

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

THESIS SIGNATURE PAGE

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

SOCIOLOGICAL PRACTICE

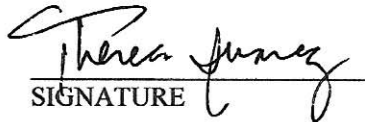
THESIS TITLE: Camouflaging Military Distress: The Systematic Silencing of Women Military Members

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DATE OF SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE: May 4, 2018

THE THESIS HAS BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE IN  
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
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**Camouflaging Military Distress:  
The Systematic Silencing of Women Military Members**

A Master's Thesis  
In Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Sociological Practice  
California State University San Marcos  
Department of Sociology

Presented by  
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MAY 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative research explores the experiences of 10 women military members from three United States (U.S.) military branches: Army, Marine Corps and Navy. Specifically, it looks at how women military members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress created and aggravated by systematic marginalization in the military. Due to the lengthy and drawn-out wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, military mental health has become a major point of social and political concern in society. However, the mental and emotional experiences of women military members are being overlooked. Current literature focuses on the socialization of military members, masculine military culture, and war related mental illness and trauma; there is insufficient literature that explores how women military members are impacted by the military institution. I utilize Labeling Theory, Symbolic Interactionism and Feminist Standpoint Theory to understand how stigmatizing labels and social interactions shape the identities of women military members. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants who self-identified as women veterans. Findings reveal that cultural masculinity creates an environment in the military that perpetuates and sustains the systematic subordination of women military members. As a result, self-silencing and identity management are frequently used by women military members as tools to help navigate through the military institutional system and to cope with distress.

Keywords: Feminist Standpoint Theory, gender subordination, hyper-masculinity, identity management, Labeling Theory, self-silencing, sexual assault, Symbolic Interactionism, women military members.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My Amazing Parents: Mom and Dad, not only are you the most important people in my life, but you are also my biggest supporters. Thank you for always having faith in my ability as a student, even when I do not have faith in myself. When I fall, you lift me back up and motivate me to keep moving forward. I love both of you more than words can express. Without your constant encouragement I would not be the strong-willed woman I am today. P.S. Thanks for letting me play with trucks and supporting all of my nonsense. XOXO

April: Meeting you was one of the greatest things ever! You are constantly there for me when I just need someone to vent to and you always listen without judging me. Without your help and support I would not have been able to accomplish my thesis. When I do not feel confident and have anxiety, you are always my voice. I am so proud to consider you one of my best friends and I am excited to continue our academic careers together. Most of all thank you for being one of my biggest supporters, even though you always see my work through “mom goggles.”

My Committee Members: Dr. Suarez, Dr. Robertson, and Dr. Swan, thank you for always motivating and encouraging me to keep my head held high. This process has challenged me, but your continual support and kindness has given me confidence in myself and in my academic ability. The guidance I have received from each one of you has shaped me into a more critically minded sociologist and for that I am so thankful. A special thank you needs to go to Dr. Suarez for always being calm and patient with my working style. You always knew that I would eventually accomplish everything and your gentle encouragement promoted me to keep moving forward.

Cohort: I am so lucky to have been able to learn and grow as a person alongside each and every one of you. You all made these last two years easier and most importantly you all made this experience fun. Thank you for always being supportive. I am lucky to have such a good group of friends like you all. I am going to miss our constant and hilarious group text messages.

Hank: Baby Hank you are the greatest little guy ever. Thank you for being there for me when I felt sad or alone. You give my life joy! XO

Participants: Thank you for being willing to share your stories. Your experiences motivate and encourage me to continue in academia so I can help give a platform to women who are not being heard. You are all strong, amazing and motivating women and I am so grateful for the opportunity to hear your stories.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2007, during the apex of the war in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom, OEF) and Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom, OIF), I joined the United States Marine Corps (USMC) as a reservist. Less than a year later, I was diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety. I knew there could be repercussions if I reported my diagnoses to my Chain of Command (COC), so I made the decision to conceal my new truth and struggle with mental illness in secret. From that moment on, I worked to skillfully conceal all negative aspects of my life from the military. Wanting to appear as an asset and not as a burden, I essentially created two separate identities: one while in uniform as a Marine and another as a civilian, completely disconnecting myself from the military. This would be the first of many decisions that I would make during my military career, to cloak my identity from being tainted by the truth.

In 2009 I volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan, in support of OEF. Before beginning pre-deployment training, I made the personal decision to forgo taking medication for my depression and anxiety. As the days went by, I began to slowly sink back into a depressive state. Though the lack of medication was taking a toll on my state of mind, it was severely exacerbated by the fear of the unknown. My mind ran wild with thoughts about what would happen to me in Afghanistan in the coming months. The constant flow of information from those in charge, such as our platoon's first lieutenant, was only legitimizing my speculative thoughts.

One afternoon, our platoon's Officer in Charge (OIC) rallied us into a circle and told us to take a knee. There under the blazing hot Mojave Desert sun, our OIC told us our fate; several of us would be injured and at least one of us would be killed. At that moment, I felt like time had stopped, no longer able to hear the words the OIC was saying, I was transfixed on his previous statement: one of us would be killed. I was certain I would be maimed or killed in the following

few months, which intensified my depression. But, I knew if I entertained this fear, causing me to lose control of myself, that my fate would be sealed, and I would be the one coming home in a casket.

The Marine Corps trains every member to adapt and overcome all obstacles, including physical and mental pain, so I drew upon my training to make sense of my new uncharted feelings. During boot camp, I remember laying in my rack, exhausted and scared, being instructed to recite the *Rifleman's Creed*, creating the foundation of mine and every Marine's indoctrination into the Marine Corps. In ghostly unison all seventy or more women recruits loudly proclaim:

This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine. My rifle is my best friend. It is my life. I must master it as I must master my life. Without me, my rifle is useless. Without my rifle, I am useless. I must fire my rifle true. I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me. I must shoot him before he shoots me. I will. (Wikipedia 2018)

So, just as I was taught, I vowed to master my life by adapting and overcoming my weakness, so I could shoot the enemy before they shoot me. I will!... will I? There was no other option, I had to deal with my fear and depression or be killed. After coming to this realization, I felt completely alone. I was equally scared by my depression and of talking about it with anyone in the military. I knew others would perceive me as unfit to deploy for not being able to overcome my body's weakness. As a woman, I already felt the daunting pressure of having to prove my ability to men, who I felt worked half as hard as me. Thus, my only option was to cope with my depression and crippling fear by staying silent.

My personal narrative does not, in totality, exemplify the experiences of all women military members who have dealt with mental and emotional distress, but I suspect that I am not the first and only woman military member to struggle silently. At the time, I did not think twice about why I found it necessary to conceal my mental and emotional distress or how it impacted



my identity as a Marine, but it has laid the basis for my research. Hence, this research seeks to understand how women military members cope and identify with mental and emotional distress<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, I seek to understand how the experiences of women military members with mental and emotional distress are defined within the social institution of the military.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In a 2008 report, *Observations and Critique of the DoD Task Force of Mental Health*, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Inspector General (OIG) makes four recommendations based on OIG Task Force findings. One finding states, “there is a cultural reluctance to self-disclose a condition that may jeopardize one’s fitness for duty... For military members with psychological health problems, stigma is the primary barrier to self-disclosing these problems and seeking mental health care” (U.S. Department of Defense 2008:2-3). The findings suggest that mental health issues are prevalent both during wartime and peacetime (U.S. Department of Defense Office 2008; Gibbs et al. 2011). For example, during peacetime between 1990 and 1999, 13 percent of all military hospitalizations were related to patients with mental health disorders (U.S. Department of Defense 2008). Comparatively, during OEF and OIF between 2001 and 2011, the rate of mental health diagnoses increased approximately 65 percent among active military members (Blakeley and Jansen 2013). In 2011 alone, military members were hospitalized for mental disorders more than any other illness (Blakeley and Jansen 2013). Statistical findings suggest that though there may be an increase in mental illness diagnoses during wartime, it is certainly still rampant during peacetime (Blakeley and Jansen 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> For this research, the phrase mental and emotional distress is used as a general term to describe both diagnosed mental health issues and emotional distress that has not been diagnosed.

Current literature mirrors the 2008 OIG and 2013 CRS findings, suggesting military members resist disclosing mental health issues due to fear of stigma, specifically fearing being perceived as weak or unfit to serve (Feinstein 2015; Gibbs et al. 2011; Hall 2011; Hipes 2012). In addition, a large group of studies discuss how military members are impacted by the process of resocialization upon entering the military institution, whereby service members are forced to adopt new norms, values and beliefs, all of which are entrenched in patriarchy (Bradley 2007; Dunivin 1994; Fox and Pease 2012; Herbert 1993; Titunik 2000; Van Gilder 2017). As Hipes (2011) suggests, “while these norms help to maintain a unified fighting force, their enforcement may foster divisions between individuals seen as fit for duty and individuals seen as too weak to handle the stressors of military service” (p. 1). The process of resocialization creates a strict framework characterizing what is considered an “ideal” military member (Dunivin 1994; Fox and Pease 2012; Herbert 1993; Morgan 2007; Titunik 2000; Van Gilder 2017). Conversely, that same process negatively impacts those who do not possess such traits, potentially causing military members to feel emotionally vulnerable and to experience shame (Dunivin 1994; Fox and Pease 2012; Herbert 1993; Titunik 2000; Van Gilder 2017). Few studies specifically address how military resocialization affects how members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress (Fox and Pease 2012). Far less literature addresses how this process specifically impacts the experiences of women military members (Herbert 1993).

More than ever before, there is gender inclusion in the military, but the experiences of women military members continue to be defined by a system that does not fully accept their presence (Morgan 2007). According to the U.S. Department of Defense 2014 report on military demographics, the DoD Active Duty force is comprised of 15.1 percent of women and 84.9 percent of men. As Van Gilder (2017) states, “the inclusion of diverse bodies is not enough to

change military culture” (p. 156), because the military institutional system is constructed around masculine norms and ideals (Herbert 1993). The DoD reports, in the *2011 Health Related Behaviors Survey of Active Duty Military Personnel* (2013), 50.7 percent of all women in the military reported experiencing gender-related stress. Additionally, women who reported gender-related stress in the military had twice as high levels of perceived anxiety and depression (U.S. Department of Defense 2013).

Scholarly literature frequently discusses how military culture is socially constructed by an institution mostly comprised of men, causing its values, norms, and beliefs to center around traditional masculine ideals (Doan and Portillo 2017; Dunivin 1994; Fox and Pease 2012; Hajjar 2014; Hall 2011; Herbert 1993; Hinojosa 2010; Morgan 2007; Titunik 2000; Van Gilder 2017). What remains to be fully explored is how military masculine culture impacts the way women military members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress. Therefore, this research seeks to understand the experiences of women military members who served in the Army, Marine Corps and Navy and have experienced mental and emotional distress while on active or reserve duty in the military. More specifically, this research investigates how the military as an institutional culture rewards masculinity at the expense of meeting the needs of women military members—ultimately, creating a social environment wherein women are systematically silenced.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To understand the diverse experiences of women military members requires listening and paying attention to their silences and watching how their male supervisors and peers behave and react to them (Enloe 2007). For example, Cynthia Enloe (2007) states:

When women inside any military (or military academy) do not report sexual abuse they have experienced by their male colleagues and superiors—because they decide the

military justice system can't be trusted, because they fear being ostracized as 'turncoats'<sup>2</sup> by their peers, or because they have seen how other women's careers have been harmed after they have spoken up—that is significant. It takes courage in any patriarchal institution to raise public objections to masculinized abuse. (P. 69-70)

Similarly, when women military members stay silent, not discussing or seeking help when they experience mental and emotional distress, it is an important silence that needs to be fully analyzed to uncover its meaning. The silences are potentially a powerful key in unlocking how and why women military members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress within the U.S. military institution. Thus, this research seeks to interpret the meaning behind the silences of women military members.

Current scholarly literature on military members, specifically on how they identify and cope with mental and emotional distress, largely focuses on the experiences of men (Mattocks et al. 2012). Literature on military mental illness, trauma and distress, often conceptualize the experiences of military members without fully establishing how the U.S. military institution impacts these experiences. Hinojosa (2012) states, “social identities and notions of self are intimately intertwined with the institutions in which individuals are embedded” (p. 180). This research seeks to understand how the military institutional system impacts the identities of women military members when experiencing mental and emotional distress. Furthermore, this research seeks to understand the social phenomenon of women military members using silence as a coping strategy to manage mental and emotional distress.

To understand the landscape of current knowledge about the experiences of women military members, I first examine the socialization process, beginning the moment individuals enter the institution of the military. Next, I present literature on masculine military culture to

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<sup>2</sup> A “turncoat” is someone who betrays or changes their alliance from one party to another. Also, known historically as a traitor.

establish the social environment of the military institution and how it systematically marginalizes women and punishes femininity. Third, I explore existing information about military members' experiences with mental illness, trauma and distress and the social construction of mental illness and trauma within the military institution. Lastly, I delve into coping strategies used by military members when experiencing mental and emotional distress in the military, conceptualizing why staying silent is consistently utilized as a coping strategy.

## RESOCIALIZATION

Once people join the military they enter a new social realm where they become socialized as a military member (Bradley 2007; Dunivin 1994; Herbert 1993). Resocialization is defined by Melissa Herbert (1993) as a “process wherein an individual, defined as inadequate according to the norms of a dominant institution(s), is subjected to a dynamic program of behavior intervention aimed at instilling and/or rejuvenating those values, attitudes, and abilities which would allow...[her] to function according to the norms of said dominant institution(s)” (p. 4). The resocialization process happens within what Goffman (1961) refers to as, a “total institution,” where all aspects of an individual's life are defined by the aims of the institution.

Boot camp serves as a great example for understanding how military members are resocialized within the total institution of the military to exhibit masculine traits. According to Fox and Pease (2012), the purpose of boot camp is to “promote the willing and systematic subordination of one's own individual desires and interests to those of one's unit and, ultimately, country” (p. 21). As such, all aspects of new military members' lives are made subordinate to the military institution, are controlled by “institutional authorities” (drill instructors) and accomplish the goals of the total institution (Herbert 1993). The individual's “civil[ian] identity, with its

built-in restraints is eradicated, or at least undermined and set aside in favor of the warrior identity and its central focus upon killing” (Lifton 1983:28 [as cited in Herbert 1993:5]). Military training prepares individuals for combat by promoting traditional ideas of masculinity, like training individuals to disregard their bodies’ natural reactions to run from fear, have pain or show emotions (Fox and Pease 2012).

The military provides members with an identity that creates a sense of reassurance, security, and a sense of purpose (Hall 2011; Hinojosa 2010). Purpose and meaning is partly found, because the institution provides access to symbolic and material resources, helping military members construct meaningful identities (Hinojosa 2010). Fox and Pease (2012) state, “like any social identity, military identity is always an achievement, something dependent upon conformity to others’ expectations and their acknowledgment. The centrality of performance testing in the military, and the need to ‘measure up,’ heightens this dependence. It also heightens the vulnerability to and influence of shame (p. 22). Although resocialization through military training can create a sense of purpose in military members, it also has the likelihood to create mental and emotional distress when members are unable to achieve set standards and expectations (Fox and Pease 2012).

As an institution, the military asserts itself on each new military member working to diminish individuality, promoting group cohesion and solidarity for the institution (Fox and Pease 2012; Hipes 2012; Kirke 2009; Titunik 2000). Group cohesion can create an environment that unifies military members, but it can also cultivate division among those who are viewed as fit to serve and those who are viewed as unfit to serve (Fox and Pease 2012; Hipes 2012). Being regarded as someone who is unsuitable for military service is determined according to patriarchal cultural norms and values, which can be subjective in nature, causing marginalized individuals

who do not perfectly fit the mold of the ideal military member to be labeled as unfit or weak (Gibbs et. al. 2011).

For all military members, the resocialization process attempts to mold the civilian into a masculine warrior who holds the ideology of the military institution above their own. However, for women the resocialization process reaffirms they are outsiders in a system that does not fully accept their presence (Fox and Pease 2012; Herbert 1993; Morgan 2007). Women not only are expected to “shift from a civilian frame of reference to that of a military, but the female recruit is required to shift her frame of reference from ‘female’ to ‘male’” (Herbert 1993:1). Women military members are potentially more vulnerable to experiencing feelings of mental and emotional distress through the process of resocialization, because they are expected to conform to institutional standards based on traditional ideas of masculinity. This research will examine how the experiences of women military members during resocialization influences how they: understand their military and social identities, conceptualize their mental and emotional distress, and cope.

## MASCULINE MILITARY CULTURE

The role of military members has been defined by society and military culture as a job intended to be done by men, especially when it involves war and participating in combat; thus, all military activities exist to support combat roles (Dunivin 1994; Enloe 2007; Herbert 1993; Hajjar 2014; Titunik 2000). For this reason, the values and norms of the military are rooted in masculinity. Historically, combat roles have been completely male dominated and characterized as violent and aggressive (Titunik 2000). Today, even with the inclusion of women in combat

roles, the military is still being defined through a male heteronormative model, which continues to marginalize women military members (Dunivin 1994; Van Gilder 2017).

The core principle of the masculine combat paradigm is the exclusion of those perceived as “others” (Dunivin 1994). Women are seen in direct opposition to the entire foundation of the military’s masculine combat culture (Herbert 1993;). Therefore, women military members who appear to embody military norms through group cohesion, in many cases purposefully displaying male mannerisms, are more likely to be accepted (Doan and Portillo 2017; Hipes 2012).

According to Hipes (2012), “women in mixed-sex groups achieved significantly higher status when they behaved in a group-oriented rather than self-oriented manner” (p. 2).

Unit cohesion in the military is organized around a strict ranking system and creates a structure of authority irrespective of individual characteristics (Titunik 2000). The military institutional ranking system, according to Titunik (2000), “diminishes the importance of primordial and personal characteristics and creates a condition of communal solidarity that transcends individual distinctions” (p. 240-241). Arguably, with a depersonalized system of authority, military member obedience is established through rank, blind to race, gender and all other immutable individual characteristics (Titunik 2000). However, other research suggests, though the military rank hierarchy is touted as an egalitarian system, in actuality it causes the subordination of women, people of color, and individuals who do not fit heteronormative ideals, irrespective of rank (Doan and Portillo 2017; Van-Gilder 2017).

A system of gender hierarchy is shown to obscure the rank hierarchy in the military, causing women to be seen as inferior members within the institution (Doan and Portillo 2017). A high-ranking woman officer highlights how gender hierarchy is commonplace in the military stating, “when I was deployed to Afghanistan there was a guy on my team, it didn’t matter how



good I was, he was a guy and I was a female and we were the same rank. So, it was a mixture of me being female and having the same rank” (Doan and Portillo 2017:244). The power of an existing gender hierarchy in the military was also expressed by a man soldier who worked alongside a woman soldier. He states:

My partner was a mechanic. That was her job. She had exactly the same training as a male mechanic in the army. But any time anything on the base mechanical would happen, she would volunteer and try to use her skillsets and be helpful. But they’d always go to the male infantry mechanic first. And even after another civilian mechanic told the team leader, hey she knows what she’s talking about. She’s been doing this a little bit longer than him. He’s only a specialist<sup>3</sup> and she’s an NCO<sup>4</sup>, the team leader was like, get out. Okay well – I mean it’s parts and grease and stuff so he’s probably better at it. (Doan and Portillo 2017:244)

Both narratives, one by a woman officer and one by a man soldier, poignantly emphasize the dominant effect a gender hierarchy has on women military members. Furthermore, these examples suggest that the military institutional system of hierarchy may not solely be defined by rank.

The military’s emphasis on gender differences is used to maintain the subordination of women military members and to keep hegemonic masculinity as the military’s central identity feature (Doan and Portillo 2017). Enloe (2007) argues, women are only seen as beneficial to the military institution if they can be properly controlled to stay within the sphere of “the actual and the symbolic roles their male superiors assign them” (p. 66). In 1994, the Direct Ground Combat Exclusion Policy was enacted by the Department of Defense (DoD) to formally exclude women military members from combat positions (Doan and Portillo 2017). However, during times of crisis when the military is stretched thin, like during OEF and OIF, all military members are utilized to accomplish mission objectives. In these cases, the roles of women military members

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<sup>3</sup> Specialist or E-4 is an enlisted rank in the U.S. Army.

<sup>4</sup> Non-commissioned officer (NCO) is a military term referring to a group of enlisted ranked individuals in low level leadership roles.

stretch beyond the strict noncombat related roles they are normally assigned, causing women to engage in direct combat situations, thus putting policy and reality at odds with one another (Doan and Portillo 2017). In other words, the social structure of the military institution, dictated by masculine combat culture, is potentially threatened by the presence of women in combat and in other arenas they have historically been excluded from (Doan and Portillo 2017; Enloe 2007). According to Enloe (2007), the success and survival of the military institution is dependent on sustaining ideals that privilege masculinity and marginalize women and anything that is considered feminine.

It is imperative that research extends beyond just understanding how women are positioned within a military power structure that is rooted in masculinity. This research will take it a step further, conceptualizing how women military members draw meaning from the culture and structure of the military and how it shapes their mental and emotional distress and subsequently their identities.

## MILITARY MENTAL ILLNESS AND TRAUMA

Social troubles are always changing, causing individuals from each epoch to experience new and differing forms of mental and emotional distress (Karp 1996; Kutchins and Kirk 2003). Mental and emotional disorders are not diagnoses that are concrete or solely based on biological facts (Kutchins and Kirk 2003). Instead, they fluidly evolve, change, and are sometimes even eliminated depending on the current social environment (Karp 1996; Kutchins and Kirk 2003). As the social environment changes, so too does the understanding of mental and emotional distress. Thus, due to differing social environments, the conceptualization of mental and emotional distress within the military are unique and somewhat autonomous from how it is

conceptualized in mainstream society. However, this is not to say stereotypes, biases, and sexist undertones surrounding mental illness in mainstream society do not affect the conceptualization of mental illness in the military. It simply points out how different social factors modify how mental illness is conceptualized in the military.

Scholarly literature directly addressing mental health in U.S. military members unequivocally concludes that mental illness is widespread in active duty populations who experience combat (Fox and Pease 2012; Gibbs et al. 2011; Whyman et al. 2011). However, there is scholarly division on the matter of how mental illness is framed within the military institution (Gibbs et al. 2011; Whyman et al. 2011). Combat related mental illness in men is considered a prideful badge of courage and an inevitable military occupational hazard (Fox and Pease 2012; Gibbs et al. 2011; Kellezi and Reicher 2014). Differing levels of mental illness acceptance are directly related to the amount of danger the military member experiences during deployments (Gibbs et al. 2011). Low danger level deployments equate to less acceptance of mental illness, whereas extremely dangerous deployments equate to a higher level of mental illness acceptance within the military institution (Gibbs et al. 2011). While some level of mental illness is accepted in U.S. military environments, it is narrowly defined. Those falling outside the narrowly defined criteria of acceptance, experience stigma and backlash from other military members (Gibbs et al. 2011; Hipes 2012).

Identifiable differences between what is seen as acceptable mental illness and what is deemed unacceptable are steeped in gender biases, cultivating division among military members (Fox and Pease 2012; Gibbs et al. 2011; Hipes 2012). Kellezi and Reicher (2014) found that gender norms play a major role in defining the acceptance of war-related traumas. For example, the language and framing of PTSD, as an inevitable result of extensive combat experience,

makes it a more acceptable illness for men to have in the military (Fox and Pease 2012; Gibbs 2011). Fox and Pease (2012) suggest that the relationship between combat trauma and PTSD has given deployment trauma a “masculine aura” (p. 22). Yet, the language and framing of PTSD causes the experiences of women to be downplayed or disregarded due to traditional gender ideas of femininity (Fox and Pease 2012; Mattocks et al. 2012). For instance, Nicki (2001) states “a woman who displays aggression and ambition, and is not feminine, risks being labelled ‘mentally ill’ or, if genuinely mentally ill, having her illness seen purely in terms of her transgression against her gender” (p. 81). Women military members who experience traumatic combat events and display PTSD symptoms, are potentially being ignored due to their gender and preconceived ideas of women’s roles being solely non-combat-related. Furthermore, women military members who experience non-combat-related mental and emotional distress are potentially being disregarded and negatively stereotyped.

## COPING STRATEGIES

Though some military members seek formal treatment, most cope with their mental and emotional distress by skillfully concealing and managing their identities (Gibbs et. al. 2011). Seeking mental health treatment can potentially be detrimental to military career advancement and perceived as a weakness (Hall 2011). Feinstein (2015) suggests the fear of being stigmatized influences military members to not seek treatment. An Army NCO expressed his fear of being stigmatized as mentally ill saying, “I keep my behavioral health stuff wound so tight. I will not tell anybody about it, because what first sergeant is going to place their trust in me and trust their soldiers to me?” (Gibbs et al. 2011:46). Crosby Hipes (2012) concludes that seeking mental health treatment in the military is regarded as a weak act; but, when individuals have contact

with others who have sought treatment, they are also more likely to seek mental health treatment. Furthermore, officers are more likely to perceive military members as weak when they seek treatment for mental illness, suggesting “the importance of high status individuals in preserving group norms” (Hipes 2012:8).

Women military members are shown to utilize several specific coping strategies to deal with mental and emotion stress emotional distress. Mattocks et al. (2012) finds that women veterans tend to use isolation techniques to cope with their emotional and mental distress after deployments. Often, they minimize their experiences in the military, especially during war, causing them to believe their distress does not justify the use of formal mental health care (Mattocks et al. 2012). Women express that sharing their experiences with other women veterans is a positive therapeutic coping method (Mattocks et al. 2012). However, these opportunities are rare and women categorically express that they do not feel comfortable in seeking help through VA services (Mattocks et al. 2012). A woman veteran asserted:

The VA is a place where men—wounded men or retired men go. But I feel that if I’m a woman veteran, or even if I’m a wounded woman veteran, I don’t deserve to go to the VA because there still may be World War II, Korean, or Vietnam vets who need the VA. So, I’m not going to go to the VA because there are so many other guys who need it more than I do. (Mattocks et al. 2012:543)

Research shows that women military members are experiencing emotional and mental distress yet are choosing to forego utilizing formal services to receive treatment. It is imperative that research addresses how the process of militarization socializes women military members and creates an environment that silences them when they are experiencing mental and emotion distress. Therefore, in this research I will do just that, consider the experiences of women military members by framing their mental and emotional distress through the larger social environment of the military where distress originates and festers.

## THEORY

I will utilize several different theories to better understand how women military members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress and how this further impacts their state of mind and self-concept. First, I turn to Labeling Theory by Erving Goffman to conceptualize how women military members become identified as, mentally ill and why they feel the need to avoid this negative label and stigmatization. Next, I incorporate Symbolic Interactionism, specifically drawing on the work of Erving Goffman on self-presentation and Charles Horton Cooley's idea of the looking-glass self. Symbolic Interactionism helps to further highlight how women come to attach meaning to their distress, how and why they use performance to cope with and conceal their distress, and how their identity is shaped by their understanding of self within the larger social structure of the military. Finally, I use Feminist Standpoint Theory to situate women at the forefront of my research and to show why this is so important.

### LABELING THEORY

The basis of Labeling Theory is the idea that when someone is labeled, that label comes with an attached stigma that changes how an individual is perceived by others and how the individual perceives herself (Goffman 1963). I use this theory to understand how women military members who are experiencing mental and emotional distress become labeled, stigmatized, and discredited. Furthermore, this theory provides a framework to explain my argument—that women military members use concealment as a method of coping with socially stigmatized mental and emotional distress.

Normative social expectations provide the foundation for a person's social identity (Goffman 1963). Hinojosa (2010) states, "social identities and notions of self are intimately

intertwined with the institutions in which individuals are embedded” (p. 180). One normative social expectation set by the U.S. military institution is that members are required to be mentally fit to serve. This expectation causes military members to be categorized according to normative attributes associated with mental stability, such as not being visibly emotional or expressing fear. Those that demonstrate they are mentally and emotionally stable, are regarded as having a social identity that aligns with normative social expectations of the institution. Conversely, when an individual’s social identity does not align with normative social expectations, for example if a military member expresses fear or cries in front of others, she is labeled and stigmatized as deficient (Goffman 1963). When women military members are formally or informally labeled as mentally ill or seen to have attributes related to mental and emotion distress, it causes them to be stigmatized, devalued, and discredited by others in the military.

Once a woman military member is stigmatized, her entire military career and life becomes controlled by the stigma attached to the label of mental illness. Stigmatization is “the process by which a person is marked or labeled as a deviant or a disgrace” (Bates and Swan 2014:139). According to Goffman (1963), normals<sup>5</sup> “believe the person with a stigma is not quite human” (p. 5). Thus, the label and stigma of mental illness generate a variety of discrimination, reducing the life chance of the stigmatized individual. Howard Becker (1963) uses the concept of “master status,” to explain that when an individual receives a negative label, it becomes their superior status. Becker (1963) states:

The identification becomes that controlling one. Treating a person as though he were generally rather than specifically deviant produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. It sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person in the image people have of him. (P. 33)

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<sup>5</sup> Erving Goffman (1963) uses the word “normals” to refer to individuals who align to normative social expectations and whose social identities have not been discredited due to stigma.

To avoid being labeled and stigmatized with a “master status”, women military members use concealment to manage their identities.

Due to the repercussions of being labeled as mentally ill or as emotionally distressed, women military members knowingly understand, that when possible, they must conceal devalued identity attributes to avoid stigmatization. The paradox of Labeling Theory is that for the individual to be labeled, stigmatized, and discredited, the stigmatized identity attribute must be visible to others. Thus, it poses the questions: How do individuals conceal stigmatized identity attributes? What are the repercussions, if any, from concealing a stigmatized identity? Newheiser and Barreto (2014) suggest that concealing a stigmatized identity does not increase social acceptance, but instead “can enhance feelings of rejection and may impair intimacy and acceptance within social interactions” (p. 58). My research seeks to understand how and why women military members are labeled as mentally ill, and if so, whether they conceal their mental and emotional distress to avoid this label.

## SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic Interactionism contends that people make sense of the world through meaning drawn from interactions. In other words, Symbolic Interactionism argues that individuals are active participants in shaping their reality, instead of simply being acted upon by society. I utilize this theory to understand how women military members come to attach social meaning to their mental and emotional distress. Symbolic Interactionism theorizes that people make sense of their world and form a self-concept through the interpretation of symbols, language and social interactions (Bates and Swan 2014; Goffman 1959; Longhofer and Winchester 2012). Expounding on this concept, Collins and Makowsky (2010) states, “a person is not an isolated



thing, but an image carved out of the whole life space of his or her interactions with others” (p. 221). I argue that women military members construct their identities using meaning drawn from social interactions within the military institution. The use of Symbolic Interactionism allows me to conceptualize how and why women military members manipulate their behavior or “performance” to cope with and conceal their mental and emotional distress.

Charles Cooley’s (1902) concept of the looking-glass self suggests people establish a sense of identity based on one’s understanding of how others perceive him or her. More simply put, “I feel about me the way I think you think of me” (Collins and Makowsky 2010:149). Cooley (1902) asserts three main elements of the looking-glass self: “the imagination of our appearance to the other person, the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification” (p. 152). Applying the looking-glass self to my research establishes how the identities of women military members is shaped by their understanding of how others within the military institution perceive them. When a woman military member’s mental and emotional distress becomes known, causing her to be labeled and stigmatized, her self-image is diminished. I argue that labels attached to mental and emotional distress become a controlling status, causing women military member to see themselves as different from and judged by other military members. Eventually, this process may lead women military members to experience a negative self-feeling such as shame or depression.

Goffman (1959) expanded on Cooley’s (1902) concept of the looking-glass self, taking Symbolic Interactionism a step further, with the concept of dramaturgy. Goffman’s (1959) concept of dramaturgy theorizes that life is indicative of a theater performance, where actors perform their lives. He divides performance into two categories: front stage and back stage (Goffman 1959). While on the front stage, actors deliver a thoughtfully scripted performance for

their audiences. Whereas, the back stage is reserved as a place for actors to retreat from the public gaze of their audiences (Collins and Makowsky 2010; Goffman 1959). Front stage performances are “‘socialized,’ molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented” (Longhofer and Winchester 2012:459). Using front performances then, women military members emulate and portray an identity that aligns with masculine expectations and the normative values and beliefs of the military institution. They use front stage performances, to skillfully conceal mental and emotional distress and to conform to masculine military cultural norms and values, so they pass as a “normals.” During front stage performances, women military members control the image that others see by adjusting their mannerisms, language, and appearance.

I argue that dramaturgy frames how women military members retain social acceptance, control the impressions of others and mask devalued identity characteristics—such as emotions and femininity. Collins and Makowsky (2010) comment about Goffman’s idea of dramaturgy, stating that “being able to control the reality that other people see is a prime weapon... for raising one’s status, power, or freedom” (p. 223). Goffman (1963) suggests that “because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so” (p. 74), including women military members trying to conceal their mental and emotion distress.

## FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

Feminist Standpoint Theory argues that women possess a unique social position that allows them to have a critical perspective of the social world that is dominated by a heteronormative white male perspective. Thus, the social inquiry of women should be grounded

in the experiences of women and the oppression they experience within a social world that positions them in subordinate roles (Longhofer and Winchester 2012). Smith (1990) suggests that historically women have been alienated from their own experiences, because the existing standpoint in sociology is centered on the experience of men who have lost sight of the true nature of social reality due to their privileged position in society (as cited by Longhofer and Winchester 2012). Furthermore, Smith (1990) argues that women understand the social world through bifurcation of consciousness; forcing women to exist in a dichotomous world (as cited by Longhofer and Winchester 2012). Ultimately, bifurcation consciousness causes women to feel that their identity is divided into two distinct parts. One part is objective, causing women to construct their identities through the lens of the hegemonic social structure and another the other part is subjective and illuminates their lived experiences as marginalized individuals within the dominant social structure (Smith 1990 [as cited by Longhofer and Winchester 2012]). Smith (1990) argues that true consciousness can only be achieved by merging the two parts (as cited by Longhofer and Winchester 2012). This research uses Feminist Standpoint Theory to situate the experiences of women military members at the forefront of my social inquiry to understand how they construct their identities through bifurcation of consciousness. Specifically, I use standpoint theory to inform the research findings on how women construct their identities within the patriarchal social structure of the military.

## **METHODS**

The use of quantitative research methods cannot fully highlight lived experiences or capture the actor's perspective, because it relies on "remote, inferential empirical methods and material" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:10). It is not enough to simply interpret an individual's

point of view, using empirical methods and material; instead, it is necessary to allow the individual to express experiences in their own words (Becker 1996). For these reasons, I used qualitative research methods to understand the lived experiences of women military members during times of mental and emotional distress, situating their standpoint at the forefront of the research. Qualitative research, “is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell 2014:246).

Specifically, I used a qualitative phenomenological research design to help describe the lived experiences of women military members and how they identify and cope with mental and emotional distress. Phenomenological research originated in philosophy and psychology and is a design of inquiry “in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell 2014:14). The use of a qualitative phenomenological research design allowed participants to verbally express to the researcher how they interpreted and made meaning of their actions, interactions, and overall experiences. Thus, causing less likelihood for data misinterpretation by the researcher (Becker 1996; Creswell 2014). In this research, qualitative phenomenological data collection empowers the voices of women military members, allowing me to gain a more nuanced understanding and interpretation of the true lived experiences of women military members. Furthermore, a qualitative phenomenological research design helped me to understand how and why women military members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress.

## SAMPLING AND RECRUITMENT

I obtained my desired sample size of 10 participants using two different nonprobability sampling approaches: purposive and snowball sampling. Combining two non-probability

sampling techniques helped establish a sample that represents a comprehensive perspective of women military members who have experienced mental or emotional distress. The objective of purposive sampling is to purposefully select participants that have certain characteristics, which helped to better understand the research problem and questions (Creswell 2014). Initially, I purposefully tried to select a sample of individuals who identified with the following criteria: a woman, a former military member, and someone who experienced any type of mental or emotional distress while serving in the military. Due to the initial lack of participant interest, I broadened the criteria by eliminating that they needed to have an experience of mental or emotional distress. I did this with the belief that it would encourage more women military members to participate. Snowball sampling was used to gain access to potential participants through information and leads provided by current participants. It is a repetitive process, wherein the researcher gains contact information for new participants through previous participants; continuing a snowballing effect until the researcher obtains their desired sample size (Noy 2008).

I utilized snowball sampling as a recruitment method to obtain participants for my research. After finding the first participant, I asked her if she knew of other women military members that would be willing to participate. My first participant became the catalyst for finding the majority of my participants. Through my first participant, I was connected to two women veterans groups using a social media networking site. After posting my research flyer and information, I had a flood of women military members who agreed to participate. The use of social media allowed me to access a large and diverse population of women military members. Social media allowed me to obtain participants that varied in age, race, sexual orientation, branch of service, rank and a variety of other ways.

I also recruited participants by distributing fliers requesting volunteers. The flier (APPENDIX A) had a short description of what the research seeks to accomplish, who I was seeking to participant and what would be required of the participant. The goal of the flier was to distribute information about the study and ask for volunteers to participate. To maximize exposure to women military members, I requested permission to distribute and post the flier at the Veteran Centers at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM), Mira Costa College - Oceanside, and Palomar Community College. These three college campus locations were identified because they are spatially located in a general area that is accessible to both the researcher and potential participants. I received several inquiries in women military members who were interested in participating, but only a few followed through and became actual participants.

## DATA COLLECTION

To collect data, I used face-to-face interviews when participants live locally and video chat when participants were unable to meet in person. Interviewing is advantageous when participants cannot be directly observed (Creswell 2014). Since this research is addressing past experiences of women military members instead of their present experiences, interviewing participants evoked the most impactful data. To focus the topics of conversation, I conducted semi-structured interviews using prepared questions established prior to interviewing. To ensure ample amount of time, I planned each interview to last between 60 to 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded using an audio recording device on my cellphone and on my laptop. Also, I had a notebook on hand in case I needed to make specific notes throughout the interview process. Afterwards, I transcribed each interview in its entirety using an online transcription program

called Trint. I digitally uploaded each audio recorded interview and transcripts were automatically created. With the aid of tools provided by Trint, I fixed all errors in each transcript prior to coding.

## INTERVIEW THEMES AND QUESTIONS

I established specific interview questions (APPENDIX B) to ensure I generated a conversation about certain thematic aspects. To begin each interview, I asked demographic questions to help establish how they identify themselves by asking their race, sexual orientation, and gender. Then, I asked participants what branch of the military they served in, how long they served, and their rank when they were discharged from service. Understanding their military demographics allowed me to better understand what their social position was while in the military, which potentially impacted their self-concept and how they identified and coped with distress.

Next, I asked an ice-breaker question to ease the participant into the interviewing process and to establish a rapport. After the ice-breaker question, I asked several open-ended questions to elicit conversation on specific themes: resocialization, gender/masculine military culture and mental and emotional distress/coping. Questions on resocialization established the experiences of participants when transitioning from civilian to military life. To understand what roles gender and masculine military culture played in shaping the experiences of women military members, I asked participants questions about their rank to establish their positionality within the military institution. Establishing rank positionality helped to establish how much perceived power they had in the military as a result of their rank and how it impacted how they identified and coped with mental and emotional distress. I constructed questions about mental and emotion

distress/coping, but throughout the entire interview I asked follow-up questions about how the participant felt in certain situations. Using follow-up questions to promote further conversation helped establish how certain actions or incidences created distress for the participant. When necessary, I asked the participants probing questions to gain more details or to further understand what they were saying. Finally, once the interview was completed I thanked the participants for volunteering to be a part of the study.

## DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Once all interviews and transcribing were completed, I read over the data to get a general overview of the information. Saldaña (2016), suggests that “data are not coded—they’re recoded” (p. 68). In other words, the coding process is cyclical not linear, broken up into two stages where codes and categories are constantly being refined. For this reason, I hand coded in two stages using pre-established codes to aggregate the data into shared general themes. For the first stage of coding, I utilized several coding methods: emotion coding<sup>6</sup>, values coding<sup>7</sup> and dramaturgical coding<sup>8</sup>. Since the concept of identity is complex, I used the three initial coding methods to create a comprehensive set of codes to encompass a variety of different aspects from the participants’ experiences. In between the first and second stages of coding, I utilized an eclectic coding method. Eclectic coding, “employs a purposeful and compatible combination of two or more first cycle coding methods, with the understanding that... second cycles of recoding

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<sup>6</sup> A coding method that labels emotions recalled or experienced by the participant (Saldaña 2016).

<sup>7</sup> A coding method that applies codes to data that reflects a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña 2016).

<sup>8</sup> A coding method that “applies the terms and conventions of character, play script, and production analysis to qualitative data” (Saldaña 2016:293).



will synthesize the variety and number of codes into a more unified scheme” (Saldaña 2016:293). In the second stage of coding, I used the method of pattern coding. Using pattern coding allowed me to: (1) establish major themes in the data, (2) search for causes and explanations in the data, and (3) examine social networks and patterns of relationships (Saldaña 2016). Finally, I analyzed the patterns established in the coding process and drew meaning from the analysis.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When using human research subjects, it is imperative to anticipate ethical issues that may arise prior to beginning (Creswell 2014). Due to the sensitivity of this research, I made every effort to protect participants’ privacy and confidentiality. I ensured that each participant was aware that the study was entirely voluntary and at any time they were free to decline to participate. Prior to beginning the interviewing process, I received verbal and written consent (APPENDIX C) from each participant, establishing her willingness to proceed with the interview. Once consent was granted, I informed the participant that she was welcome to skip any questions she did not wish to answer. Finally, I assigned pseudonyms to each participant and made every effort to not use information that would potential reveal their true identity.

## REFLEXIVITY

In qualitative research, researchers are considered a key instrument in interpreting the meaning participants hold about a social phenomenon (Creswell 2014). For this reason, it was important that the researcher understands the language, culture and general standpoint of her population. McCorkel and Myers (2003) state, “standpoint epistemology asserts that all

knowledge is socially situated, it requires researchers to specify the location and contexts in which their knowledge is produced... Women's stories cannot be fully comprehended without first considering the specific power structure in which they are constructed and told" (p. 202). As a former military member, I possess insider knowledge and standpoint similar to my research population, thus creating commonality between myself and the participants. However, my knowledge and standpoint were produced and located within the same system I seek to critique, the military institution. Consequently, my knowledge and standpoint are a double-edged sword, having the potential to create both good and bad consequences in my research.

My knowledge of military cultural norms and values gives me the background to better understand the positionality of women within the institution. I served in the military for six years, was socialized within the military institution, and aware of the complex meanings attached to military symbols, language and interactions. For example, I have knowledge of the importance of the military ranking system that exists in each U.S. military branch. Though each branch uses different rank titles, the concept of ranking and attached meanings to each rank is a complex system within the military institution. Understanding the complexities of the military institution has allowed me to better interpret the meanings behind participant experiences.

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Table 1.1 shows each participants' military criteria and social demographic information; all the information relates to how participants self-identified themselves.

Table 1.1

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Military Branch</b>	<b>Years Served</b>	<b>Personnel Type (Officer or Enlisted)</b>	<b>Rank at Discharge</b>	<b>Sexuality</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Recruitment Method</b>	<b>Interview Type</b>
<b>Candice</b>	Navy	6	Enlisted	E-6	Heterosexual	White	Personal Request ***	In-Person
<b>Valorie</b>	Army	8	Enlisted	E-6	Heterosexual	White	Social Media	Video Chat
<b>Dominique</b>	Marine Corps	8	Enlisted	E-5	Heterosexual	Mexican/ Hispanic	Flier	In-Person
<b>Robin</b>	Army	6	Enlisted	E-6	Bisexual	White	Social Media	Video Chat
<b>Nina</b>	Navy	N/A*	Enlisted	E-6	Heterosexual	Asian	Personal Request ***	Video Chat
<b>Kathy</b>	Navy	27**	Both	O-6	Heterosexual	White	Social Media	Video Chat
<b>Judy</b>	Army	23	Enlisted	E-8	Heterosexual	White	Social Media	Video Chat
<b>Erika</b>	Army	20	Both	O-3	Pansexual	Hispanic	Social Media	Video Chat
<b>Mallory</b>	Marine Corps	10	Enlisted	E-5	Heterosexual	Navajo	Personal Request ***	In-Person
<b>Sandra</b>	Navy	4	Enlisted	E-5	Heterosexual	White	Social Media	Video Chat

\*Still serving in the military

\*\*9 years enlisted and 18 years as an officer

\*\*\*Researcher personally asked the individual to participate.

Spurred by the ice-breaker question, participants revealed several important factors about their lives prior to enlisting and their motivations to join the military. Candice, Dominique, Erika, Mallory and Robin all discussed joining the military to escape their hometowns. Mallory grew up on a small Navajo reservation and stated that she “didn't wanna get trapped<sup>9</sup>” on the

<sup>9</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

reservation like most people did in community. Erika, in part, joined the military to leave her hometown, because she worried she would head down a negative life path abusing drugs like many of her friends.

As a teenager, Robin was forced to attend an oppressive military reform school, comparatively she assumed that the military would be easy. Robin stated that the main reason she joined the military was to get out of her hometown and to escape her living situation with her parents. Robin stated, “I just needed to get out of that space and get into a bigger space where I could express myself without my family breathing down my neck. So, I joined the military (laughed). I feel cheated!<sup>10</sup>” Prior to leaving for basic training Robin’s parents told her that if she did not complete basic training she was not welcome back home; thus, failure was not an option.

Dominique joined the military to escape from the people and place where she grew up and as a way to prove herself. She stated, “I had a very crazy childhood. My brother and sister were selling drugs out of the house. I was sexually abused as a kid. [There was] a lot of molestation. It’s just the quickest way out.<sup>11</sup>” Dominique was not the only participant who was sexually abused prior to joining the military; Candice, Valorie, and Sandra also discussed being sexually abused. However, Dominique was the only participant that was motivated to join the military specially to escape those who had sexually abused her.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The ways in which women military members come to form their identities as military members is diverse and complicated, so too are the ways in which they identify and cope with

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<sup>10</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>11</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

emotional and mental distress. Women military members draw on their institutional socialization and military culture to help them navigate an institution that does not welcome them as equals.

Four main themes emerged in the research data: (1) the resocialization process socializing women military members to adhere to military cultural norms and values; (2) the systematic subordination of women and femininity; (3) sexual assault and rape being defined within a masculine paradigm; and (4) women military members with a mental health diagnosis being in fear to disclose their distress.

In the ensuing findings sub-sections, I first discuss how the resocialization process lays the foundation for understanding how military members are socialized to disregard their own individual distress and replace it with a group-oriented mentality. This process works to instill masculine military norms and values to promote military members to prioritize the group and mission above all else. Next, I discuss how the military sustains and perpetuates a culture of gender subordination through methods of enforcement—both invisible and visible methods of enforcement. The third sub-section discusses how the military institution creates a narrative that causes women military members to be blamed for the sexual misbehavior of male military members. Furthermore, this sub-section discusses how the military institution creates an environment that silences women military members who have been sexually assault and raped. Finally, I discuss how fear of negative repercussions cause women to silence themselves when dealing with mental health issues and aspects that cause fear to exist within the military institution.

## RESOCIALIZATION

To understand the ways in which women military members identify and cope with mental and emotional distress it is essential to understand how they are socialized and framed within the military institution. Many participants directly defined the process of resocialization as “indoctrination.” The way that participants framed the resocialization process varied, but all participants acknowledged that they were trained to adhere to the norms of the military institution. The following key sub-themes emerged, in regards to resocialization: (1) instilling military cultural norms and values to validate the importance of group cohesion, such as disregard for individual needs; and (2) expecting the “mission” of the military to take priority over its members. Ultimately, the resocialization process works to socialize all military members to be in fear of failing the institution.

### *“The Indoctrination Works”: Instilling Military Cultural Values*

Basic training is perfectly constructed to mentally and physically expect conformity to military norms and values—and ultimately promote the resocialization process. One key cultural value instilled in military members is the importance of group cohesion. Military basic training creates an atmosphere where military members are collectively pushed to physical and mental exhaustion which bolsters the importance of functioning as a group.

Many participants discussed situations that instilled the value of group cohesion in the military at all physical and mental costs. Candice, who served nearly six years as an enlisted member in the Navy, discussed an experience that occurred at the end of *Battle Stations*<sup>12</sup> during

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<sup>12</sup> The final test Navy recruits must pass to graduate basic training. Battle Stations are designed to emphasize teamwork under stress.

Navy basic training. All the recruits were herded into a room, placed at parade rest<sup>13</sup>, and shown a video of the gruesome aftermath of the USS Cole bombing. Candice stated:

You are all exhausted and you just went through [Battle Stations], this intense scenario of like the world ending and... they are playing this slide reel of the Cole. And at the end (laughs), everyone was just crying. Between, like, everything they were showing us, like these tragic images, people dying, then running through the names of each individual sailor that died and all the stress of what we just went through, and everybody—man, woman, child, it did not matter—you were bawling... that's the one time they wanted to play into our empathy... It is like a bonding thing. Like now we are bonded because we experienced this together, like a deployment except it was boot camp<sup>14</sup>.

In Candice's case, being physically and mentally challenged during Battle Stations caused her to feel bonded with the other military members who shared the same experience. This speaks to how basic training is structured to promote resocialization, instilling the norms and values of the military by physically and mentally breaking down and rebuilding members. Participants commonly discussed similar moments to Candice's, where they were physically and mentally pushed to their breaking point and felt that it caused them to feel bonded with other military members. When emotion is expressed by everyone in the group, as Candice mentioned, it becomes an acceptable moment and is not regarded as a weakness. Fox and Pease (2012) states, "military identity is always an achievement, something dependent upon conformity to others' expectations and their acknowledgment. The centrality of performance testing in the military... heightens this dependency" (p. 22).

Resocialization is such a powerful process that even when military members consciously try to resist it they are unable to. While serving six years in the Army, Robin—who identified herself as not being a "born patriot<sup>15</sup>"—frequently used rebellious tactics to fight against military

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<sup>13</sup> A formal military position assumed by military members in ranks in which members remain silent and motionless with their feet shoulder width apart and their arms clasped behind their backs.

<sup>14</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>15</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

resocialization. She frequently chanted subversive songs during group formations. For example, Robin would chant: “War. What is it good for? Absolutely nothing.<sup>16</sup>” However, even though Robin was aware of some level of “indoctrination,” both during basic training and regular duty, she was unable to fully understand and resist the process all together. Like many participants, Robin saw basic training as a means to an end, knowing that she needed to accomplish it to be able to become a war reporter and to see the world. At times, Robin stated that she found the behavior of drill instructors cliché and laughable—constantly yelling and threatening recruits. Nevertheless, the resocialization process took hold. Robin explained:

I remember, like, actually thinking, like, how cliché the drill sergeants were...But at the same time, you know, the indoctrination works, because it's tried-and-true, you know. Even at a certain level, if you're resisting it, it still takes hold...But I was still, like, becoming a soldier. So, like, I was learning to devalue my own personal needs... I was learning how to think of myself as government property and not think of myself as a person anymore. So, I was not really paying attention to my emotional experiences as much. They didn't matter, like, in fact they were holding me back<sup>17</sup>.

Robin’s feelings closely reflect how the majority of the participants felt during initial resocialization in basic training. The process of resocialization is so powerful that even when military members are aware of what is occurring, like Robin, they are unable to resist it from controlling their identities. Robin chose not to pay much attention to emotional reactions, and instead, a more masculine stoicism that is rewarded in the military. Furthermore, Robin devalues her individual needs and sees herself as “government property.” As reflected in Robin’s statement, individual emotions hold her back. Her concern is for group cohesion.

Resocialization causes military members like Robin and Candice to devalue themselves as individuals and promotes traditional ideas of masculinity; to ignore all signs of human weakness, such as pain and sadness. As labeling theory suggests, when an individual’s social identity does

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<sup>16</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>17</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.



not align with normative social expectations of the institution they are labeled and stigmatized (Goffman 1963). Individual needs are labeled and stigmatized as weakness in the military. Thus, they adhere to military cultural norms and values to avoid being stigmatized.

After Robin repressed her individual mental and emotional distress for years she experienced a “complete breakdown” while on deployment. She explained that the only thing that kept her from feeling suicidal was knowing that her deployment was almost done and that she would be going back home. It took until Robin was discharged from the military to be able to fully cope and heal from the distress she experienced while in the military. Robin reflected on what she was feeling after leaving the military, she explained:

[I thought to myself], wow you’ve just been through hell...You literally been through hell. Just because you haven’t been in a firefight, doesn’t mean you didn’t go through hell. I had to keep reminding myself of that. Because, as you know, when everyone’s in it together you forget to care about yourself. Like you’re trained to not care about yourself. Like I am just doing this thing, I am supposed to do it, everyone’s doing it... I was traumatized actually... Everyone was traumatized together, that’s why no one felt special<sup>18</sup>.

Robin’s realization, that she was so engrossed in being a part of a group that she forgot to care for her own emotional and mental distress, is a narrative that was common among most participants. Though most did not express having such a profound moment of clarity, like Robin, many participants discussed not identifying and coping with their mental and emotional distress until after being discharged from the military.

Like many other participants, Dominique expressed not fully understanding the magnitude of her distress until getting out of the military. Dominique, (experienced PTSD, depression, and anxiety, caused by trauma she endured on a deployment to Afghanistan) stated that she did not fully identify her distress as PTSD until she “hit the regular civilian

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<sup>18</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

workforce.<sup>19</sup> She was not able to identify her distress until she was discharged from the military, because that was the first time she realized how different she functioned in a militarized culture compared to civilians who had not been socialized within the military institution. Dominique stated, “I couldn't cut it [as a civilian]. I was the wrong piece.”<sup>20</sup> Like Dominique and Robin, most participants discussed being able to fully recognize the extent of their distress, incurred in the military, after being discharged and disconnected from the military environment.

*“Make the Mission, at Any Cost”: Prioritizing Mission over Members and Values*

Participants commonly discussed situations when the mission of the military was prioritized above the welfare of the military members. As suggested by Goffman (1961), in a “total institution,” all aspects of an individual’s life are defined by the aims of the institution and the military is no exception. The aim of the military is to complete their mission, and the lives of every military member are aimed at this goal.

While in the Marine Corps, one of Mallory’s brothers passed away. She reflected back on how terrible that moment was in her life and how the “mission first” mentality of the military caused her to experience further pain and distress. Mallory stated, “on the day of the funeral, sitting in the church, casket freakin' right in front of me and I get a fucking text from one of the lance corporals<sup>21</sup> in my shop.”<sup>22</sup> She went on to tell me that the lance corporal texted her, at the direction of their superior, to ask where she had left paperwork that they were trying to locate.

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<sup>19</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>20</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>21</sup> Lance corporal (E-3) is the third enlisted rank in the U.S. Marine Corps, one before becoming a corporal (E-4). A senior lance corporal is a Marine who has held the rank of E-3 for a long-time period and who is close to being promoted to the next higher rank, E-4.

<sup>22</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

Later on, as Mallory was driving to her brother's burial site, her superior called her directly to again inquire about the mundane paperwork. Though Mallory was extremely upset about both occurrences she let them go by the time she arrived back to work, after taking a week of emergency leave. Soon after, she decided to take a week of addition leave to take time to properly grieve her brother's death and emotionally heal. Three days into her leave, she was called back to work because her coworker gave birth, thus they were short staffed and needed her help. Reflecting on these traumatic experiences Mallory stated, "I think the structure of the Marine Corps, you know, puts pressure on people who are trying to be compassionate and understand...But, I mean, at the end of the day it is all about the Marine Corps, you know. You don't matter."<sup>23</sup>

Mallory's story seems initially disrespectful; but, this event is almost entirely due to the military's emphasis on devaluing individuals and putting the mission first. The resocialization process militarizes individuals by virtually eliminating the individual all together. Fox and Pease (2012) suggest, the key purpose of basic training is to "promote the willing and systematic subordination of one's own individual desires and interests to those of one's unit and ultimately, country" (p. 21). By eliminating the importance of individuality, the military institution creates members who blindly follow orders to accomplish the mission at any cost. This causes military members to unquestionably compromise their individual being in dangerous and morally dubious situations to accomplish the mission of the group and institution. Military members are socialized to believe that if they fail to accomplish the mission they subsequently fail the group and ultimately fail the entire military institution. Just like all military members, Mallory's coworkers were resocialized to see the mission of the military as their number one priority; thus,

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<sup>23</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

if they failed the mission they failed the group and the entire institution. This potentially played a role in why Mallory was treated in such an insensitive way.

Consequently, Mallory sunk into a deep depression and coped by drinking heavily. Her distress became so severe that he sought out military mental health treatment and started seeing a therapist and psychiatrist regularly. However, she did not tell her superiors or anyone she worked with that she was experiencing depression or that she sought treatment. Like Mallory, most participants consistently discussed the importance of adhering to the values of the military institution and when they experienced individual emotional or mental distress they felt obligated to continually ignore it, so to not interfere with accomplishing the mission.

For thirteen years, Judy worked as an Army recruiter, a position that relied on her ability to recruit the designated amount of people to successfully meet the mission. Judy explained:

... higher level leadership were just, um, puttin' lots of pressure on people to make the mission, at any cost. Which, there were all kinds of people who got in trouble for a variety of fraudulent contracts and applicants who had disclosed past infractions and stuff. Um, and I just wasn't one of the people who was willing to do that<sup>24</sup>.

Even though Judy was not willing to break the rules to fraudulently enlist people to make the mission, she felt like she was put in situations where she felt like her values were being compromised. She stated:

[In] one instance, towards the end of my career when I was a senior guidance counselor at the MEPS<sup>25</sup>, um, I was in charge of the Army shop... the leadership was trying to get this one guy in the Army that day, cause every day is like a crisis for them. And he was not qualified to enlist that day. He would have had to wait at least one other day to meet the qualifications for a waiver processing. And so, I wasn't willing to violate the law and enlist him. So, when he completed his physical and the other paperwork wasn't ready I told his recruiter to take him home and schedule him to come back on another day... I got some really good butt chewing for not breaking the law and enlisting that guy that day... [I] was counseled by my captain and he tried to get me to sign a counseling statement. And basically, I aw, I slide a piece of paper out in front of him, after he slide the counseling statement over to me, that said exactly which laws he would be violating by

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<sup>24</sup> Judy, Video Chat Interview, March 15, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>25</sup> Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS)

doing that. And I said “I’ll sign this if you want me to, but this is the list of things that I’m gonna go to JAG<sup>26</sup> and claim which laws have been violated.” So, he backed down. But, shortly after that I was relieved of my position<sup>27</sup>.

Judy’s experience exemplifies the extent to which the military values meeting the mission over the individual, especially when it comes to upholding laws, regulations and core military values. The Army, similar to the other branches in the military, touts itself as having seven core values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. However, the core values of each military branch seem to conflict with what is expected of its members. *The Army Values* define a loyal soldier, in part, as “one who supports the leadership and stands up for fellow soldiers” (U.S. Army Center of Military History 2011) and defines having integrity as “do[ing]what’s right, legally and morally” (U.S. Army Center of Military History 2011). Yet, Judy’s experience depicts a drastic divergence, on the part of her captain, from the values that are supposedly being taught to all soldiers.

When there is fear of not meeting the assigned mission, military members will not only compromise their personal morals but they will compromise the “proclaimed” values of the military institution. However, the “true” values of the military are aimed to accomplish the mission at whatever cost necessary. Nevertheless, fear becomes a major factor in how military members are socialized to rise above and complete the mission. The foundation of fear is instilled in military members through resocialization in basic training. When drill instructors utilize physical and mental punishment to reprimand recruits who do not meet “the mission,” it creates a cultural expectation that all subsequent mission failures will result in punishment. Ironically, in relation to the recruit(s), the initial punishment in basic training is based on a

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<sup>26</sup> Judge Advocate General (JAG) is the organization in the military that operates like a court system.

<sup>27</sup> Judy, Video Chat Interview, March 15, 2018, Vista, CA.

failure of a mission that does not even truly exist. Ultimately, the mission of basic training is the responsibility of the institution—and on a more individual level the drill instructors—to train recruits to be in fear of failing the mission and to compromise their individuality at all cost when necessary.

## CULTURE OF SUBORDINATION

Nearly every participant expressed that as women they were seen as inferior to men in the military. The marginalization of women military members is instilled and perpetuated through masculine cultural attitudes and behaviors. There is not one clear cut method that is used to sustain and perpetuate the subordination of women military members. Instead, my findings suggest that the subordination of women military members is accomplished through a variety of different methods. The following sub-themes were most often discussed: (1) gender trumping rank in defining women military members and rewarding women for their silence; and (2) male military members enforcing the subordination of women military members using harassment and violence and women justifying and internalizing their subordinated status in the military. Each method of subordination simultaneously empowers men and masculine military culture while subjugating women in the military. The way in which participants identified and coped with subordination varied to some extent. However, participants commonly used identity management and silence to cope, while others justified and internalized their subordination.

### *“Death by a Thousand Cuts”: Gender Hierarchy as an Invisible Tool of Subordination*

Several participants felt that they had to work much harder than men in the military to be seen as their equals and in some cases to simply be seen as adequate. This suggests that gender is

seen as the defining characteristic for women military members, irrespective of their rank.

Furthermore, many participants discussed staying silent about gender subordination to try to gain success in the military, which suggests that women are being rewarded for their silence.

Sandra, who spent four years in the Navy working as an intelligence analyst, spoke about her success in the military and having to work harder than the men she worked with. She explained:

They don't really take you seriously, right.... You have to work harder... [and] perform better to meet the same standards. Like, you know, people remember your mistakes a lot longer than they remember the mistakes of others. There was this one fucking guy... And, like, he would constantly fuck up, constantly! And he was way senior to me and for whatever reason, like, people would just gloss over and blow it off. Like [say], "oh, that's just how he is." Like, he's just shitty and we're just all okay with that? What is the purpose of this, like, interpersonal scoring system that we're all keeping on each other? If it's just cool that he fucking sucks and the rest of us have to be awesome. So, um, and that to me seemed very much like a dude thing, where he would just, like, walk around and pat the male officers on the back and be like, "hey what's up man." I was just like, get the fuck outta here with this shit! Like you gotta be fucking kidding me man<sup>28</sup>.

Though Sandra was rewarded for her hard work in the Navy, getting several prestigious awards, she acknowledged that it was something that she felt she had to work much harder to achieve compared to her male counterparts. For Sandra, and for many participants, working harder and performing better meant managing their identities to better align with the norms and values of the military. In Sandra's case, working hard and performing better meant separating her military identity from her personal identity. She stated, "I made it a point to stay in a pretty small bubble<sup>29</sup>." Sandra purposely restrained herself from socializing with her supervisors and coworkers, especially outside of work. Instead, Sandra explained that she had a small group of friends that worked outside of her shop who she could confide in without feeling like her identity

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<sup>28</sup> Sandra, Video Chat Interview, March 23, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>29</sup> Sandra, Video Chat Interview, March 23, 2018, Vista, CA.

would be compromised. During work hours she was entirely focused on completing the mission. She already felt that she started in an inferior position because she was a woman, thus, she managed her identity. Sandra's method of separating her life became her way of protecting her military identity from being tainted further.

Sandra's identity was entirely shaped around combating against her subordinated status as a woman in the military. Collins and Makowsky (2010) argue, "a person is not an isolated thing, but an image carved out of the whole life space of his or her interactions with others" (p. 221). Sandra carved out her identity by drawing upon her interactions and experiences in the military, like the one discussed above, to conclude that she was seen as inferior due to her gender. Thus, she took the steps to actively manipulate her identity to conceal and cope with her subordination. She worked to adhere to masculine military culture by devaluing her individual desires, interests and emotions; instead she focused entirely on accomplishing the mission of the military. This became a common narrative of many of the participants, they would manipulate their identities as women military members in the hopes of sustaining and improving their status in the military. However, when women military members are silenced, because they fear being further marginalized, it creates a culture that rewards silence and the marginalization of women.

Sandra's experience and comments about an "interpersonal scoring system" directly reflects the concept discussed by Doan and Portillo (2017), that there is a gender hierarchy in the military that trumps the rank hierarchy, causing women to be marginalized both for their gender, as women, and for displaying feminine characteristics. Findings by Weitz (2015) further affirm that a gender hierarchy holds precedence in how women are framed in the military institution. Weitz (2015) states, "through this process—despite training, uniforms, shared jargon, and other strategies aimed at creating a cohesive military—the private or captain becomes the *woman*



private or the *woman* captain, with special threats and responsibilities based on her sex” (p. 179). Conversely, this finding staunchly contradicts the argument, discussed by Titunik (2000), that the military rank system creates an egalitarian system of obedience and authority, irrespective of personal characteristics. According to Titunik’s (2002) understanding, a woman military member’s status is directly related to her rank. Therefore, it could logically be deduced that a woman who is an officer would automatically have a superior status to a woman who is enlisted. However, this is not the case, instead, I found that the status of women military members is first defined according to their gender. This finding was solidified through receiving similar feelings of subordination from both enlisted and officers.

Kathy, who served as an officer for the majority of her 27-year career, conveyed the concept that gender supersedes rank for women in the military. Kathy stated:

There were major differences... the general feeling was that we were there to make men feel better and they didn't take ya as seriously.... My early career was like death by a thousand cuts. If that makes sense. This was so pervasive. It just happened all the time, that my thought was to keep my head down and my nose clean. Work as hard as I could so they would think I was half as good. You know, and it worked. But, it was just like, wow, every time you turn around<sup>30</sup>.

Kathy discussed that the constant gender subordination she encountered as a woman military member was so pervasive that she felt that the only way to get through it was to keep her head down and nose clean. Like Sandra, Kathy expressed that to combat against the inferior status she was given as a woman in the military she avoided anything that could further taint her military identity. She stayed silent about the pervasiveness of gender oppression in the military and was in turn rewarded for her silence. Using silence, Kathy was able to climb the ranks and have a successful military career. When discussing feminist standpoint theory, Smith (1990) states, “the more successful women are in mediating the world of concrete particulars so that men do not

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<sup>30</sup> Kathy, Video Chat Interview, March 4, 2018, Vista, CA.

have to become engaged with (and therefore conscious of) that world as a condition to their abstract activities, the more complete men's absorption in it and the more effective its authority" (Longhofer and Winchester 2012:390-391). Women military members are relegated to work in a subordinate social sphere within the dominate heteronormative masculine world of the military institution. The more invisible their presence becomes it sustains and empowers the existing power structure. Kathy, like many participants, navigated between two worlds so successfully that her subordinated status was arguably invisible to men in the military; thus, further sustaining the existing system of power.

A gender hierarchy, framing women as inferior to men, has caused the systematic subordination of women in the military institution. Though women military members acknowledge the existence of gender subordination, they silently maneuver within the culture that continually works to subjugate them as women. This is accomplished through identity concealment and cultural conformity. The forced silence and subsequent reward for silence, ultimately works as an invisible tool to sustain masculine military culture as the military's central identity feature and further perpetuates the marginalization of women military members.

*"In Their Eyes, We're Never Gonna Measure Up": Visible Tools of Subordination*

While a gender hierarchy works invisibly as a tool of subordination, other methods of subordination are more visible but equally effective. The subordination of women military members is further instilled and perpetuated by emboldening men in the military to actively use their superior status to enforce masculine military cultural norms and values. Participants often discussed incidences when they actively tried to gain status within the military institution only to have male military members assert their superiority over them to prevent this from happening.

Gender related verbal, sexual and physical harassment are seen to be used as visible tools of subordination. In several cases, participants justified their own subordination, which suggests that masculine military culture is sustained by socializing women to internalize their own subordination.

Nearly every participant discussed the pervasiveness of gender related harassment in the military. I define gender related harassment as the systematic uninvited verbal, physical or sexual behavior directed at women to torment and/or belittle the social status of women and that is visible and prevalent in military culture. The pervasiveness of gender related harassment in the military suggests that it is used as another tool to control and sustain the subordination of women in the military.

Mallory discussed “jokes” being constantly made at the expense of women. She stated, “[there were] constant jokes about us being undeployable because we’re pregnant or because we just had babies or, you know, jokes about our periods. Or just hearing male Marines joke about sleeping with the other females<sup>31</sup>.” Jokes might seem harmless on the surface, but the commonness of jokes made at the expense of women military members becomes a method to establish that women are inferior to men in the military. Mallory expressed how constant gender related harassment impacted her in a real way. She explained:

I just had this feeling that we just weren't shit, you know. Like we're, we're constantly, constantly trying to measure up to them in whatever way we could. And um, a lot of times, you know, we paid for it, like I did with my baby, you know stuff like that. There was a lot of stressful things that took a toll on our health, because we were too busy trying to, like, measure up. And in their eyes, we're never gonna measure up. You know, we're never gonna be on their level, regardless<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

<sup>32</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

Due to stress and anxiety, Mallory ended up giving birth pre-term to her first child. Throughout her pregnancy she experienced continual stress and anxiety as a result of being constantly demeaned and overworked by a male superior. Mallory believes that she was singled out by her superior because she was the only woman in the office. Mallory's experience of gender related harassment reflects findings by Weitz (2015):

harassment, assault, and denigration of women allow men to reinstate the military as male territory and to demonstrate male power over women. Such actions not only put individual women 'in their places,' but also 'other' all military women by dividing the military into the vulnerable (women) and the presumed invulnerable (men). (P. 179)

As Weitz (2015) suggests, gender related harassment is used as a tool to instill the superior status of men and to put women "in their places."

Furthermore, Mallory's acknowledgment—she was too busy trying to "measure up" to men in the military as a way to gain acceptance—reflects a similar concept discussed by Fox and Pease (2012), which argues that the importance of performance testing in the military and the need for members to "measure up" creates a heightened dependency on conformity.

Furthermore, Fox and Pease (2012) suggests that the need for acceptance heightens vulnerability and influences shame. Similarly, Cooley's (1902) theory of the looking-glass self helps to interpret how Mallory's sense of identity was shaped by her understanding of how others perceived her. Mallory's experience reflects the notion that women military members experience shame and vulnerability caused by the need to constantly try to "measure up" to men and masculine military standards. The identities of women military members are tied to how they understand how they are perceived by others in the military. Also, Mallory's experience shows that the suffering caused by trying to "measure up" causes tangible physical and mental distress in the lives of women military members. Mallory's experience is a good example of how gender

related verbal harassment works to subordinate women, but other participants, such as Dominique, experienced gender related harassment through physical means.

Dominique stated that she “always felt like one of the guys<sup>33</sup>” and that she never felt discriminated against as a woman. However, as our interview progressed and her story was unpacked she discussed contradictory experiences. Dominique discussed an experience that happened when she was deployed to Afghanistan. A firefight broke out unexpectedly, she rushed out of her tent wearing shorts and a t-shirt with her hair down. She took a position next to a male military member to join the firefight. The man next to Dominique said he thought they were taking on more fire compared to other areas because she had her hair down and that the “enemy” was trying to purposely kill her because she was a woman. She further explained:

I got a butt stroke to the back of the head. It was an accident. So, we're behind this little berm slash Hesco barrier... and we were taking on more fire and then he told me "you need to put your weapon down because I am not going to fucking get killed because they want to fucking shoot you. And I was like "you can go fuck yourself I am not going to put my weapon down"... And he hit me [purposely] in the back of the head. And um, I know it sounds crazy. But, um, when I came to he was literally laying on top of me and still shooting...my thought was, I probably would have done the same damn thing if I had some stupid ass tell me that. Cause I know where he was coming from and I got it, but me being me I am not gonna freakin' do that<sup>34</sup>.

I asked Dominique how she felt about the situation after the incident, she stated, “honestly, I laughed about it, blew it off; like it was just a regular old day<sup>35</sup>.” She never reported the incident to her superiors and later would be diagnosed with a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which was directly related to the incident. Military masculine culture is so engrained it causes both men and women to internalize and justify its existence. As argued previously, the resocialization process

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<sup>33</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>34</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>35</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

works to instill the ideals, values and norms of the military in every member. Thus, it causes even women to justify and internalize the oppression of women in the military.

Dominique's experience directly demonstrates an instance of a woman military member being debased and violated due to her subordinated status as a woman and her display of femininity. Even though Dominique does not identify the incident as gender oppression, it is clear that her gender was the controlling factor that led to a male military member to physically assault her. In Dominique's case, the male military member associated her display of femininity, with her hair down, as an actual threat to both of their lives and felt empowered to remedy the situation to save both of their lives. Military culture privileges men and masculinity to the extent that it emboldens male military to use their superiority to mentally and physically enforce the subordination of women and femininity in the military.

Finally, other participants discussed experiencing gender related sexual harassment. Valorie, who served 8 years in the Army as an enlisted member, discussed the prevalence of gender related harassment perpetrated by men in the military. She explained how she frequently felt objectified by men in the military. Valorie stated:

If I literally logged every single time that this happened. Hundreds, thousands. I don't know. It happens all the time, sometimes multiple times in a day. Sometimes you walk into a situation where it feels like you're in a meat locker. Other times it's a completely fine experience and everything's great and you're like, "wow what a group of professionals"<sup>36</sup>.

Valorie admits that gender related harassment was a constant occurrence in the military but also commented that she believed it was caused, in part, by the individual behavior of women. She stated, "In military terms, we would say make yourself a hard target, like if you look like you're not for play they tend to not fuck with you"<sup>37</sup>." Though Valorie in no way blames women for

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<sup>36</sup> Valorie, Video Chat Interview, February 26, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>37</sup> Valorie, Video Chat Interview, February 26, 2018, Vista, CA.

being sexually harassed, she explained that she believes that it is, in part, the responsibility of women military members to make it known that they will not tolerate being sexually harassed. Her conflicting comments, about the reasoning for gender related harassment, show that she both saw it as a method of subordination and internalized it as being a natural occurrence that needed to be regulated by women military members.

Similarly, Candice (Navy, enlisted, served 6 years) spoke about how common it was to be sexually harassed as a woman in the military. She explained:

I had to fight, just daily, against sexual advances from everybody. Like, it was constant. And at that time, it's like, it's just like, fuck this is literally my life... Like, it was constant<sup>38</sup>... I never wanted to admit that I was ever in a position to be assaulted because then it means that I had no power. And I don't like being powerless. I don't like not being in charge or having that agency. And I think that's what I had a really hard time conceptualizing with myself. It's like I kept getting [harassed] and I had no power and in the military it's even worse then, I'm starting to, like, blame myself. And like think, like, 'what did I do, that invited that<sup>39</sup>?'

In Candice's case, like many participants, constant gender related harassment made her question her own behavior and caused her to feel powerless. To gain back power Candice told me that at times she would sexually harass men in the military to show them how horrible it felt. She admitted that her behavior was caused through her internalization of experiencing gender related harassment and that she purposely exhibited similar behavior to gain back some form of power.

Participants spoke to a greater cultural issue, where women military members constantly have to endure gender related harassment by male military members to the extent that the behavior has become normalized. Gender related harassment is used to continually sustain men and masculine culture as the dominate and superior identity in the military.

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<sup>38</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, November 06, 2017 and February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>39</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, November 06, 2017 and February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.

This finding reaffirms Enloe's (2007) argument that the success and survival of the military institution is dependent on sustaining ideals that privilege masculinity and marginalize women and all things feminine. Military culture emboldens men to use their superior status to regulate the behavior of women using gender related harassment to sustain and perpetuate masculine military culture. Masculine military culture is further sustained through women military members being socialized to justify and internalize their own subordination. Whether it is obvious to the woman military member that she is being marginalized or not, it has created a culture where women are being subjugated to unnecessary physical and mental harm resulting in distress.

#### SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RAPE

Sexual assault and rape were topics discussed by the majority of participants. I distinguish sexual assault and rape from gender related sexual harassment because though they are intertwined sexual assault and rape become a physical violation of a person's sexual being. The ways in which participants discussed and the feelings attached to sexual assault and rape were severely magnified compared experiences of gender related harassment. The following sub-themes emerged around the topic of sexual assault and rape: (1) the narrative of sexual assault and rape in the military is constructed in a way that puts the responsibility on women to regulate the misbehavior of men; (2) male military members exhibit sexual predatory behavior; and (3) women military members cope with sexual assault and rape using silence. This finding signifies that sexual assault and rape is not only extremely common in the military, but the military institution has framed it in a way that holds women military members responsible for regulating an entire system of misconduct.



*“Don’t be a Slut”: Controlling the Narrative of Sexual Assault and Rape*

Participants frequently discussed that, as women military members, they were seen to be responsible for regulating the sexual misbehavior of male military members. They commonly discussed women military members being labeled as sexually promiscuous by male military members. Making individual women responsible for sexual assault and rape helps to justify the sexual misconduct of men and protects the reputation of the entire military institution.

Mallory, who spent 10 years as an enlisted member in the Marine Corps, discussed that as soon as she arrived to her permanent duty station at Camp Lejeune, she was welcomed by a woman military member who gave her and another newly arrived woman the “Don’t be a Slut Speech.” Mallory explained:

A senior corporal<sup>40</sup> took me and my friend, that checked in, aside and was like, basically they called it the “Don’t be a Slut Speech.” And it was just like, ‘hey guys don’t do this, be careful who you talk to, don’t be alone in a room with a male... We had just got there and I felt like we didn’t do anything wrong but I felt...like we were in trouble.

There was never any[one], like, [who said], “oh hey you know if this happens you can talk to this person or you know this might happen, this could happen you can always talk to me or whatever.” There was just don’t do this, don’t be alone with the males, don’t have them in your room, don’t hang out with them because rumors are gonna start<sup>41</sup>.

At the time, Mallory thought the “Don’t be a Slut Speech” was odd and wondered if the men got a similar speech. However, she later concluded that the men did not get an equivalent speech, because she never heard it being discussed by the men. Though Mallory fully questioned the speech, she told me that it “was just a thing<sup>42</sup>” that always happened. Every time new women military members arrived a higher-ranking woman would give them the “Don’t be a Slut

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<sup>40</sup> Corporal (E-4) is the fourth enlisted rank in the U.S. Marine Corps. A corporal is considered a non-commissioned officer and is frequently the first rank in the Marine Corps when an individual starts to take on a leadership role.

<sup>41</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

<sup>42</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

Speech.” This indicates that it is a cultural norm to instructing women military members that they are responsible to regulate their behavior so they do not entice male military members to prey on them.

The “Don’t be a Slut Speech” is one method that is used to regulate the behavior of women military members. The speech works to emphasize gender differences and subordinate women military members. Immediately, the “Don’t be a Slut Speech” implies to women military members that they are personally responsible for regulating the sexual misconduct of men in the military. It also suggests that if and when they, as women military members, are sexually violated it is due to the individual woman not conducting themselves appropriately around men in the military. As Mallory explained, she felt like she was in trouble. This narrative creates fear and the belief that women need to self-police their own sexuality ultimately causing women military members to be blamed for being victimized. Just as the “Don’t be a Slut Speech” is used as a tool to regulate the behavior of women military members, it equally creates a culture where the presence of women military members is seen as being problematic and as a liability to men and to the mission of the military if women military members cannot properly be controlled.

Along with the “Don’t be a Slut Speech,” Mallory learned that women military members were given one of two distinct labels depending on their perceived behavior when interacting with male military members. Mallory explained, after being given the “Don’t be Slut Speech,” “was when somebody had first mentioned to me that you’re either gonna be a slut or you’re gonna be a bitch<sup>43</sup>.” Many participants stated that women military members are commonly seen as either a “slut” or “bitch.” Mallory stated that being a “slut” meant that the woman military member was more social, who would go out drinking with male military members or who were just simply

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<sup>43</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA

friendly with male military members. The label of “slut” implies that being social with men in the military equates to sexually promiscuity on the part of the woman military member, irrespective of the actual facts.

In some instances, women in the military are seen as a “*slut*” or sexually promiscuous simply because they are a woman in a male-dominated institution. Candice felt that she was labeled a “*slut*” by several military physicians, which led to further mental and emotional distress throughout her military career. While in the Navy, Candice explained that she experienced a panic attack after being told she needed to go to medical to get her annual medical exam. After reflecting on her panic attack, Candice pinpointed two previous interactions with military physicians that traumatized her resulted in her intense reaction after being told she needed to get her annual medical exam. One incident occurred during her physical medical exam at MEPS hours before joining the Navy and the second incident occurred early on in her military career. Candice explained:

It was terrifying because I didn't know why I was freaking out. It was for something so normal. Like, I was just supposed to go. Like, they keep track and they'll send notifications to your supervisor, like, when everyone gets their physicals and all that type of shit. And I was due for my annual. And I was not looking forward to it, cause, I mean, Navy doctors aren't exactly known for their tact, grace and delicate hand, if you will. I was, ah, terrified. Cause like in boot camp, I was a virgin when I went in. I was as pure as the goddamn daisies. Like, no one was going to touch me. My mom had me as a teenager, so there was no penis coming near me, cause I was not having any kind of babies. And ah, so when I went in I was a virgin, and, like, going through MEPS, the processing station before we get to boot camp. Like, the doctor that they had, first of all was ten thousand years old and I am pretty confident that that is an accurate age, like, it would be listed on his license. And he was a dick... I don't remember a woman being there, when I went into MEPS. But that doctor fisted me like a fucking thanksgiving turkey and I was not pleased. Like, he was so rough and then rude, like, he literally talked to me like I was already a whore. Like I had been just throwing the poon out there since

birth. Like, I am inherently a whore, I am going in the Navy, I am a woman, and I must be a ho. Like, he had it figured the fuck out<sup>44</sup>.

Candice goes on to explain a second uncomfortable and traumatic experience while seeing a male military physician during her initial military training. She explained:

And then on top of that, it's like, how he talked to me. Like, he was like, "well you're gonna have to get on birth control." They were forcing me to get on birth control and I was really unhappy about that, cause I had not decided on that at all. I hadn't had time to think about what side effects [there] were, what drugs would be best, what options... And they were like "it will be great because you won't get your period" and I am like "hmm.... That doesn't sound natural to me." I am like, "I thought I was supposed to be shedding my uterine lining once a month." And they were like, "oh well you are gonna have to because if you get pregnant in the fleet you'll get sent off your command and then you'll be a burden cause you will have left a gap for a body in that position because it doesn't get refilled." So, they're like [thinking], "oh it's just one more woman draining the system" ... I'm 19, [no], 18 sitting in stirrups getting fisted by a fucking dinosaur and lectured on why I should be on birth control because it's just guaranteed I'm going to spread my legs as soon as I get to the ship like that is what they expected of me and that I think was really traumatic<sup>45</sup>.

Candice's experiences interacting with military physicians during her annual medical exams reflect the impact and commonness of women military members being labeled as "sluts." In many cases when women go for their annual medical exams that is the first time they have ever interacted with their assigned physician. Yet, like in Candice's case, military medical professionals label women military members as "sluts" or "whores" because this is the existing narrative that women have been stereotyped with in the military.

Masculine military culture has created a medical environment that is insensitive and primarily focused on ensuring that all military members are mission-ready. Military medical professionals are socialized in the same institution as all other military members, thus they hold

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<sup>44</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>45</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.

the same masculinized cultural norms and values as the military institution. Military physicians are responsible for keeping military members mission ready and weeding out those who are not fit for service. Thus, it becomes inconsequential whether they are treating women military members with dignity during their exams. In fact, by dehumanizing the entire process allows military medical professional to accomplish their mission in a more efficient way. Women military members are further dehumanized and devalued because they are seen as a liability.

Military culture constructs a narrative that put women in control of regulating the sexual misbehavior of men in the military and creates the stereotype that women military members are inherently sexually promiscuous. Both of these narratives work to take all the responsibility and blame off of the military institution, its masculine cultural values and ultimately, men who sexually violate women. This narrative works to make incidences of sexual assault and rape seems like an individual blunder of a woman in the military who was being sexually promiscuous. In actuality, this narrative, blames women who are being sexually victimized and preyed on by men in the military.

*“You’re a Predator” : Men as Predators and Women’s Avoidance Methods*

Women military members broadly identify men in the military as predators and use avoidance methods to combat against becoming prey. Valorie discussed the commonly held knowledge that men in the military saw new women military members as prey. She explained:

When you see new women come into the unit, like you see them try the same shit with them and it's like 'god you're disgusting dude, like you're just gross. You're a predator!' Like that's predator behavior, you know. But it's like you quickly make it known which guys are like that, you kind of pass on the knowledge and that's it. And I mean it's just like this open secret that certain guys are predators<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Valorie, Video Chat Interview, February 26, 2018, Vista, CA.

Valorie reflects that the predatory behavior of men in the military is common knowledge that is accepted and tolerated. The continual knowledge that predators exist, combined with all the other cultural aspects that work to subordinate and violate women military members causes women to initially see all men as potential predators. This finding is affirmed by Weitz's (2015) similar finding. Weitz (2015) states, "all the factors that increase women's sense of vulnerability necessarily reinforce the idea that male sexual predators are everywhere" (p. 171). By passing on the knowledge about predators in the military, it creates this generalized idea that this is a constant issue that women military members must come to realize to protect themselves.

Mallory discussed how she learned that she needed to be more vigilant in protecting herself from predatory men in the military. She explained:

... one time, talking to a senior lance corporal, he was my friend, "my friend." ... he made a comment about how there were bets going around the barracks about... who was going, like, sleep with me or whatever... I was super upset... at that moment I felt like everyone, like, thought that way about me. Like, no one had ever mentioned it to me or whatever and I never felt like anyone thought that way of me. But, when he said it... I just immediately thought that everyone thought that way about me. So, he's like, "no, I'm your friend," he's like "I betted, but I betted that it wouldn't happen." ... I didn't understand, like, what was happening. They were sort of, I don't know, like I guess preying on me<sup>47</sup>.

In Mallory's case, she was not informed by other women military members that she needed to protect herself from the predatory behavior of men in the military. Mallory went on to say that after this incident she started to constantly question her own behavior to avoid being preyed on again. Like Mallory, many participants experienced similar experiences and gained knowledge of the predatory behavior of men. Thus, many participants used methods to avoid being seen as prey.

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<sup>47</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

Several participants tried to deemphasize feminine aspects of themselves believing that it might help deflect being preyed on by men. Participants discussed changing their appearances specifically to stop men from looking at them in a sexual way. Valorie explained that she stopped wearing makeup and took on a more masculine, violent demeanor. She stated, “I feel like I was happy to play the bitch role if it meant you were going to leave me alone<sup>48</sup>.” In Valorie’s case, she believed if she acted like a “bitch” and made herself appear less feminine by not wearing makeup would result in her being left alone by male military members. Kathy stated “we were treated differently because we looked different<sup>49</sup>.” Both Valerie’s and Kathy’s statements suggest that the display of femininity creates the belief that there are differences between men and women in the military and could result in becoming prey. Therefore, women military members take on masculine mannerisms to divert attention away from feminine attributes in the hopes of avoiding predatory behavior. This was the case for Dominique when she was in Afghanistan.

Dominique was a cook sent to Afghanistan with a support battalion. Originally, she was sent to a large military base in Afghanistan, where there was little likelihood for her to be involved in any type of combat. After a month, Dominique was sent to a small Forward Operating Base (FOB), which was home to a Marine infantry unit. Once she arrived, by helicopter, to the remote FOB she realized she was the only woman on the entire base. She immediately deduced that she needed to find a way to show the men at the FOB that she was there to do her job and nothing more. Dominique explained:

When I first got there, it was like... when you first get to a unit. But, I'm not the type to put up with the goo goo eyes or whatever. I'm going to show you that I'm going to hold

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<sup>48</sup> Valorie, Video Chat Interview, February 26, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>49</sup> Kathy, Video Chat Interview, March 4, 2018, Vista, CA.

my own. So, I didn't wear deodorant, I didn't wear makeup and I wore my frog gear<sup>50</sup>. My hair was always busted, I was always dirty... I knew it needed to be done when I got there. So, I was like, cool. You're not gonna look at me like that anymore, I'm gonna stay dirty. I'm just gonna stay GROSS, so you can get grossed out by me every time you see me, I don't give a shit, but you're not gonna look at me like that. So, I held my own. I stunk like they stunk and it is what it is<sup>51</sup>.

For Dominique, purposely changing her appearance to be less feminine became a defense mechanism to guard herself from being seen as prey by the men at the FOB. She chose to display male mannerisms, to make herself appear to be more akin to the military men who were working and living on the FOB. Even though Dominique explained that she was not a “girly girl” and always felt like one of the guys, she consciously adjusted how she looked and carried herself to deflect the gaze of men in the military and to better conform to masculine military standards. This was especially true for Dominique when entering into a new situation where it was unknown the type of men she would be working with. However, she was generally aware of what it was like to arrive to a new unit and actively prepared herself to make it appear that she shared the masculine norms, values and ideals of the military to avoid being preyed on by men in the military. As Symbolic Interactionism theorizes, people make sense of their world by drawing meaning from their social interactions with others. Dominique’s manipulation of her appearance reflects Goffman’s (1959) idea of dramaturgy, because she used a front stage performance to conceal her perceived femininity and replace it with an appearance that better conformed to masculine military culture.

Dominique spent nearly six months of her deployment on the remote FOB. When she first got to the FOB she stated that the Afghani interpreter, who lived and worked with the Marine Corps infantry platoon, verbally degraded her in front of male military members.

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<sup>50</sup> Flame resistant clothing that is issued to military members to be worn in combat environment’s.

<sup>51</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.



Dominique stated, “he was calling me a whore and saying, ‘oh yeah the Americans and their females out here and they pimp them out as whores and they're out here fighting a man's fight<sup>52</sup>.’

” This indicates that the interpreter held similar beliefs that are held and perpetuated by masculine military culture.

Later in her deployment Dominique stated that the same interpreter who previously verbally harassed her also sexually assaulted her. The way Dominique coped with the sexual assault was similarly to how other women military members cope when sexually violated by men in the military. She made the decision to conceal the incident out of fear that she would be sent back to the large military base where she was originally and would not be able to actively participate in war. Dominique explained:

The only reason I didn't say anything was because I knew they would have sent me away from my platoon and I wanted to be there. And cause they needed an interpreter and he was their interpreter. So, between a female Marine, who really shouldn't be with them in the first place, versus their terp of course they're going to keep their terp. So that's why I didn't say anything and when I came back, um, I don't know. Well, I had been sexually abused throughout my life. So, I don't know I'm not going to say it wasn't anything, but it was just one more thing on my plate<sup>53</sup>.

*“I Never Told Anybody”: Coping with Sexual Assault and Rape Using Silence*

Like Dominique, participants frequently talked about being sexually assaulted or raped and staying silent as a way to mitigate the situation from having further negative repercussions. The negative repercussions that were most commonly identified by participants were to be blamed for the unwanted sexual advances from men and derailing their military careers by speaking out. While Kathy (served 6 years as an enlisted member and 18 years as an officer in

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<sup>52</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>53</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

the Navy) was at Officer Candidate School (OCS), only days before being commissioned, she was raped by a fellow officer candidate. Hesitantly, Kathy told me about the experience, stating:

I remember one of the guys who had been from my original company, he had gone to town and gotten drunk and he came in my room and he forced himself on of me. And I thought, "ah, what am I going to do?" Ultimately, I decided I cannot do anything about it. I couldn't do anything about it because they would put me on a hold. So, I never told anybody. I never told anybody. I mean, I have now, but I didn't at the time. I needed to get, I needed to graduate. I needed to get my commission.

We both would have had [been put on a hold]. He had time, cause he was, he was, a little bit younger than me. I didn't have the time. I didn't have the time. And I just, you know, I wasn't sure that it would've ended up that anybody would have believed me anyway... Because, I mean, it was 1982. They just, it wasn't. Women weren't believed, men are but women still weren't believed. They still weren't believed. So<sup>54</sup>.

Similar to Kathy's experience in 1982, other participants discussed, more recent experiences, being sexually assaulted and/or raped and choosing to stay silent to cope. Mallory spoke about her experience being sexually violated and why she stayed silent about the incident. She explained:

The rape culture in the military is really bad. Um, I had one experience, not that I was sexually assaulted. But, I had hung out with, like, three guys... I had gone to, um, one of their houses. And we were just, you know, hanging, drinking and stuff. I remember getting wasted. And I remember wondering, like, what was wrong with the drink because I hadn't drank very much but I was drunk... Anyway, I hooked up with one of the guys that I knew for a really long time. And um, later on I found out through another friend who knew them. He was like, "Hey, I just want you to know, like um, to be careful around them... They had a reason to invite you over."... I was just like, "holy shit! Are you serious?... That makes sense... I didn't drink very much of whatever they gave me and I was fucking wasted<sup>55</sup>."

After being asked if she reported the incident, Mallory responded stating:

No, I felt like... It was like, I should have known better. Why was I the only female drinking with three males. Like you know, "one of those [situations]." So, I just kept it to myself and I just started to avoid them<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Kathy, Video Chat Interview, March 4, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>55</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

<sup>56</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

Mallory stated, “not that I was sexually assaulted,” implying that she was complicit in the act. In reality, Mallory’s experience weaves a story that suggests that three male military members lured her to a party, colluded in drugging her and then one man had sex with her without receiving full and sober consent. The way Mallory reframed the incident—taking blame off of the men who victimized her and blaming herself—was a common occurrence among participants. Frequently, reframing and silence were used as a way to cope with sexual assault and/or rape. But, at the core of the issue lays the fact that the military institution creates an environment that promotes incidents, like what happen to Mallory and Kathy to continually occur. Enloe (2007) suggests, “while such a personal interpretation may work as a private survival strategy for women isolated in a masculinized institution, letting such misogynistic and harassing practices go unchallenged leaves the existing masculinized military culture firmly in place, perhaps even reaffirmed” (p. 76). Furthermore, military culture that puts the responsibility of regulating the sexual misbehavior of male military members creates the fear that if women speak about being sexually violated they will be blamed and suffer negative repercussions.

## FEARS IN DISCLOSING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Most participants cited not reporting, discussing or seeking treatment for mental health issues in the military out of fear. Participants feared that an official diagnosis would negatively impact their careers; that they would be seen as feminine, weak-minded, irrational, and incapable of doing their jobs in comparison to men who were deemed masculine—stoic and rational. Thus, to combat against having their identities tainted, participants commonly discussed using silence and seeking civilian mental health treatment over using military services.

Women military members struggling with mental health issues fear it will be seen as a transgression against their already stigmatized gender. Candice, who struggled with depression and anxiety, explained why she did not want anyone in the military to know about the distress she was experiencing. She stated:

I automatically didn't want anyone in the division to know about it because that's just one more, like, mark against me as a military member being a woman. And it's already, like, I'm already underestimated. And [it's] assumed that... I'm gonna create more work than I'm actually helping with... I already internalized the fact that I as a woman, in this situation where it's all men they're constantly judging me. If I show that I have any mental health weakness that's exploitable and can be used against me... So there's this other underlying issue of, like, why you just kinda like [think], I don't need this. I will not succumb to this. I will not entertain it because there's too much that can get fucked up by admitting that there is a mental health problem<sup>57</sup>.

Mallory expressed a similar sentiment, stating:

Like I said, I didn't want to be judged. You know, as a female you already, you know, it's already like [if] you're having a bad day [they say], "Oh she's on her period. Oh, this is what's going on with her," you know. And then you add mental health stuff too [then they would say], "Oh she's crazy. She's on her period and she's crazy." I just didn't wanna be judged or have my, you know, any sort of work performance be based on a mental health issue, you know, or whatever. So that was my biggest reason. I felt like as a female we already have enough, you know, differences between us and adding extra stuff, like, just makes it worse. So, I tried to minimize, you know, a lot of things<sup>58</sup>.

Candice and Mallory stayed silent out of fear that their mental health issues would be seen as a weakness as a woman military member. As previously discussed, masculine military culture works to subordinate women military members. Therefore, participants did not want an additional label to further damage their status and identity as military members.

Labeling theory indicates that once a person is labeled and stigmatized it becomes that persons "master status." Becker (1963) states that a stigmatized label "becomes that controlling one. Treating a person as though [s]he were generally rather than specifically deviant produces a

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<sup>57</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>58</sup> Mallory, In-Person Interview, March 23, 2018, Temecula, CA.

self-fulfilling prophecy. It sets in motion several mechanisms which conspire to shape the person in the image people have of [her]” (p. 33). As previously stated in the literature, labeling theory suggests that for an individual to be stigmatized and labeled the stigmatized identity attribute must be visible to others. Since mental health issues are internal and can be concealed from the broader public, and especially formal mental health treatment outlets, women military members use silence to protect their identities from being spoiled by a “master status.”

Several participants learned to stay silent about their own mental health issues by seeing how other women military members were treated after it was known they were diagnosed with a mental illness. For example, Judy was inclined to stay quiet about her own issues with depression after seeing how other women military members were being treated. Judy stated:

I knew people who had, um, who had let their co-workers know that they were on Wellbutrin or that were taking anti-anxiety meds or anti-depression meds. And, um, and the people that they told, you know, would use it against them. They would say, "oh, you must not have taken your pill today, cause you're acting like a bitch." Or you know, um, they just would berate the person and say that they were weak and, ah, anyway. To the point where a friend of mine, um. She was working at the MEPS down in Sacramento and, ah, her boss was always yelling at her and she was an E-8 and he was just horrible. And she became suicidal and called me<sup>59</sup>.

Judy’s explanation depicts a gendered narrative of how women military members are treated when it is known they have mental health issues. This reflects the findings of Kellezi and Reicher (2014) who found that gender norms play a major role in defining how mental health is framed and the level of acceptance military members will receive, if their mental health issues are known. Similarly, Nicki (2001) argues that women, in the civilian population, run the risk of:

...having her illness seen purely in terms of her transgression against her gender. Cultural concepts of irrationality and sexist norms of mental health marginalize people with mental illnesses in attacking their personhood. In attacking the personhood of those who are simply nonconformist they contribute to the development of mental health problems in such people. (P. 81)

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<sup>59</sup> Judy, Video Chat Interview, March 15, 2018, Vista, CA.

In both civilian and military populations women with mental health issues are culturally framed by concepts of irrationality and sexist norms. Thus, when women military member's mental health issues are known their entire identity is attacked and defined as a gendered transgression. Thus, it can be concluded that women military members are silencing themselves due to the fear that their identity will be further tarnished as women.

Participants frequently discussed not speaking out about mental health issues because they feared that it would destroy their opportunities to obtain more prestigious job selections. Dominique feared that her future hopes of becoming a Marine Corps Drill Instructor (D.I.) would be compromised if it were discovered that she took medication for a diagnosed Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and that she was seeing a military psychiatrist. Dominique explained, "I put in my D.I. package four times. I was not gonna have anything on there, with anger, depression, anxiety. Nothing. No PTSD<sup>60</sup>." After being flagged on a post-deployment mental health assessment, Dominique was forced to go to post-deployment medical for mental health treatment. She explained, "And then he flagged me. And then when he flagged me I was, like, fuck. I'm flagged<sup>61</sup>." Dominique feared that her chances of becoming a D.I. would be destroyed by being flagged and forced to seek mental health treatment. To minimize the potential backlash for seeking mental health treatment, she told no one why she was going to medical and she purposely scheduled her appointments at times when her absence would not be questioned.

Even though Dominique was receiving treatment for her mental health issues, no one she worked with knew anything about the issues she was dealing with. She was assigned to a Naval

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<sup>60</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>61</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

psychiatrist and attended regular appointments for years after her deployment. Dominique described how she worked around her diagnosis in the hopes of becoming a D.I. She explained:

She was really awesome. She told me right off the bat, "yeah you totally have PTSD, you have depression, anxiety and I'm worried about you, but at the same time I'm glad that you keep coming back." And I told her, I'm going D.I. If for some reason something happens and I don't get to go I'm not gonna come back, like, I'm not. And she took it really personal because we had already established a relationship. So, in her notes she was really careful with how she worded things... so that I could still do it. And then, so I got denied four times for D.I.<sup>62</sup>.

Dominique's psychiatrist thoughtfully constructed notes about the care she was providing Dominique so that it did not impede her chances of becoming a D.I. However, Dominique's D.I. packages continually got denied. After each rejection, Dominique would work with her psychiatrist to make changes to her treatment so she would be a more appealing D.I. candidate. After one rejected D.I. package, Dominique's psychiatrist suggested that it was due to the medication she took for her TBI. Dominique explained:

...that's what it was, the triptans, whatever the freakin' triptans they used to give me on medication. They said, "because you're still actively taking those you can't do it." And I was like, well fine fuck it I am not gonna take the meds. So, I stopped taking the meds and then I put it in again. It was literally, it was process of elimination. Once I fixed one thing, it would go, I would do it again. Get defined for another thing. I was like, well crap man<sup>63</sup>.

Ultimately, Dominique was never accepted to become a D.I. Though she cannot be 100 percent certain, she believes that she was not accepted because there was evidence of mental illness on her medical record and due to the medication, that she took for her TBI. The outcome of Dominique's experience affirms Hall (2011) finding, that seeking mental health treatment can potentially be detrimental to military career advancement and perceived as a weakness. Dominique's response suggests that even war related mental health issues are not accepted and

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<sup>62</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

<sup>63</sup> Dominique, In-Person Interview, February 28, 2018, San Marcos, CA.

that women military members actively work to minimize their own distress to further their careers and to protect their identities.

Most participants had a fear of seeking formal military medical treatment for mental health issues but felt more comfortable going outside of the military institution to seek formal care. The implications of having to seek civilian services created unneeded hardships for military members. When seeking civilian care, participants frequently felt that they were responsible for explaining the dynamics of the military to medical providers, which at times delayed the treatment process. In many cases, it became a barrier for receive the appropriate care, because civilian medical providers had a hard time relating to the type of mental health issues that participants were dealing with.

Candice, who experienced depression and anxiety, expressed why she did not feel comfortable seeking mental health treatment in the military. She stated:

I think having the person sitting across from me wearing khakis and having her butter bars on and I'm supposed to spill my guts to this person as an E-3. And just tell her everything without abandon and completely trust in that. That, I think, just in itself is hard no matter gender or issue or job that you're trying to protect. That's intimidating cause this is an authority figure and that's drilled in our heads, this hierarchical power structure is already there. So, it's, I think, for me it was really hard to trust someone who I already know is in that position that can beat being a ranked position above my head. What do you want me to tell you? That'd be like, working in a salon, going to my boss to be my therapist about how I hate everything in the salon. Like, I am not gonna fucking do that, I want to stay working. I don't know. I think that was an intimidating factor<sup>64</sup>.

Candice's statement shows that military members have a deep distrust in military mental health professionals and question their motives. Similarly, Robin, who experienced depression and anxiety, explained her distrust for Army psychologists, stating:

You know I didn't really trust any Army psychologists because I had gone to one during my first deployment. And um, after I had lost my temper with an NCO outside of our section who was, um, you know, antagonizing me on guard duty in the middle of the night. Um, I'd been sent to this Army psychologist. I was told by her—which now in

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<sup>64</sup> Candice, In-Person Interview, February 02, 2018, Vista, CA.



retrospect was good advice, but not what I needed at the time to hear— which was, “lower your standards.” Basically, well, the first thing she said when I came in was, “so you have an anger problem.” And I’m, like, [thinking], “go fuck yourself” (laughs). I didn't say it that way, but in my head that is what I was thinking. I was like [thinking], “God, I am already being pegged this way.” Like, Army psychologists aren't to be trusted, because they're basically taking orders from my chain of command<sup>65</sup>.

Robin feared seeking mental health treatment for several reasons. First, she felt that military mental health physicians were not there to truly help military members but that they were “taking orders” from her chain of command. This was a common feeling among participants, they felt that if they spoke to a military mental health provider that their information would be directly dictated to their chain of commands and that it would result in negative repercussions. The second reason that Robin feared seeking treatment is that she felt that military mental health professionals were not truly there to teach military members how to take care of themselves and to heal. Robin indicated that military culture and resocialization has a main goal of creating conformity and strips military members of their individual identities.

If you empower soldiers to take care of themselves, we’re gonna stop being good soldiers. Cuz their lives are built around not taking care of themselves. So, you can’t actually help someone heal in that situation. Because your entire life is built around lies<sup>66</sup>.

Thus, if military mental health professionals actually taught military members how to take care of themselves and heal their mental illness it would also teach them how to be individuals again and destroy the entire foundation of military culture and conformity.

Nina, who also had a deep distrust of military mental health professionals, used silence to prevent her reputation from being further spoiled. Nina’s mental health information was directly shared with her chain of command and coworkers without her consent. She explained:

Right after I was being admitted to the treatment facility... I was shocked to find out that most of my colleagues already knew that I was admitted to a psych ward. I mean if you go to the E.R. ...probably everyone will know that you're going to the E.R. But psych

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<sup>65</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>66</sup> Robin, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

ward, being admitted there, that was, kinda like, a thing I really don't want anyone to know. But unfortunately, they all knew<sup>67</sup>.

Nina went on to explain how she felt after her mental health issues were shared with those she worked with. She stated:

I really felt bad... my self-esteem was really low. Like, they felt bad about what happened to me, but at the same time that's a thing I don't want them to know. And it felt like I was naked. I mean like, they stripped me off and I am floating and everyone saw me there<sup>68</sup>.

Nina felt that her true identity was fully exposed to those that she worked with, due to having her mental health issues shared without her consent. After this incident, Nina started to silence and conceal her mental health issues so her identity was not tainted further. She further explained what it felt like to conceal her distress and mental health diagnosis, stating:

Emotionally it's hard, because, like, it always feels like you have to prove something to other people even though they're not the one who's actually paying for your rent or paying for your food. But you have to show them a brave face, that you can do your job. And you always have to perform, I think like, a 100 percent or more than that. So, they won't, you know, step back to that problem, your mental illness<sup>69</sup>.

Unlike Candice and Robin, Nina was not even given the option of concealing her mental health issues. Therefore, this becomes the number one issues of why military members have such a great distrust for military mental health treatment. Ultimately, this distrust causes military members to not seek much needed care for their ongoing mental health issues.

## MEN CAN BE SUBORDINATED TOO

Erika became an outlier in my participant data, not because her experiences deviated from the other participant experiences, but, because she served as a man. Erika identified herself

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<sup>67</sup> Nina, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>68</sup> Nina, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>69</sup> Nina, Video Chat Interview, March 1, 2018, Vista, CA.

with the following terms: female, intersex, trans, pansexual, and Hispanic. However, though she identifies today as a woman veteran she was raised by her parents as a boy and served her entire 20 years in the Army as a man. Erika's military story is complex, but not unlike the experiences of other women military members. Due to her feminine characteristics her status as a military member was frequently subjugated. Erika experienced sexual and mental trauma while serving in the military and she identified and coped with her distress in a similar manner as many other participants. The similarities between Erika's experiences and many other participants suggests that the military institution subordinates both women and feminine behavior as a way to sustain and perpetuate masculine military culture.

*"I Always Had a Different Shape": Identity Management and Subordination of Femininity*

Erika discussed that she had many feminine features that caused her to stand out from other men in the military. She stated, "It's kind of hard to pass as a guy when you have boobs like these (laughs). I have a lot of feminine features that are not common in males. Like, I have a very small brow line, I don't have an Adam's apple, things of that nature<sup>70</sup>." Erika went on to explain that she was drawn to the military, because it was a place where she was able to wear a uniform. She explained:

that's why I think I enjoyed the military so much... because that was one place I could wear a uniform... most of the uniforms are equal, so there is not gender difference... the battle uniforms and everything else, everybody's the same. And that kind of made me feel a little more at ease I think, because the sizes that I had to use were female size. I always had a different shape. Um, shoes too, you know, my feet are narrow. And so most men's shoes do not fit me, so I would have to try to get women's sizes and those fit me perfectly<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>71</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

For Erika, being outside of the military and not being able to wear a uniform caused others around her to question her identity more often. Similarly, other participants manipulated their behavior and appearance to both embody masculine military norms and to deflect the gaze of male military members. However, even with a uniform Erika said that she would be singled out for her feminine mannerisms and body features.

I was asked often if I was gay, you know. Even though I was married [to a woman]. Because I do have a lot of the same movements [as women], you know, there's some innate movements that people have. Mine are not like drastic, you know, like flamboyant... I mean they're just typical female moments, but they're different. And people can perceive those<sup>72</sup>.

Erika discussed that she felt like she did not fit in with other men in the military. She stated:

Well my friends, that I hung around with, my closest friends have always been female. I can have a superficial friendship or relationship with a guy. But, the internal jokes that they do, "the brotherhood" I call it right. "Bro Hood"... I never felt like it quite fit there<sup>73</sup>.

Erika explained that because she was constantly being labeled as gay, due to her femininity, she found ways to counteract these perceptions. Kelly (2011)—discusses identity tactics used by gender nonconforming individuals—states, “identity normalizing strategies... often consisted of the deliberate construction of a normatively gendered presentation of self... [individuals] described engaging in... presentation rituals in order to appear non-threatening in regards to all aspects of their identities” (as cited in Currah and Mulqueen 2011:573). To better conform to masculine military norms, Erika said at times she would join in with men when they crudely discussed women. Because she shared a common attraction to women with the military men, it allowed her to appear more masculine. But, she stated that she could not fully conform to the

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<sup>72</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>73</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

hyper-masculine norms in the military because to her it was the equivalent to “speaking Mandarin<sup>74</sup>,” foreign and unknown.

Erika used other methods to try to compensate for her femininity. She discussed that she would take on more dangerous work assignments to stay as “the top man on the pyramid<sup>75</sup>.” Erika stated, “I’m an overachiever by far. And my thing was to compensate by far. I always took riskier assignments... I was able to hide some of my soft side, I guess, by masculinizing<sup>76</sup>.” West and Zimmerman (1987) argue, “that the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’ ” (p. 126). As West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest, Erika (like all individuals in society) was hostage to the production of gender. In a social institution, like the military, the production of gender has produced a culture that idealizes hyper-masculinity. Erika was unable to fully mask her femininity—in a military environment that subordinates such qualities—which caused her to be constantly questioned, in some cases, even attacked for not conforming to military cultural norms. Like other participants, Erik was not able to fully conform to masculine military norms and values caused her to be seen as inferior. However, unlike many other participants, there were boundaries to Erika’s subordination. Her career stayed intact and was not simply threatened because of her gender. This at times was not the case with other participants, as women, they felt that their military identities and careers were constantly vulnerable.

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<sup>74</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>75</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>76</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

*“I Didn't Report it to My Command”: Coping with Rape Using Silence*

Erika worked hard to hide her identity, yet, she was preyed on because of her differences compared to other men in the military. She discussed an incident that occurred while she was deployed to Ukraine, where she was brutally raped by a Ukrainian officer. Reluctantly, Erika stated, “I was sexually raped at gunpoint. So, you know, it was a Ukrainian officer and he held a gun to my head the entire time. So... that was tough<sup>77</sup>.” Erika explained that after she was viciously raped, she never disclosed what fully occurred out of fear. Erika explained.

No, [I never said anything]. I didn't want to cause an international incident, because everything was right when they were trying to join NATO at the time. I did disclose it to one of the Ukrainian Colonels that I had befriended, [I told him] that I was feeling really uncomfortable, of the tension, from this one particular captain... And then the next morning I heard that they had made him walk "the walk of shame," which is when you're walking down the line of your unit and everybody hits you. And, um... I felt a little bit of justice there, you know, without them knowing everything, but I'm sure they knew something was not okay. I didn't report it to my command at the time, because it probably would have cost me my commission at the time. Because they always try to find some kind of blame on you. So, I felt at the time, knowing my command that I already had some issues with my command, I thought it was best not to say anything<sup>78</sup>.

Erika further explained her reasoning for concealing being raped. She stated:

Well, for one I'm trans. I was serving at the time as a male... and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" principles were around... so any of that suggestiveness would have been a debt to my career anyway. It shifted me enough anyway to end my career, because I could have stayed in longer. But um, I just need to get out at the time. So, when they offered a 20-year letter a few months after I took off<sup>79</sup>.

After being raped and dealing with the traumatic aftermath, she had to stay silent about what happened to her out of fear that it would jeopardize her 20-year career in the military. As she discussed, due to the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” policy she feared that because the rape was male-on-male rape that she would be forced out of the military because she would be labeled as gay.

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<sup>77</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>78</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

<sup>79</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

Erika stated, “I think my biggest fear is being blamed for it somehow<sup>80</sup>.” As previously discussed, the military institution perpetuates and sustains a culture that puts the blame of sexual violence on those that are victimized. Similar to many participants, Erika felt that she would be blamed for being raped and that her only recourse was to stay silent. Erika’s silence further solidifies that the military institution uses heteronormative masculine culture to silence anyone who is deemed “unfit” according to the narrowly define ideals of the institution. Smith (1990) theorizes that feminist standpoint theory suggests “the simplest formulation of alienation posits a relation between the work individuals do and an external order oppressing them in which their work contributes to the strength of the order that oppresses them” (Longhofer and Winchester 2012:390). In other words, the ways in which women navigate through a system of subordination, whether using silence or justifying and internalizing their inferior position, it strengthens the system that works to oppress them. The authority within the military institution becomes more powerful not just by subordinating and silencing women but subordinating and silencing all those who do not encompass the strict heteronormative masculine ideals of the institution. By understanding the silences of those who are systematically subordinated in the military institution it illuminates a system that exists to privilege heteronormative masculinity ideals.

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<sup>80</sup> Erika, Video Chat Interview, March 16, 2018, Vista, CA.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ADDRESSING MILITARY CULTURE

In the 2008 *Observations and Critique of the DoD Task Force on Mental Health* it was reported that the “DoD has a successful history of transforming culture” (U.S. Department of Defense 2008:3). However, my research findings indicate a very different picture about military culture. To create inclusion in the military and to promote an environment where silence is not used as a coping method, it is essential for masculine military culture to be addressed. Culture is not something that can be changed instantaneous, but with time and persistency change is possible. The military institution needs to start addressing the component of masculinity and how it works to create pervasive gender related harassment, sexual assault, rape, and mental health issues in women military members and other marginalized individuals. Currently, the Department of Defense sees the military institution as one that is defined solely around a rank hierarchy system. As my findings show, this is not the case. Other hierarchies supersede rank, such as gender, and it must be acknowledged that by ignoring this fact it further perpetuates masculine military culture and oppression. Gender, race and sexuality need to be taken into consideration when the Department of Defense investigates military issues so reports reflect the true nature of the population.

### CREATING A SPACE FOR THE MARGINALIZED

Currently, women veterans feel like outsiders when seeking health treatment through military systems that are supposed to support their care. Systems like Veterans Affairs (VA) isolate women further by not creating inclusive spaces for women veterans. Several participants



in this research discussed being discouraged by the care they received because they felt they were being judged and misunderstood by care providers. It would be beneficial for the VA to create courses to educate staff about the different needs of women and other marginalized veterans. It needs to be understood by military medical professions that there are many dimensions to the individual experiences of military members and the system must work to teach medical staff how to care for veterans in a more inclusive way. Furthermore, to change the culture of the military it is important for all military related institutions to start recognizing and changing policies that help to create an environment where women military members feel that silence is the only option.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the lack of current literature addressing the experiences of women and other marginalized military members in the field of sociology, it is imperative that future research carves out a space that illuminates their voices. Furthermore, research needs to work to further understand how masculine military culture creates silence in marginalized individuals. As Enloe (2007) states, “paying attention to women soldiers entails taking seriously the diverse experiences of women in the enlisted ranks and officer corps and at the same time, watching the behavior of their male peers and superiors. ‘Paying attention’ requires listening to silences’ ” (p. 69). It is imperative that research further investigates the meaning behind the silences of women military members and all those who are marginalized in the military institution. Furthermore, future research must begin to understand how race, gender, and sexuality intersect; creating differing forms of silence and oppression. Women military members, like the participants in this research, are willing and wanting to share their stories to bring about positive change and to

expand the narrative of what it means to be a military member. It is important that their stories be told so that positive change takes place.

## CONCLUSION

In today's U.S. military climate, where women are slowly gaining equal job opportunities it is more essential than ever that issues of subordination, mental health and sexual violence are addressed. As Van Gilder states, "the inclusion of diverse bodies is not enough to change military culture" (p. 156). In a system where masculinity defines all aspects and where women and femininity are subjugated, it is necessary to address the realities of the military institution: the systematic subordination of women military members and femininity; the pervasiveness of gender related harassment; framing the narrative of sexual assault and rape in a way that further victimizes women and promotes predatory sexual behavior by men in the military; and, the masculine military cultural norms and values that promote fear of seeking treatment or speaking about mental and emotional distress.

These data show a snapshot into the experiences of the greater population of women in the military and how their military experiences differ from their male counterparts. Based on the qualitative interview data collected and analyzed in this research it is apparent that the experiences of women military members are diverse and complex. This research has helped broaden the knowledge of women military members' experiences and to understand the complex ways in which they navigate through the military institution using silence. Their experiences are often disregarded and diminished when discussing the military as a whole causing the voices of women to be diminished. As Feminist Standpoint Theory suggests, understanding the experiences of the marginalized illuminates how the privileged dominant social world works as a

system of subordination. It is important that women and marginalized individuals are brought to the forefront of conversation to understand how the military institution works as a system of oppression.

It is not easy to be a woman or feminine military member, which is evident by the experiences of the participants. It is not easy to decide how to properly navigate through an institution that seemingly rejects the presence of women and femininity. Military culture privileges heteronormative masculine ideals and creates an environment that rewards the silence of women. Ultimately, the privileging of masculinity and devaluing of women and femininity creates a system that systematically silences the voices of the marginalized. In a system that rejects the presence of women military members, silence has become the best way for women to cope and still lead a successful military career. It is the responsibility of the military institution to critique and eliminate cultural aspects that cause women military members to be blamed and punished for the bad behavior of others. It is time for true inclusion to take place, not only by opening up more jobs to women, but by addressing and changing the culture of the military that has historically worked to erase the presence of so many voices.

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLIER



# Research Participants Needed!

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## WHO?

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### **WOMEN VETERANS,**

who experienced any type of mental and/or emotional distress while serving in the military.

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## WHAT?

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Participate in an interview for a graduate student research study.

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## WHY?

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To understand the experiences of women military members when encountering mental and/or emotional distress.



**Want to  
Participate?**  
For more information or  
to volunteer as a  
participant, please  
contact Graduate  
Student Researcher  
Kristen Schmidt at  
[darli005@cougars.csusm.edu](mailto:darli005@cougars.csusm.edu)

## APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Demographic Questions:*

1. Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation
2. What branch of the military were you in?
3. How long were you in the military?
4. What rank were you when you were discharged?

### *Ice-Breaker Question:*

5. Why did you join the military?

### *Resocialization Questions:*

6. Tell me about your experience arriving at basic training?
  - a. How did you feel?
  - b. What was the most memorable experience
7. In what ways do you feel that your life was different in the military compared to before you joined?

### *Gender/Masculine Military Culture:*

8. Tell me about individuals that you worked with?
  - a. Were you friends?
  - b. Were they men or women?
  - c. Did you feel treated differently from the men?
  - d. Did you feel treated differently from the women?
  - e. Did you fit in?
9. During your military career, tell me about a time when you felt like being a woman was a problem?

***Mental and Emotional Distress/Coping:***

10. Tell me about a time during your military career that you felt unhappy?
11. Tell me about a time during your military career that you felt fearful?
12. During unhappy and fearful moments, how did you manage your emotions?
  - a. Did you talk to friends?
  - b. Did you seek medical care?
  - c. Did you tell your command?

***Probing Questions:***

- How so?
- Tell me an example?
- Can you elaborate?
- Can you further explain that?

**APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM**

California State University  
**SAN MARCOS**

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**Camouflaging Military Distress:  
The Systematic Silencing of Women Veterans**

**Invitation to Participate**

Dear Participant,

My name is Kristen Schmidt and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Sociological Practice at California State University San Marcos. You are invited to participate in a research study to understand the experiences of women military members when encountering mental and/or emotional distress. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a woman veteran who has experienced mental or emotional distress while serving in the military. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

**STUDY PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand women military members who experience mental or emotional distress while actively serving in the military.

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:**

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 8 to 12 participants who will be participating in this research.

**PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:**

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following:

- Agree to meet the researcher at a time and place that is comfortable and convenient for you.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length.
- Answer questions related to your experiences in the military.

**RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES:**

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. These include:

- The interview time may take longer than expected.
- Participants may be uncomfortable answering certain interview questions
- Interview questions may bring up sensitive memories that could cause unexpected emotions.

- The identity of the participant could potentially be discovered. This may occur even though a made-up name will be given to the participant and the researcher will be taking precautions to protect the participants identity.

### **SAFEGUARDS:**

To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:

- The interview will be scheduled at a convenient time for the participant. At any time during the interview process, the participant can stop the interview if the time becomes inconvenient. The interviewer will keep track of time to ensure the interview does not last longer than expected.
- Participant may skip any questions they do not wish to answer.
- If sensitive memories cause an emotional response, participant will be reminded that they are able to skip any questions that they do not wish to answer. The participant is able to choose to stop the interview process at any time. Also, the participant will be provided with a resource guide to help direct them to counseling and/or mental health services.
- To protect the participant's identity, the researcher will keep all interview information in a password protected computer in a password protected file. Also, the researcher will erase the audio recording of the interview as soon as a transcript is made from the recording. Prior to the transcript being typed, the researcher will keep the audio recording of the interview on a password protected phone. The research will not be using the participant's name. Instead, a pseudonym will be used and put on the interview transcript. Once the research project is complete, the researcher will erase the interview transcript.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your responses will be confidential.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with California State University, San Marcos.

### **BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:**

While there are not direct benefits to you, your participation in this study will be used to gain a greater understanding of how the military impacts the experiences of women military members who encounter mental and emotional distress.

### **INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:**

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND SIGNATURES:**

If you have questions about the study, please call me at (760) 201-3378 or e-mail me at [darli005@cougars.csusm.edu](mailto:darli005@cougars.csusm.edu). You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you

have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at [irb@csusm.edu](mailto:irb@csusm.edu) or (760) 750-4029.

**PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT:**

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the study.

Please check the option that applies to you before signing:

- I give permission for my interview to be audio recorded
- I do not give permission for my interview to be audio recorded

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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| This document has been approved by  
| the Institutional Review Board at  
| California State University San Marcos  
**Expiration Date: December 18, 2018**