South Asia Region.¹⁹ Moreover, women-only bank branches exist in Iran, so that women from conservative families can conduct their banking business without having to have contact with an unrelated man.²⁰

Indicator 1.1.3 Accountability to and Fairness in the Application of the Law

Iran's judiciary implements the Islamic penal code and falls under the authority of the supreme leader. He appoints the judiciary chief to five-year terms. Iran has traditional criminal and civil courts, but it also has separate Islamic revolutionary courts that can try people for crimes against the regime and on vague charges of being un-Islamic.²¹ A special clerical court functions outside the judicial system and handles cases involving clerics.²²

The U.S. Department of State's report on human rights in Iran did not offer sex-disaggregated data on the availability of legal counsel, however, it did note that "the constitution and law require a warrant or subpoena for an arrest and state that arrested persons should be informed of the charges against them within 24 hours. Authorities, however, held some detainees, at times incommunicado, for prolonged periods without charge or trial and frequently denied them contact with family or timely access to legal representation."²³ These findings suggest that legal counsel and support are not widely available in Iran regardless of gender.

Islamic law treats children as adults from the age of legal maturity which is age 9 for girls and age 13 for boys. The government specifically allows for the execution of children after the age of legal maturity and executes individuals sentenced for crimes committed before the age of 18.²⁴ Per the Department of State report on human rights, "UN human rights experts expressed concern for the up to 90 individuals on death row for alleged offenses committed when they were younger than age 18."²⁵

With regard to the treatment of women and children in prison, the Department of State reported that prisons "held older children who lived with their incarcerated mothers without access to medical care or educational and recreational facilities. Following the November 2019 protests, child detainees were reportedly held in the same cells as adults at a facility in Ahvaz due to overcrowding, according to UNSR Rehman."²⁶

¹⁹ *Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22*, 21.

²⁰ "Iran's First Women-Only Bank Opens," Reuters, 7 June 2010.

²¹ "Iran's Judiciary," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institute of Peace, 3 December 2020.

²² *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 20.

²³ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 16.

²⁴ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 5.

²⁵ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 5.

²⁶ *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Islamic Republic of Iran*, 15.

Indicator 1.1.5 Role of Authorities

Iranian observers do report some cases of female resistance to the regime. Hamed Shahidian noted that “secular feminists, as well as female nationalists and leftists, opposed the IRI from early on.”²⁷ However, because of increasing oppression and pressure from the regime, many of these feminists and female nationalists have ceased organized activism. Hamed Shahidian notes, “They have continued intervening through informal friendships, research circles, formal and informal associations, cyber communities, and contacts abroad . . . their effectiveness must not be overstated.”²⁸

In recent years, observers have reported that Iranian feminists and young people are more likely to take a dismal view of the Iranian regime and the discriminatory laws against women.²⁹ This is likely a product of high education levels among young people of both genders and is evidenced by periodic protests and unrest in Iran, including the 2009 Green Revolution and the current protests over the murder of Mahsa Amini by the morality police.

Considerations for Military Forces: Factor 1.1 Rule of Law

Should the U.S. military ever conduct operations on the ground in Iran, planners must understand that fear of Iran’s brutal justice system may inhibit Iranians of both genders from freely cooperating with U.S. forces and that overt cooperation may spark retaliation from the regime on citizens. Additionally, commanders and operational planners should keep in mind the implications of the unequal status of women and girls before Iranian law and the lack of protections against both domestic abuse and sexual assault. Improving situational awareness on these issues will increase U.S. forces’ ability to provide protection and support to all facets of the civilian population.

Strict interpretations of Islamic code in many areas will prevent Iranian women and girls from speaking with male servicemembers and interpreters. Operational plans should include provisions for female servicemembers and female interpreters to interact with the female population whenever and wherever practical to ensure information and concerns from all sectors of the civilian population can be relayed to commanders and operational planners. Moreover, should U.S. forces decide to implement body searches at checkpoints, they should ensure the availability of female searchers for the protection of U.S. forces and the civilian population alike.

Finally, reporting suggests that many Iranians, both men and women, are extremely unhappy with the brutal Iranian justice system. Many Iranians, particularly

²⁷ Shahidian, “Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

²⁸ Shahidian, “Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

²⁹ Shahidian, “Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran”; and Parsa, “The Role of Women in Building Iran’s Future.”

women and young people, also abhor the unequal status that women have before the rule of law, as well as the laws restricting their dress and freedom of movement. These attitudes provide significant messaging opportunities for U.S. forces and should be leveraged as the situation dictates.

Factor 4.3 Community and Household

Indicator 4.3.1 Education

Education is a bright spot for gender parity in Iran. Women and girls in Iran enjoy high levels of schooling at all levels. The government proudly announced that 98 percent of children were enrolled in primary school for the 2018 school year, with a goal of 100 percent.³⁰ Iran's female literacy rate is 97 percent.³¹ While Iran does have one of the world's shortest requirements for compulsory schooling, five years, the WPS survey indicates that on average Iranian girls receive 10.3 years of schooling.³² Other sources report that 90 percent of girls complete secondary school as of 2016, and 60 percent of university students are female.³³ However, the lack of employment opportunities and restrictions placed on women by the government and by their families lead to frustration and dissatisfaction from women with high levels of education.

Indicator 4.3.2 Household

Family is a central focal point in Iran, and it is common for multiple generations of families to live together in the same household. Men and women typically do not live alone until they are married. Male heads of household have the legal right to restrict the freedom of movement and employment of their wives and daughters. Men are expected to be the providers for their families while women are expected to manage domestic tasks and rear the children. Women are discouraged from working outside of the home.³⁴ The WPS Index reports that the female labor participation rate in Iran is only 14.1 percent.³⁵ However, though the labor participation rate for women is low,

³⁰ "Enrollment Rate in Primary Education Increased to Almost 100% in Iran," *Tehran Times*, 14 September 2018.

³¹ "Part 5: Statistics on Women in Iran," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institute of Peace, 9 December 2020.

³² Shabnam Moinipour, "Iran's Educational System and the Institutionalization of Gender Inequality," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 4 April 2022; and *Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22*, 78.

³³ "Part 5: Statistics on Women in Iran."

³⁴ Shahidian, "Gender Relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran."

³⁵ *Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22*, 21.

education is highly prized for both boys and girls, and women outnumber men at many of Iran's universities.³⁶

Access to health care is a constitutional right in Iran, and the government spends roughly seven percent of its GDP on health care; 60 percent of the hospitals in Iran are state-owned. Iran also has an extensive network of "health houses" that serve the primary healthcare needs of 90 percent of Iran's rural population.³⁷ The maternal mortality rate in Iran stands at 16 per 100,000 live births, and the under-five mortality rate is 13 per 1,000 live births.³⁸ The rates of maternal mortality and deaths of children under five have been halved since 1990.³⁹

However, Iran lacks access to services for people with disabilities despite laws on the books that require it. This is likely due to the government's inability to provide that access. Human Rights Watch and the Center for Human Rights in Iran conducted 58 in-depth interviews with people with disabilities and others, documenting "discrimination, abuse, and lack of accessibility. [They] found that the government has failed to provide sufficient community-based services—including quality and appropriate assistive equipment, personal assistance, accessible and affordable habilitation and rehabilitation, and other services."⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch also documented the government's failure to provide accessible public transportation and equal access to health care for people with disabilities.⁴¹

Indicator 4.3.4 Demographics

The average life expectancy in Iran is 75.25 years. On average, women live about three years longer than men (female 76.67/male 73.89). From birth to age 55, there is a gender ratio of 1.05 male : 1 female, but after age 55 the percentage of men to women steadily decreases.⁴² A small study of couples seeking sex-selective fertility services found only a slight preference for males and noted that sex preference for males decreased as the education level of the mother increased.⁴³ Approximately 77

³⁶ Mitra Shavarini, "The Social (and Economic) Implications of Being an Educated Woman in Iran," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 1 (2009): 132–40, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.1.7080233mu3m2v0m5>.

³⁷ "Industry Spotlight: Healthcare 2018," *US-Iran.org* (blog), American Iranian Council, 8 August 2018.

³⁸ "Maternal Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing 2022," data portal, World Health Organization, accessed 2 April 2024.

³⁹ "Industry Spotlight: Healthcare 2018."

⁴⁰ " 'I Am Equally Human': Discrimination and Lack of Accessibility for People with Disabilities in Iran," *Human Rights Watch* (blog), 27 June 2018.

⁴¹ " 'I Am Equally Human.'"

⁴² "Iran," *World Factbook*, Central Intelligence Agency, last updated 26 January 2023.

⁴³ Seyedeh Fatemeh Ahmadi et al., "Attitudes About Sex Selection and Sex Preference in Iranian Couples Referred for Sex Selection Technology," *Journal of Reproduction and Infertility* 16, no. 1 (January–March 2015): 36–42.

percent of the population is urban, and that percentage is growing at a rate of 1.3 percent per year.⁴⁴

Iran has a refugee population of nearly 1 million, though sex and age-disaggregated data is difficult to find. Iran has provided its refugee population access to schools and health care, and refugees are permitted temporary work permits. About 80 percent of Iran's refugees come from Afghanistan, and the other 20 percent come from Iraq.⁴⁵

Since the Iranian revolution, millions of Iranians, particularly educated Iranians have migrated to other countries. The United States is the most popular destination for Iranian emigres and currently has an Iranian American population of greater than 1.5 million. While no source provided sex- or age-disaggregated data on the diaspora population, there were reports of families with daughters fleeing at the time of the revolution due to new limits on women's rights.⁴⁶ Furthermore, in 2019 Al Jazeera reported an uptick in the migration of unaccompanied minors from Iran to Europe during that year.⁴⁷ Other sources report that large numbers of certain minority religious groups including Bahais, Yarsanis, and Mandeans have fled Iran since the revolution due to persecution and that their populations in Iran have dwindled.⁴⁸

Considerations for Military Forces:

Factor 4.3 Community and Household

Despite its oppressive laws and brutality, the Iranian regime has built relatively modern and effective education and healthcare systems that serve virtually all Iranians. When conducting operations, military commanders should be wary of operations that will destroy schools, universities, and healthcare facilities. Destructive operations would provide evidence for an adversary to message to both genders that external military interventions are specifically harmful to the civilian population.

Iran's high literacy rate means that messaging via written communication is likely to reach most segments of the population. However, older Iranians, particularly older women, are the most likely people to be illiterate. To ensure the inclusion of older populations, messaging should include spoken communication methods in addition to written communication.

Iran is home to significant populations of ethnic and religious minorities. The Iranian regime treats some of these groups much better than others, and military com-

⁴⁴ "Iran."

⁴⁵ Shirin Hakimzadeh, "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home," Migrationpolicy.org. accessed 4 February 2023.

⁴⁶ Hakimzadeh, "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home."

⁴⁷ "Why Are So Many Iranian Minors Seeking Asylum in Europe?," Al Jazeera, 19 January 2019.

⁴⁸ "New Discrimination Against Minorities," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institute of Peace, 12 February 2020.

manders and planners should pay particular attention to those differences to ensure the military can provide adequate protection and support to all groups. Moreover, the unfavorable treatment of some minority groups may provide messaging opportunities for military forces.

Any operational plans must also include contingencies for caring for Iran's refugee population should military operations inhibit the current regime from continuing to support the 1 million refugees that it has taken in from Iraq and Afghanistan. Failure to do so will precipitate a large humanitarian crisis. Moreover, military forces should be aware that in addition to a large refugee population, reports indicate that many Iranian children flee to other countries as unaccompanied minors. Both of these groups are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, and military planners incorporate measures to prevent human trafficking into their campaign plans.

Factor 6.1 Media

6.1.1 Access

Per the WPS Index, 91.2 percent of women reported having access to a cellular phone. Women have access to social media in Iran and have used it to display their poor treatment to a global audience. Iranian women have participated in the #MeToo movement and garnered support for other movements through the use of social media.⁴⁹ The U.S. Institute of Peace reports that "significant restrictions on content have been in place since 2009. Major international platforms like Facebook and Twitter remained blocked during the coverage period, as was Telegram. Censorship decisions remained highly politicized, with both conservative and reformist news sites facing censorship for failure to adhere to strict guidelines on coverage of sensitive political, social, and international issues."⁵⁰

6.1.2 Distribution

The regime has traditionally used state-run media and newspapers to push its propaganda to the Iranian people. In recent years with the rise of social media, the regime has also pushed propaganda through social media sites such as Instagram and Twitter. There does not seem to be a gender difference in how media is shared.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ahou Koutchesfahani, "How Iranian Women Use Social Media to Narrate Their Struggle to the World," *New Voices in Global Security* (blog), King's College London, 25 July 2022.

⁵⁰ "Report: Internet Censorship in Iran," *Iran Primer* (blog), United States Institute of Peace, 5 November 2019.

⁵¹ "Report: Internet Censorship in Iran."

Indicator 6.1.3 Disinformation and Messaging

There is little sex-disaggregated information on how the regime influences its population and the population's susceptibility to disinformation based on gender. However, with regard to the nonlethal targeting of information for different groups, the U.S. Department of State reports that the regime has used social media in an attempt to influence U.S. attitudes and elections.⁵² These disinformation campaigns included anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian narratives. The State Department report suggests that the regime is adept at using social media to propagate disinformation campaigns, but did not provide evidence of the regime relying on gender norms to propagate these campaigns.

Considerations for Military Forces: Factor 6.1 Media

The vast majority of Iranians have access to the internet and cellular phones, which bodes well for messaging efforts from military forces. However, military forces will need to ensure they can get around the strict censorship barriers that have been erected by the Iranian regime. Additionally, military forces should be aware that the Iranian regime is adept at pushing out propaganda via newspapers, television, radio, and social media.

The Iranian regime has shown that it is capable of using a variety of media to influence its population, but there is little publicly available sex-disaggregated data on how well it works. Moreover, there is little information on if or how the regime uses gender norms in its messaging efforts. Military forces should seek that data as well as information on the effectiveness of messaging to the Iranian population. Additionally, information operations planners should seek information, specifically sex-and age-disaggregated information, on the susceptibility of various groups to disinformation. Obtaining that information will be crucial to effective messaging efforts by military forces, as it is likely that some populations including women, older Iranians, and ethnic minorities respond differently to various types of media based on access and specific messaging.

CONCLUSION

Gender has a profound influence on the Iranian regime's authoritarian style of government, as well as the daily lives of ordinary Iranians. Should the United States ever decide to conduct military operations in Iran, its military commanders will require a detailed understanding of the gendered implications of their decision-making to execute successful operations that lead to stability and lasting peace. The factors described above provide only a surface-level overview of gender considerations in

⁵² Christina Nemr and William Gangware, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Foreign State-Sponsored Disinformation in the Digital Age* (Washington, DC: Department of State, 2019), 23.

Iran. These considerations are likely to vary greatly within Iran's different regions and among Iran's urban and rural populations. Continued in-depth, gender-focused research on a commander's specific area of operations must be a priority for all military staffs planning operations in Iran.

CONCLUSION

Intermediate and senior-level PME schools across the United States have implemented ongoing initiatives to integrate WPS into their curricula. The summaries in the pages to follow reflect the creative and substantive WPS integration efforts across a range of educational contexts.

When I first arrived at Marine Corps University (MCU) nine years ago, I learned that the U.S. Marine Corps training and education command response to the WPS data call was “NSTR,” short for *nothing significant to report*. As disheartening as this was to learn, it seemed more likely that there was, in fact, WPS-related content in various courses but that it was just being called something else—or, in fact, the person responding to the data call did not know the correct person to ask about a question like this, so NSTR became the default response. At that moment, I became determined to find out how we could respond more accurately the following year. Fast forward to 2024 and we see an ever-growing community of military and civilian educators committed not only to including WPS content in the core and elective curricula across their respective schoolhouses, but also to ensuring its relevance and utility in various exercises, wargames, and faculty development sessions. This new status quo mirrors the old adage, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time is today.” Although it certainly would have been helpful if this work had started earlier—thus impacting more future leaders—it is still worth celebrating how far this community has come together. To use a running metaphor, advancing WPS principles is less of a sprint than a marathon—and more of a relay than an individually run race.

If we wish to sustain our current momentum, the culture of collaboration must continue. To quote Daniel Coyle in his book *The Culture Code*, “Culture is a set of living relationships. . . . It’s not something you *are*, it’s something you *do*.”¹ Doing WPS together hinges on the deliberate effort by members of the PME community to come together on a regular basis (for example, via virtual meetings of the WPS Joint Academic Forum initiated by Colonel Veronica Oswald-Hrutkay of the U.S. Army War College in 2019, and currently the WPS PME Working Group led by Dr. LisaRe Babin at the Army University) to share what they are working on and to serve as resources for each another (for example, in person at annual WPS symposiums hosted by the U.S. Naval War College and Defense Security Cooperation University). There is also an ongoing need to capture current efforts not just for annual data calls sent up to the Office of the Secretary of Defense, but in free and easily accessible articles and edited volumes published by the military presses.

¹ Daniel Coyle, *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* (New York: Bantam, 2018), xx, emphasis added.

This publication offers a snapshot of the ways in which WPS is being brought to life in the intermediate and senior-level military classrooms across the various branches of the Armed Services. Summaries were provided by WPS programming leads at Air University, Army War College, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Joint Forces Staff College, Marine Corps University, National Defense University, Naval Postgraduate School, and Naval War College as well as by the role-playing gender advisors in the Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic-Special (JLASS) Program. Although they are all slightly different (as one might expect given the various mandates for different branches of Service and level of learning), there are some commonalities present in most of the summaries, which encompass the 2023–24 academic year. For example, several of the institutions offer WPS-related student groups, writing awards, library guides, exercise integration, electives, and core courses. These are all important initiatives that are on their way to becoming institutionalized. There are also a few institutions that have set themselves apart in certain areas. Such highlights include:

- The offering of three WPS-related electives annually at the Command and General Staff College
- The creation of the original (and ongoing) WPS symposium and student addresses offered at the Naval War College
- An emphasis on WPS-related injects into the JLASS exercise by the Army War College
- The organization of a gender focal point course that graduated 60 new gender focal points at Air University
- The creation of the original WPS writing award and subsequent awarding of WPS student paper teams at National Defense University
- The initiation of a WPS Scholars program at Marine Corps University, which tripled its student enrollment in 2024
- The number of student theses—16 in one academic year—devoted to WPS at the Naval Postgraduate School

Taken together, these efforts reflect hundreds, if not thousands, of hours devoted to making WPS relevant and applicable for military students. The WPS community of educators should be commended and celebrated for bringing their experience and expertise together to showcase the value of integrating WPS in PME.

With gratitude,
Lauren Mackenzie, PhD,
Professor of Military Cross-Cultural Competence,
Marine Corps University

AIR UNIVERSITY SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

Annual Language, Regional Expertise and Culture (LREC) Symposium:

The Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) hosts an annual LREC symposium. Each year has a new theme that typically centers around Chief of Staff of the Air Force priorities that address global challenges. Each year, the AFCLC solicits topics and panel abstracts to incorporate into its agenda. The last two years, it has incorporated topics pertaining to Women, Peace, and Security. This year, Ms. Charity Borg provided a presentation on the topic of gender in strategic competition, specifically addressing how WPS influences security alliance decision-making, builds collective capacity, and resilience to People’s Republic of China coercion.

Inaugural International Alumni of Distinction Seminar: In March 2023, the International Officer School hosted a three-day seminar that provided an opportunity for 32 senior leaders from around the world to engage with each other and key officers and senior enlisted leaders within the U.S. military community. Topics of discussion included Women, Peace, and Security and the development and empowerment of a professional enlisted force. Additionally, the seminar explored integration by design via coalition interoperability, focusing on integrated deterrence strategy, agile combat employment, information sharing, and all-domain command and control integration.

Curriculum: Air University has increasingly incorporated WPS principles into its curriculum. The Jeanne M. Holm Center for Officer Accessions and Citizen Development developed a Gender and Culture in Conflict course. The Air Command and Staff College incorporated WPS principles into its War and Gender Post–1945 US elective, a Gender and Leadership elective, and hosted a special WPS seminar for its political affairs specialists in late January 2024. Additionally, the Global College of PME, which delivers distance learning professional education, has coordinated with Joint Staff curriculum developers to incorporate gender analysis into operational planning blocks of instruction. Air War College offers the elective course WPS in CENTCOM and at Home—Impact of Changing Gender Roles and Women’s Movements on International Security, which discusses the 2017 Women Peace and Security Act and the need to strengthen efforts to prevent, mitigate, and resolve conflict by increasing women’s participation. Faculty across all Air University colleges are finding creative and relevant ways to integrate gender considerations into their classrooms.

Gender Focal Point Training: Air University faculty organized and participated in a Department of Air Force-led Gender Focal Point course in June 2023. The course graduated approximately 60 new gender focal points, all of whom worked at Air University and across Air Education and Training Command.

Publications: Two WPS-related publications were authored by Air University faculty and students in 2023.

Martinez, Christine, Major. "Women, Peace, and Security: An Underutilized Tool in Countering the People's Republic of China in the US Southern Command Area of Responsibility." *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 6, no. 7 (September–October 2023): 110–16.

Hur, Hyunsoo. "Women, Peace, and Security in the Indo-Pacific: US Personnel Views from the Ground." *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 6, no. 6 (September 2023): 48–71.

—*Summary provided by Lieutenant Colonel Lyndsey Banks, Air University Gender Focal Point*

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

The U.S. Army War College has integrated the WPS agenda and the corresponding DOD equities throughout its institutional structures, processes, and the Joint PME curriculum. In support of the DOD WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP), Defense Objective 1 and Intermediate Defense Objective 1.1, key lines of effort to integrate the WPS agenda showcased on this communication are a six-week elective focused on WPS principles, a two-week WPS graduate seminar, and incorporation of WPS-focused scenarios in wargaming exercises, among others.

The Operationalizing WPS in Transforming Conflict Course (DE 2381) is a six-week elective designed for distance education students seeking to explore, understand, and engage WPS concepts. Students also examine international and national WPS-related policies and their efficacy, functionality, and interoperability. Students completing this course gain coherency, advance competency, and expand perspectives on the strategic and operational application of WPS concepts and principles that ultimately aim to establish positive defense and security conditions that protect national interests. This includes greater awareness of the risk attendant on failing to apply a gender perspective and the opportunity of meaningful participation of women in capacity-building and decision-making within the institution, with partner institutions, and within the host community we aim to inspire across the entire competition continuum. In addition, students are encouraged to use this study to further their abilities to assess the range of military operations, mandates, and country national action plans around WPS/gender concepts.

A Cross-Cutting and Emerging Approach to Operating in the Joint Environment two-week WPS graduate seminar is designed for senior military leaders involved in strategic decision-making that influences the development of plans and execution of operations across the Joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) environment while working with foreign defense and security forces. The seminar is an

opportunity to gain foundational awareness of a strategic imperative for commanders and staffs to make critical decisions based on all the information in the operating environment. Students learn how to operationalize a whole of society approach from a Joint staff perspective, culminating with a brief-out to a senior leader. For students who completed DE 2381 (above), the seminar offers an opportunity to deepen their intellectual understanding about this cross-cutting WPS concept into direct application for operating in a strategic environment.

The Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic Exercise (JLASS-EX) is a wargaming program providing experiential learning in the design and execution of military operations across the competition continuum at the strategic level of war. WPS principles integrated in the JLASS-EX include participation of women in peace and security; protection of women and girls from violence; inclusion of women in conflict prevention; equal access to relief and recovery before, during, and after conflict and crisis; protection of human rights; equal application of the rule of law; and incorporation of a gender perspective into peace and security efforts, and DOD equities such as: gender integration; professionalization of partner nation armed forces sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) prevention; gender-based violence (GBV) prevention; protection of civilians; protection of children affected by armed conflict; countering trafficking in persons; humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR); countering violent extremism.

—Summary provided by Dr. Ric Killian, Deputy Provost, U.S. Army War College

U.S. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

The Command and General Staff College's (CGSC) Command and General Staff School (CGSS) has incorporated WPS principles into the facility, curriculum, and extracurricular activities related to its Officers Course.

Facility: The school has replaced a historic photograph of students in a classroom of the school's Lewis and Clark Center with one that includes women. This contributed to achieving Defense Objective 1 of the DOD WPS SFIP. Approved a display of the historical perspective of women in the military. The Frontier Army Museum will create and maintain a WPS display in the Lewis and Clark Center to display the artifacts and stories of women in the military from the late eighteenth century through to modern day. The display will change to reflect a different time-period three times each year. This contributed to achieving Defense Objective 1 of the WPS SFIP.

Curriculum: Command and General Staff Officers Course offers three elective courses that contribute to students understanding the WPS principles. The Women at War course provides a survey of theoretical debates over the use, experience, and effects of women in war. While exploring the history of women at war in a global

context, it focuses primarily on women at war in the Western world, with a particular emphasis on American women from the Revolution to the present. In this course, students will analyze the role of, and understand the historical context of, women engaged in, or by, war. Through a survey of women's historical experience of war, students will further understand that women have always played a role in war, thus influencing—even if indirectly—the development of military policy, revolutions in military affairs, and the conduct and termination of war. The Women and Leadership course is for the women and men who will lead the next generation of women in the military. The course provides knowledge and proven strategies for students understand the different challenges women and other minorities face as they lead in the military. Students will gain an understanding of their own role in maximizing the potential contributions of the women in an organization. Students gain knowledge and resources to address some of the most common barriers women face in gaining credibility as a leader. The Mass Atrocity, Genocide and the Military Role in Identification, Prevention, and Intervention course familiarizes military officers with the concept of genocide prevention. Students gain the tools necessary to advise and assist their governments in recognizing and preventing genocide. The course examines and analyzes the military's capacity to assist in policymaking and understand the ability of enlightened military action to prevent genocide. Military leaders apply the learning objectives of the course to real world situations to assist in developing guidance on genocide prevention and response to a genocide or mass atrocity event and incorporation of the concepts of genocide prevention into military doctrine, training and education. The course teaches military leaders the warning signs of genocide and mass atrocities with the goal of prevention. CGSS gender-briefed key leaders and curriculum developers on the WPS SFIP and WPS principles and helped them generate ideas for continued integrations into the strategic and tactical curriculum and exercises.

Extracurricular activities: The CGSC Foundation supports a women's mentoring program tailored to the location and schedule of the schools within CGSC. This program includes social and educational activities connecting mentors with women students who elect to participate in the program or activity. These events have gained in popularity since being established in 2019. CGSS approved a WPS writing award for the Command and General Staff Officers Course class of 2024. This will formalize the process to identify and select a winning paper for submission to Army University and the Joint PME WPS writing competition.

—*Summary provided by Dr. LisaRe Babin, research psychologist, Army University, and Michelle Garcia, assistant professor, Command and General Staff College Gender Focal Point*

MARINE CORPS UNIVERSITY SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

MCU-wide student opportunities: Since 2018, MCU faculty have partnered with the National Naval Officers Association to sponsor an annual WPS writing award competition that seeks to attract and reward student WPS-related research. A compilation of award-winning papers was published in the first volume of *Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education* (MCU Press, 2022) edited by MCU and Army War College faculty. Additionally, this is the third year the Reynolds Scholars Program has been offered to all MCU students. Named for Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds (Ret), the Reynolds Scholars Program's monthly meetings focus on the advancement of the WPS effort, and this year student enrollment tripled.

Conferences and presentations: Faculty delivered invited presentations at the Naval War College's WPS Symposium, the Defense Security Cooperation University WPS Conference, and NDU's Center for Applied Strategic Learning, as well as in the WPS 100-level Gender Advisor course. MCU faculty were also invited to deliver a keynote presentation titled "Integrating WPS Considerations into PME" at the U.S. Naval Academy's Conference on Teaching and Learning.

Curriculum: Along with consistent integration of WPS-related concepts across the curriculum (to include a WPS core course and Gender, War and Security elective), the MCU Command and Staff College (CSC) has increasingly incorporated WPS principles into planning exercises and wargaming through the Warfighting Department. Whether it be in seminars devoted to causal analysis, intercultural communication, or critical thinking, faculty across all MCU colleges are finding creative and relevant ways to integrate gender considerations into their classrooms.

Collaboration: MCU faculty organized and participated in a subject matter expert exchange in 2022 with participants from the Swedish Defense University and Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations and in 2023 with faculty from the Canadian Forces College. Faculty members contributed to the NATO Research Task Group report titled *Integrating Gender and Cultural Perspectives in Professional Military Education Programs* led by Dr. Alan Okros. Ms. Melissa Mihocko was hired as a WPS subject matter expert to support students and faculty across MCU.

Faculty development: In 2022, CSC and Marine Corps War College faculty worked together to deliver an MCU-wide WPS faculty development session, and in 2023, CSC faculty members offered a presentation for all new faculty and staff titled

“How MCU Is Leading the WPS Effort in PME.” In-person, virtual, and hybrid WPS faculty development sessions are offered throughout the year.

Publications: Below is a sampling of WPS-related publications authored by MCU faculty:

Mackenzie, Lauren, Claire Metelits, and Bradford Wineman. “The MCU Women, Peace and Security Scholars Program: An Inaugural Year in Review.” *Marine Corps Gazette* 107, no. 3 (March 2023): 79–82.

Mackenzie, Lauren, Claire Metelits, and K Hunter. “Efforts by Defense Civilians to Integrate Women, Peace, and Security Considerations into Professional Military Education.” In *Total Defence Forces in the 21st Century: Collaboration and Integration in the Military Domain*, edited by Joakim Berndtsson, Irina Goldenberg, and Stéfanie von Hlatky, 151–72. Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023.

Taken together, these writing, research, and scholarly program offerings reflect a continuous and scaffolded approach to the institutionalization of WPS within the MCU community.

—*Summary provided by Dr. Lauren Mackenzie, professor of military cross-cultural competence, Marine Corps University*

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

National Defense University (NDU)-wide student opportunities: As part of NDU’s commitment to implement the WPS strategy, students can participate in the annual WPS research and writing competition. Students can submit research papers for award consideration by a panel of judges. Winning papers will address one or more of the following areas: how gendered understandings, perspectives, and/or approaches relate to advancing peace, national security, economic, and social development, and/or international cooperation; conflict resolution; peacebuilding; conflict prevention; protection of rights; protection from gender-based harms; protection of women and girls during and after conflict; access to relief and recovery; humanitarian assistance/disaster relief; leadership; counterterrorism efforts; or gender equality in military, law enforcement, and other security services. The judging committee selects a winning paper each May. The winner is awarded a certificate of achievement signed by NDU’s president and may be invited by partner organizations to present their research to a wider audience.

NDU Library WPS Collection: The NDU library maintains a digital WPS collection (in various formats) with foundational documents and other WPS resources: https://ndu.libguides.com/MERLN_WPS.

Curriculum: NDU offers a WPS elective Women, Peace, and Security: Gender Perspective in National Security (NWC6079).

Student groups: The College of Information and Cyberspace, the College of International Security Affairs, Eisenhower College, and National War College have student-led Women in National Security (WINS) affinity groups. Their purpose is to provide network opportunities, share leadership perspectives, and promoting awareness about the value and need for diversity and inclusion of Women as national security leaders. WINS groups host guest speakers that showcase women in leadership roles.

Joint Forces Staff College (JFSC): JFSC continues its Mary Edwards Walker Paper Award for each resident Joint Coalition Warfighting School class four times per year, recognizing a WPS-related paper written by a student paper team. The Joint Advanced Warfighting School at JFSC includes a lesson on WPS and human security at the beginning of its Operational Planning course. The JFSC WPS lead conducted a faculty development session on WPS in May 2023 and also presented a short brief on WPS in Wargaming at the 2023 NATO Allied Command Transformation Annual Gender Advisor Conference. JFSC exercises include WPS themes, and the JFSC WPS lead created an optional gender focal point role-player script to be used by students in exercises.

—*Summary provided by Dr. Mariya Y. Omelicheva, professor of strategy, National War College, and Ms. Rebecca Sorell, JFSC WPS lead*

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

The Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) has actively engaged in research and education supporting the WPS agenda. From 2011–23, NPS faculty engaged in more than 35 sponsored research and teaching projects and advised more than 200 theses related to gender inclusion and equity and WPS. Recent activities have focused on U.S. military and civilian gender diversity and integration, understanding the role of women in political violence, mobile education teams, and train-the-trainer seminars in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Institutionally, NPS established the Inclusion and Diversity Council in 2018 to assist leadership on issues of employee diversity and inclusion.

From August 2022 to February 2023, 16 student theses were written on issues relating to the WPS initiative. They range from understanding the impact of women on violent social movements in the United States, female participation in UN peace-keeping operations, and female inclusion and retention in law enforcement and the militaries of the United States and its allies, and the role of women in developing stable peace and countering terrorism. Prior to 2022, NPS students have written numerous theses on women's issues, covering such topics as femicide/violence against women;

(mis)treatment of women in combat; gender-based violence in the military and on the battlefield; sextortion and human trafficking. A few illustrative titles from 2022 to 2024 indicate the diversity of student research: “Analyses of Female Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations” (March 2022), “Do the Dutch Know Much?: A Comparative Analysis of Gender and Use of Force in Law Enforcement in the Netherlands and the United States” (September 2023), and “The Effects on U.S. Navy Diversity with the Removal of Officer Photos from Promotion Selection Boards” (March 2022).

NPS faculty have produced nearly 20 studies related to WPS during 2022–24. They have engaged in mobile, virtual, and in-residence educational seminars related to WPS. Faculty incorporate issues of gender, peace, equity, and sexual violence into courses such as international law, civil-military relations, intelligence, terrorism and political violence, social movements, refugees, regional security, domestic security institutions, and manpower systems analysis. Some of the most involved faculty have been Jomana Amara, Kathryn Aten, Marigee Bacolod, Deborah Gibbons, Carolyn Halladay, Erik Helzer, Cristina Matei, and Simona Tick. Representative faculty publications from 2022–24 include:

Aten, Kathryn J., Anita M. Salem, and Simona L. Tick. *Sailor Perspectives and Recommendations for Communication About Divisive Events and Inclusion within the Fleet*. Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2022.

Bacolod, Marigee, Jennifer A. Heissel, Laura Laurita, Matthew Molloy, and Ryan Sullivan. “Mothers in the Military: Effect of Maternity Leave Policy on Take-Up.” *Demography* 59, no. 2 (1 April 2002): 787–812. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-9816044>.

Gibbons, Deborah E., Alan Nelson, Covell Meyskens, Miriam Bergue Alves, and Anne Clunan. *Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and Strategic Deterrence: Results of a Two-Year Study*. Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2023.

Thomas, Gail F., Deborah E. Gibbons, and Sally Baho. “Prevention Is Better than the Cure: The Development of Gray-zone Situational Judgment Tests to Deter Sex and Gender Discrimination.” *Military Behavioral Health* 10, no. 4 (2022): 368–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2022.2026848>.

—Summary provided by Dr. Anne Clunan, associate professor, Department of National Security Affairs

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE SUMMARY OF WPS EFFORTS

Mainstreaming WPS in NWC Curricula: The U.S. Naval War College (NWC) is committed to building WPS capacities of future leaders in the Joint force, civilian agencies, and counterparts in partner nations through professional military education as required by the U.S. Women Peace and Security Act, Public Law 115-68-October

6, 2017. NWC's *Strategic Plan 2022–27* seeks to integrate the DOD's *WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP)* across all its Joint professional military education (JPME) programs. In recent years, the college has continued to expand its WPS mainstreaming efforts across core curricula in the master of arts in national security and strategic studies, and flag and intermediate level certificate courses for U.S. and international students.

Optional educational activities such as WPS Student lunch-and-learn sessions, faculty development brown-bag lunches, and guest lectures on special topics are offered routinely. To facilitate student research, online library guides offering a wide array of WPS content have been made available and continue to be updated periodically.

Inaugural WPS elective (academic year 2023/24): NWC offered its inaugural Women, Peace and Security: Women in the Military and National Security elective, exposing students, both civilian and military officers in the resident senior and mid-level master's degree courses, an opportunity to deep dive into topics such as WPS in maritime security, women's role in the military, and in leadership. An elective titled the History of Women in War and Combat: The Distinguished Outsiders has long been a highlight of the program.

Women, Peace, and Security Symposium, 26–28 April 2023: The ninth iteration of the annual WPS Symposium at NWC was titled Women, Peace, and Security in a Fragile World: Perspectives on Warfighting, Crisis Management, and Post-Conflict Transitions. The event aimed at fostering a shared understanding of the complex and dynamic global security environment through women's influence and experience as stakeholders and catalysts of change, alongside men. The content focused on DOD's SFIP objectives by examining the application of WPS principles in the armed forces, in building partner nation capacities, and considering the challenges and opportunities for protecting vulnerable women and their communities in conflict and crisis contexts. The event required attendance by all in-resident students and faculty for the first time in the history of the conference series.

Women, Peace and Security in the Future Warfighter Symposium, 10 August 2023: To introduce students to WPS at the outset of the academic year, a focused panel discussion titled "Future of War: Engendering Great Power Competition" was featured at the event attended by 500 in-resident students.

Annual WPS Writing Award 2023 chair: Established several years ago The Honorable Juliette C. McLennan Essay Prize encourages original graduate-level publishable research.

—*Summary provided by Dr. Saira Yamin, the Ambassador Swanee Hunt Named Chair of Women, Peace, and Security, Naval War College*

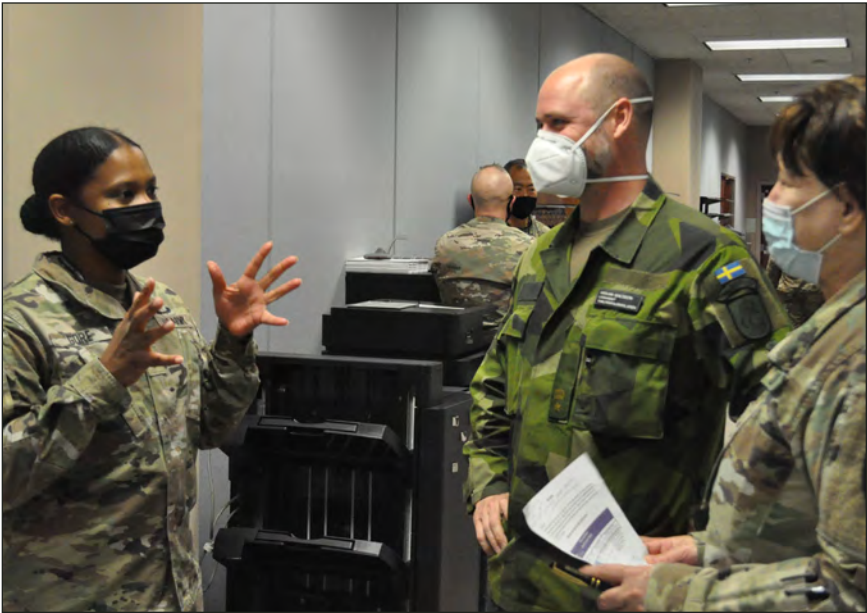
TEACHING WPS IN WARGAMING

The Role-Playing Gender Advisors in the Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic-Special Program

Wargaming in PME is a proven way for students to practice military decision-making while exercising creative and critical thinking. Active and experiential learning on WPS, as practiced in wargaming, is critical to developing the gender advisory skills the U.S. military requires.

The Joint Land, Air, and Sea Strategic-Special Program (JLASS-SP) began in 1983 as Carlisle-Maxwell (CAR-MAX), an Army and Air War College exercise program. Over time, it evolved to a global strategic-level experiential learning program with most senior level colleges with students and international fellows role-playing civilian and military leaders at the national and geographic combatant commander level in a scenario set 10 years into the future. In JLASS-SP, students evaluate the strategic environment and identify key national and alliance interests and supporting defense policy goals; analyze developing situations to synthesize global campaign strategies that employ all instruments of power to shape outcomes in the best interest of the nation/alliance; analyze the information environment in global campaign development and apply effective communication strategies within the joint environment, the multinational environment, the public media, and the interagency to enhance strategic outcomes. In JLASS-SP, each senior level college conducts the program individually with a capstone collective wargaming event concluding the program for the respective academic year.

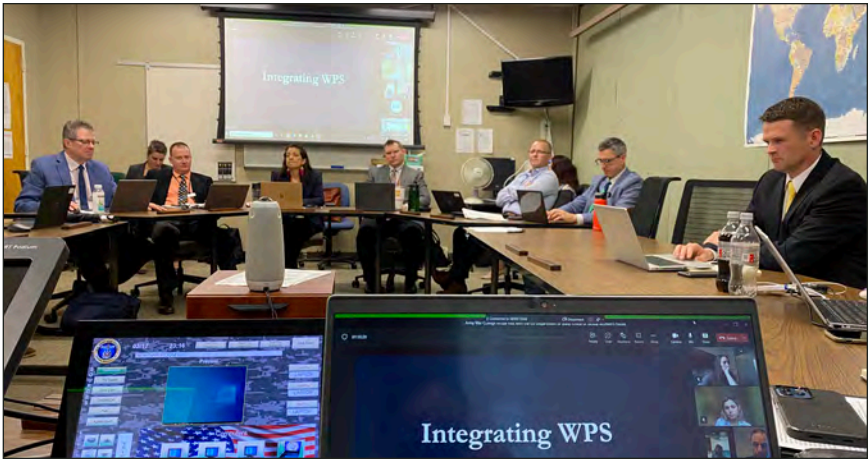
In the 2022 and 2023 academic years, JLASS-SP included students and international fellows from Army War College, Air War College, Naval War College, National Defense University, and Swedish Defense University (the latter manning the fictional NORDIC Command), Chilean War College, and the Nigerian War College. Students role-played gender advisors (GENADs) at the geographic combatant commander level and others played WPS roles in the Joint Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the White House National Security Council. They were coached by an Army War College WPS subject matter expert who contributed notional press articles in the *Early Worm* press digest sent to wargame players and scenario moves and updates to address WPS themes such as the protection of women and girls from violence; inclusion of women in conflict prevention; equal access to relief and recovery before, during, and after conflict and crisis; protection of human rights; equal application of the rule of law; incorporation of a gender perspective into peace and security efforts; gender integration; professionalization of partner nation armed forces; countering sexual exploitation and abuse; protection of civilians; protection of children affected by a armed conflict; countering human trafficking; humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; countering violent extremist organizations; upholding international



LtCol Yolanda Gore of the Army War College (left) and Maj Hakan Isacson of the Swedish National Defense University (middle) discuss WPS issues with Army War College WPS subject matter expert Col Dana Perkins (right) during 2022 JLIASS collective wargame. Courtesy of Col Dana Perkins.

humanitarian law and international human rights; and gender analysis to support intelligence, plans, and operations. Students who were not familiar with the GENAD duties and WPS principles were provided one-on-one training on the spot. An NDU student played the role of WPS lead in the White House Gender Policy Council and convened meetings with GENADs to sync and coordinate activities. In the JLIASS-SP scenario, the real-world Nordic Center for Gender in Military Operations (as an asset of the fictional NORDIC Command) was able to respond to requests for train-the-trainers GENADs in support of other combatant commands. In 2023, GENADs were asked to also include in their consideration DOD's *Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan*.

The Swedish Defense University student who served as NORDIC Command GENAD provided the following feedback post-JLIASS-SP: "Continue to: 1) involve a gender perspective into the strategic exercise, it is educational to have a larger perspective to gender questions. 2) have open and welcoming attitude to gender perspective. 3) positive learning environment. . . . It would be great to have game-cards that implicate gender related issues cause to military action during the exercise, forcing the staff work to proactively analyze and plan for complications to their military actions. Thank you for a good exercise."



Army War College students participating in the virtual staff ride with the Department of State, Office of Global Women's Issues in April 2022.

Courtesy of Col Dana Perkins.

Integrating WPS in wargaming enhances strategic mindedness by advancing strategic thinking and expanding awareness and understanding, and it also adds another lens in predicting potential instability. It offers additional depth to analysis and strengthens risk assessments while fostering enduring peace approaches and providing additional insights into countering extremism, and it also can strengthen dialogue and trust.

WPS in JCLASS-SP wargaming complements other educational initiatives at the Army War College such as guest lectures, a six-week elective course delivered in a distance learning environment (Operationalizing WPS in Transforming Conflict) and a two-day seminar designed to deepen the understanding of WPS concepts by making direct application in a strategic environment (A Cross-Cutting and Emerging Approach to Operating in the Joint Environment). Other initiatives include the Strategic Art Film Program featuring the film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* to gain a better understanding of WPS concepts, and a virtual staff ride to the Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues. An Army War College student who participated in the virtual staff ride wrote, "I really liked the WPS portion. It seems like it's getting more attention now and the more information that is taught the more it will be used as a tool and not just a check in the box."

—Summary provided by Colonel Dana Perkins, Colonel Brian Foster (Ret), and Colonel Sheila Scanlon (Ret)

CONCLUSION APPENDIX

Sample Matrix For Consolidating Future WPS Efforts Across PME

To gain a quick look at how PME institutions see themselves implementing DOD's WPS policies, readers might consider aligning to a matrix for PME input. These types of snapshots provide insight into common threads and depths of academic study being offered across the Joint Force. The Joint Staff's J-5 Staff coordinated this effort, and the Command and General Staff College provided the sample data entered into the matrix (see table next page) of how the Command and General Staff School see themselves in the WPS implementation process. The estimate includes the current and three previous academic years. Students may be interested in a project using the official DOD WPS Annual Data Call to interpret what is being reported against this matrix. One such student may also consider other categories as appropriate. For example, the gender breakdown among faculty by number and/or percentage. The listed academic schools in the matrix are also initial recommendations for analysis of past and current participants within the Joint WPS Academic Forum.

—Colonel Veronica Oswald-Hrutkay, USA (Ret), RN, BSN, MN, MSS, ACNP

WPS in PME - AT A GLANCE - SNAPSHOT

Row responses: Last 3 years (AY 2020-2022)/AY2023 (current)	WPS Elective	WPS E-track	Briefs	Integrate	Execute	Material	Resource	Research	Fac TRG/ Dev	Lead	Charter	PN women	Report	RES/DE	JWAF	Other	
KEY: See detailed KEY below describing each column item Row responses: Last 3 years (AY 2020-2022)/AY2023 (current) Please include any COMMENTS you identify; place an ASTERISK (*) in the box (also) for comments you want to include (as shown in the first example entry). Place comments below the box in free text and state which row it is Note: COMMENTS do not fit in the actual snapshot. They will be referred to by the corresponding asterisk and placed in free text in another area.																	
PME Institution	4/3	NA	0/1	10%/45%/1%/1%	Blackboard*	Blackboard, website & Facebook*	6/0	yes/yes*	no/yes	SFIP and PME Network			yes/yes	yes/no	yes/yes	several initiatives*	
<i>United States Command and General Staff College (CGSC) (These answers reflect only the Command and General Staff School which runs the credentialing course for majors, the command and general staff officers course (CGSOC).</i>																	
<i>U.S. Department of State (Partner nation women participation in PME)</i>																	
<i>Air University</i>																	
<i>Army Management Staff College</i>																	
<i>Army University</i>																	
<i>Defense Institute for Medical Operations</i>																	
<i>Defense Language Institute English Language Center</i>																	
<i>Defense Security Cooperation University</i>																	
<i>Department of the Navy</i>																	
<i>Joint Forces Staff College</i>																	
<i>Joint Special Operations University</i>																	
<i>National Defense University</i>																	
<i>Naval Postgraduate School</i>																	
<i>RAND Corporation</i>																	
<i>Sergeant Major Academy</i>																	
<i>Uninformed Services University</i>																	
<i>U.S. Air Force Academy</i>																	
<i>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Engineer Research and Development Center</i>																	
<i>U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute</i>																	
<i>U.S. Army War College</i>																	
<i>U.S. Coast Guard Academy</i>																	
<i>U.S. Indo-Pacific Command</i>																	
<i>U.S. Marine Corps University</i>																	
<i>U.S. Military Academy West Point</i>																	
<i>U.S. Naval Academy</i>																	
<i>U.S. Naval War College</i>																	
<i>U.S. Space Force</i>																	
<i>U.S. Transportation Command</i>																	
<i>Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation</i>																	

Key: Asterisk (*)= Comments Note: all comments to be placed in publication (some may be consolidated); place any comments under each row as it may apply for each PME institution. NOTE: COMMENTS are optional. Comments can be something that may require additional explanation or included if the list above does not capture something that was offered. Please be as brief as reasonably possible when commenting. Number of WPS-specific: electives. Number of electives that include a WPS-specific track. Number of WPS-specific briefings. SME (WPS-specific, subject matter expert) presentations. Percentage of base programming assessed for WPS integration applicability. Percentage of base programming WPS integration executed (applied). Student-specific material/tools inclusive of WPS. Existence of a student/faculty WPS knowledge resource site/library. WPS-supported student research (theses, papers). Training for faculty/faculty development/faculty certification to teach WPS. Existence of a WPS lead, director, or focal group (i.e., gender focal points, GENAD, etc.). Existence of a WPS charter (i.e., steering committee, WPS/gender focal point network). Number of partner nation (PN) women graduated. Submitted annual report for DOD WPS Data Call. WPS in resident and distance education programs. Joint WPS Academic Forum (JWAF) participant. Other: additional comments here

Glossary of Key WPS Concepts and Terms

Empowerment is the process of gaining authority, power, confidence, and control to perform various acts or duties autonomously.¹

Equality is the right of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment.²

Equity is a situation in which everyone is treated fairly according to their needs and no group of people is given special treatment.³

Gender refers to the socio-culturally constructed roles, rights, privileges, and responsibilities of men, women, boys, and girls.⁴

Gender advisors (GENADs) serve as the subject matter expert for implementation of a gender perspective in military operations in accordance with the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, U.S. Strategy on WPS, and DOD WPS guidance.⁵

Gender analysis is an examination of the relationships and interactions between men and women, their access to and control of resources, the constraints they face relative to each other, and sociocultural power structures.⁶

Gender awareness is the knowledge and understanding of the differences in roles and relations between women and men, especially in the workplace.⁷

Gender balance refers to efforts that ensure both men and women have equal opportunities and access to matters in the institutions of society (namely: religion, economy,

¹ *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "empowerment," accessed 10 May 2022.

² *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "equality," accessed 10 May 2022.

³ *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "equity," accessed 10 May 2022.

⁴ DOD Introduction to Women, Peace, and Security course and DOD Women, Peace, and Security Implementation course, both Joint Knowledge Online, accessed 10 May 2022, hereafter JKO WPS training courses.

⁵ "Joint Task Force Gender Advisor Description," Resources, Women, Peace, and Security Studies, U.S. Army War College, accessed 6 May 2024.

⁶ JKO WPS training courses.

⁷ *Cambridge Dictionary* online, s.v. "gender awareness."

education, culture, and polity). Notably, when applied to the military, gender balance does not equate to the ensuring equal numbers of men and women within units.⁸

Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity, and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. Gender-based violence is typically characterized by the use or threat of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, social, and other forms of control and/or abuse. Gender-based violence impacts individuals across the life course and has direct and indirect costs to families, communities, economies, global public health, and development.⁹

Gender blindness is the failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of men and boys and women and girls are assigned to them in specific social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and backgrounds.¹⁰

Gender focal points (GFPs) are the advocates assigned on staff to help mainstream gender throughout a command, specifically within their functional areas. Tasks may vary by functional assignment; duties include advocating for the integration of a gender perspective; establishing and mentoring the gender network; developing and delivering training on gender considerations; monitoring and coordinating data collection; reporting on the achievements within their functional area; and supporting and assisting the GENADs.¹¹

Gender integration refers to the strategies applied in policy/program assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation to take gender norms into account and to compensate for gender-based inequalities. For DOD, *gender integration* often refers to integrating women into the military. Outside of DOD, *gender integration* can refer to “the integration of gender perspectives,” particularly among U.S. interagency partners and civil society organizations.¹²

⁸ JKO WPS training courses.

⁹ JKO WPS training courses.

¹⁰ NATO Term, s.v. “gender blindness,” accessed 16 April 2024.

¹¹ Laura Coy, “The Gender Network: Roles and Duties of GENADs and GFPs” (PowerPoint presentation to AFRICOM, Operationalizing WPS Course, Joint Staff), slide 7.

¹² JKO WPS training courses.

Gender mainstreaming, according to NATO, is “a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women and men an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, programs, and military operations.”¹³ According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, it “involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures, and spending programmes with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.”¹⁴

Gender perspective exposes gender differences and how being treated as a man or woman in society shapes a person’s needs, interests, and security.¹⁵

Meaningful participation is defined as both critical mass and decision-making power throughout an organization’s structure.¹⁶

Sex refers to the biological and physiological differences between males and females, such as the anatomy of an individual’s reproductive system and genetic differences.¹⁷

Sex disaggregated data is data on individuals collected and tabulated separately for women and men.¹⁸

Structural barriers, in the context of WPS, are gender inequalities in social structures, based on institutionalized conceptions of gender differences.¹⁹ Structural barriers also create the *glass ceiling* effect.

UNSCR 1325 is the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on 31 October 2000. It acknowledged the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls and recognizes the critical role that women play in peace processes.

¹³ NATO Term, s.v. “gender mainstreaming,” accessed 10 May 2022.

¹⁴ “What Is Gender Mainstreaming?,” European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed 10 May 2022.

¹⁵ JKO WPS training courses.

¹⁶ *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), 7n2.

¹⁷ JKO WPS training courses.

¹⁸ “Sex-disaggregated Data,” European Institute for Gender Equality, accessed 10 May 2022.

¹⁹ “Structural barriers,” Statistical Terms Glossary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, accessed 6 May 2024.

United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security was published in 2019 in response to the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017. The strategy seeks to increase women’s meaningful participation in political and civic life by ensuring women are empowered to lead and contribute, equipped with the necessary skills to support and succeed, and supported to participate through access to opportunities and resources.²⁰ Women’s contributions as agents of change in conflict prevention and resolution increase peace-building capacity and long-term maintenance of peace.

U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security was published in 2023 in the wake of critical global events—geopolitical changes, a rise in climate-related crises, and advancements in technology, among others—to adapt and update the U.S. approach, in line with the requirements of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017. The updated strategy is rooted in existing legislation and normative frameworks and is informed by consultations with civil society, women-led organizations, and women leaders to fulfill the WPS Act of 2017 and build on prior U.S. commitments to advance women’s involvement in peace and security processes, including the 2019 WPS Strategy.²¹

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda is a particular theme of the UN Security Council’s work under its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security that the council has considered at formal meetings. UNSCR 1325 and nine other resolutions are the outcomes of the UN Security Council’s WPS agenda.

²⁰ *United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: White House, 2019), 2.

²¹ *U.S. Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security* (Washington, DC: White House, 2023).

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The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda is a global framework and policy tool that guides national actions addressing gender inequalities and the drivers of conflict and its impact on women and girls. By fostering structural and institutional change, the WPS agenda aims to 1) prevent conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls and 2) ensure the inclusion and participation of women in peace and security decision-making processes to incorporate their specific needs in relief and recovery situations. The ultimate goal is to promote more inclusive and democratic societies and the long-term stability of countries and regions. This second volume showcases student papers from the Joint Women, Peace, and Security Academic Forum's 2022 and 2023 WPS in PME Writing Awards, a best-of selection of informative and empowering work that intersects with the Department of Defense equities supporting global WPS principles. This monograph demonstrates how the strategic leaders of tomorrow think WPS principles should be implemented, and how those principles will influence the paradigm of peace and security and our approaches to conflict prevention and resolution.

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