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A PILOT REPORT ON WOMEN'S ASSESSMENT  
OF THEIR MILITARY CAREERS

by

Barbara Gallatin Anderson, Ph.D.

Department of Anthropology  
Southern Methodist University  
Dallas, Texas

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Abstract

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## A PILOT REPORT ON WOMEN'S ASSESSMENT OF THEIR MILITARY CAREERS

Women have doubled their numbers in the military since 1978, and now represent more than 10% of active military forces. Women have become so integral a part of the Armed Services that, in the judgment of Major General Jeanne Holm, United States Air Force (Retired), it would be next to impossible to field a standing peacetime force of over 2 million volunteers without them (Holm, 1982). Major General Holm, who at the time of her retirement from the Air Force after 33 years of service had risen from truck driver to the highest ranking woman ever to serve in the United States Armed Forces, sees women's impact on the military as "an unfinished revolution." "Revolution," in this context, has reference to the influx of women under sanction of law into the previously all-male military; "unfinished," to her conviction the women's full incorporation within the ranks continues to constitute a major challenge for the Armed Services.

Attitudes on women's participation in the military have been documented as varying from beliefs that their presence enriches the Services (Tetreault, 1987; Eisenhart, 1975; Devilbiss, 1985) to negative attitudes and fears of a diminished combat readiness because of them (Priest, Prince, & Vitters, 1978; DeFleur & Marshak, 1978; Wilcove & Thomas, 1979; Gilder, 1979). Some researchers see the military as a male-generated model for optimal performance in war, essentially nonaccommodating of women without unwanted change (Holm, 1982; Keil, 1979).

Dispassionate literature is rare, despite an evident consensus that mutually respectful adaptation on the part of men and women is critical to effective growth in all branches of the Service. There is agreement, also, that the military inevitably will change by virtue of women's presence. The nature of that change has been variously considered, but few authors venture an unequivocal description of the form it will take.

Despite their increase, women's numbers and distribution within the military provide arena for opportunities that allow men and women to sort stereotypic from pragmatically based knowledge of one another in a service context. Women-in-the-military remain an enigma to many men. Northcraft and Martin (1982) have shown how this lack of closure can act to aggravate negative expectations about minority women. Many women report their earliest impressions of the military as dominated by a male military model, the projection of which influences the work place, field, or military classroom.

The research reported upon here is exploratory in nature and limited in scope. A first phase of the research was the design and testing of an intensive interview form (appendix) that would provide the basis for a reconstruction of the career histories of women in the military. The goal of the research was the identification of particular themes that shape women's performance and expectations in the military. "Theme" is used here to subsume patterns of shared attitudes underlying behavior as well as the behavior itself.

Only 24 women were interviewed. The Army, Navy, and Air Force were represented with eight women from each of these Services. Twelve of the women were Black, 10 Anglo, and 2 Hispanic. Both enlisted women and officers participated. Of the 24, 18 were in functional support and administrative occupations, 4 in service and supply, 1 a technical specialist, and 1 in mechanical equipment repair.

The second phase of the research was devoted to analysis, by specific interview categories, of data collected. The search here was for regularities and differences within predesignated areas of relevance. These included factors influencing women's entry into the military, their activities within it, self-image, assessments of various dimensions of military life, and lastly their projection of their own futures within the military. Several questions of general applicability to women in the Services were also included.

The final phase of the research isolates those themes which, in the judgment of women interviewed, are most salient to their optimal performance within the military. Where possible, implications of these findings for the military are also signaled.

### Discussion

#### The Intensive Interview Document

The intensive Interview with Military Women (appendix) was ambitious in scope. Data gathered from this document constitute the major basis for analysis. With each of the 24 women, I explained--in a brief verbal introduction--its purpose, assured anonymity, and responded to any questions about the goals or disposition of the research. The interview was conducted with privacy in a closed office. Demographic data were collected on rank, service, occupational specialty, age, years in service, educational level, place regarded as home, and identification of what the subject regards as her present family membership. (Some women continue to identify with their family of birth [mother, father, siblings]; others, with that of marriage [husband and children].)

Of the 18 open-ended sets of questions that constitute the body of the interview, all but 1 were designed to be asked of

enlisted women and officers alike. The remaining set of questions was designed to cope with areas of self-review that would be affected by enlisted versus officer status.

Where women pursued lines of thought unanticipated within the formal framework of the interview, they were encouraged to pursue them. Further probes ("Anything else?" "Could you elaborate on that?" "And then what happened?") were incorporated in the interview when they seemed appropriate to the enlargement of discussion.

Interviews averaged 1 hour in duration.

Despite the obvious limitations of so small a sample, areas of consensus are sometimes distinguishable by ethnicity, while on other issues women appear to close ranks, with Black, Anglo, and the two Hispanic women taking a shared posture. To the extent possible, reporting within the following sections will deal both with consensus and with those dimensions on which ethnicity--or affiliation with a particular military Service--appear to have influence. (Except where the two Hispanic women made separate judgments, they are subsumed in this document with the White Anglo group.)

#### Choice of the Military

Of all the women interviewed only one joined the military because of a predetermined interest in an armed-forces career and with recruitment in a particular Service steadfastly in mind. "I was hooked on the Air Force." Pride in the Air Force and her conviction of its superiority over all other branches of the Armed Forces found repeated expression in this Black woman officer's interview. Three fourths of the women, whether enlisted or officer, Black or White, see themselves as having joined by chance, by accident, or by the fortuitous appearance of a recruiter at a time when they were soon going to have to make some decision about their future.

Sometimes the chain of events begins trivially. "I didn't feel ready for college, but I didn't want to stay in the town I was from. One day I ran into a Navy recruiter by accident. I took the Navy test to escape an English test for which I was unprepared and which was scheduled at the same time." Two weeks after graduation from high school she learned she had passed the Navy test.

For one woman it was a recruitment billboard that had stayed in her mind. Another took the test as a lark to allay the fears of her girl friend with whom she had gone to the Air Force recruitment office. "I passed and she didn't, and I woke up one morning in the Service and in uniform."

"I was totally curious. Just plain curiosity got me in," one woman assured me.

Despite more advantageous educational backgrounds, future officers report joining the military for much the same reasons as future enlisted women. Either they were impelled by simple curiosity, or they elected the military over a less compelling choice. The decision is made to choose a promising if undeterminable future over a less-valued, sometimes imminent, alternative.

"I knew I did not want to be an accountant," said a Naval officer of a career into which she found herself inexorably moving. She went to enlist on the day of college graduation. She saw the Navy as an "exciting and different prospect." Another woman rejected high school teaching after 6 months at it. "I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life." The travel opportunities she associated with Navy service were also a magnet.

The prospect of otherwise just drifting into childbearing and marriage was a factor for three women.

A view of the Service solely as financial security, with the prospect of a regular paycheck as the primary and overruling consideration for entering the military was voiced by only one woman (Black). However, the benefit of greater financial security within the Service than outside it was of sufficient influence for one third of the women (Black and White) that they made reference to it in the context of recruitment decision-making. Five women sought college educations that would not have been financially feasible in civilian life. One woman, married to a serviceman, chose the financial stability of the military to add to their joint income, rather than face having to change civilian jobs every time her husband moved.

Reference to the role of security recurred in contexts other than financial security, and was most often emphasized in terms of psychological expectations. Women saw the military as an opportunity for escape from unformulated prospects for the future, as an avenue for the maturity and personal growth that might well elude them on the outside. "I had thought of a sales career," one officer recalled, "but I was intimidated in interviews for work. I looked young. I had no self-confidence."

Finally, the opportunity to travel was "the major reason" reported by two women, though references to their enjoyment of this dividend were volunteered by half the women.

In subsequent sections of this paper, the broad themes integrating women's views of themselves in relation to the military are addressed. The genesis of some of these is rooted in pre-enlistment expectations of their futures within the Service.

## The Family's Role in Enlistment Decision-making

Financially stable families are more often reported as objecting to military careers for their daughters than are financially troubled ones. Mothers are characteristically the least supportive of family members of their daughters' decisions to enter the military.

"Mom was not thrilled," "Mom was shocked," "I had never seen her so upset" were typical descriptions of reactions of White and Black mothers. One woman reported receiving phone calls from her mother with some regularity when she was in Officers Candidate School, reminding her that she could quit. "I had no encouragement from my mother. None."

For three women the decision to enter the Service in advance of the college education planned--or hoped--for them was the main objection. Another agonized over the possibility of her daughter's being overseas, "distant and in danger," and wept when her daughter enlisted. For a mother with five younger children still at home, the loss of a household aide needed to be weighed against the unknown advantages for the daughter.

Uniformly, however, mothers were either mollified in their views, or learned to accept daughters' unwillingness to abide by their wishes. Later sections of the interview reveal that, except in two cases, mothers assume a staunchly supportive role once daughters take up life in the military.

Concern for fathers' opinions was less reported and apparently less influential when offered. Two White women officers, however, both in the Army, were most affected in their decisions by the supportive counsel of their fathers whom they identified as lifelong mentors and role models. For one Black woman a much loved grandfather was influential against negative family pressure, and both Black and White women report having discussed their plans with boy friends or husbands and weighing their opinions.

Virtually all women wanted me to know, however, that once they had convinced themselves of the desirability of a military career, they were neither dissuaded nor delayed by outside influence. Only in the case (Hispanic) where a husband's concern had to be overcome, did a significant amount of time elapse between the decision to enlist and enlistment itself.

## Early Career Ambitions and the Influence of Role Models

A series of questions was included in the interview about early life career ambitions and the influence of role models in childhood and adolescence. Half of the women, regardless of ethnicity, could report no durable career interest in childhood and adolescence. They shared cursory thoughts of futures as



singers, flight attendants, secretaries, and teachers. One was propelled by her mother into preparation for teaching--an activity that held little attraction for her and which she abandoned later in the course of a teacher-training program.

Among those women who reported durable career interests, mention of undertakings related to science or technology was dominant. In their early career dreams, 10 of the 24 women reported that at some time during their adolescence they gave serious thoughts to becoming physicians, engineers, navigators, dieticians, nurses, and in one case a specialist in computer graphics. Four of the women, two enlisted and two officers, had actually explored college-level education or training possibilities before entering the military. Two of the 10 are engaged to related work in the military, but neither at the original level of aspiration.

In reviewing their lives prior to the military, more than half the respondents could recall no role models. Of those who could, Blacks (with two exceptions) and the two Hispanics with little hesitancy named their mothers. Most frequently identified by Anglos and the second choice of Black women was some particular teacher who had opened up a new horizon or had shown them that in the absence of planned futures they ran the very real risk of dreary and unfulfilled life styles. Mothers--and in one instance a grandmother--are seen as having overcome great obstacles, sometimes, as one Black sergeant put it "within a world denigrated by Whites." Mother-daughter relationships are reported as enduring. Mothers sometimes assume close confidante roles, encouraging both patience and aggressiveness in their offspring. "Guts and a persevering spirit: that's what she taught me to have."

#### General Satisfaction and Dissatisfactions with Military Life

Women--Black, Anglo, or Hispanic--find greatest satisfaction within the military when their jobs are varied in content, when their daily assignments allow them some concrete measure of progress, and when they have power. They expect respect from the immediate boss, for whom they develop an intense loyalty.

Black women more often than White voice the desire to work within small groups where camaraderie can develop.

Regardless of ethnicity, these women will fatalistically accept a reasonable amount of their work day involved in "putting out fires" or dealing with bureaucratic emergencies as these arise, but regard an overdose of these as the most fatiguing dimension of their assignments.

Once they have experienced responsibility women want more of it. They want to become more valued and more visible in the military, and are ready to undertake the training that will help

them do so. They regard training opportunities as too limited. "When I enjoy a position equated by the men around me with power, that's when the years and the work will all make sense..." A Black woman officer admits she feels great about being "top of the crop--I make sure I prove myself worthy of that every day."

Women are most dissatisfied with those dimensions of the military which they regard as adversely affecting advance within the Service. The fullest expression of these sentiments was found in their responses to those interview questions specifically addressed to the role of women (Black, Anglo, and Hispanic), and the content analysis of these will be dealt with in the later sections of this manuscript.

When asked what they most and least liked about the military there was again considerable agreement across factors of ethnicity and Service. "Travel" was the most liked dimension of military service. "Separation from loved ones" was least preferred. This seeming anomaly is explained when women make clear that adventure, stimulation, and potential for personal growth make travel attractive, but those advantages are seriously diminished if they involve extended or repeated separation from loved ones--particularly during critical periods of relationships. Even single women find travel hard on relationships. "You make friends, male and female, and then you have to move on... Sometimes you find yourself avoiding anything definitive with a man--you ask yourself 'Where is this thing going to go?'" Two of the women, with more than 15 years in the Army, no longer value travel highly. "Let's face it," one of them offered, "there's a little more of the 'homesteading' in me than there used to be."

Almost as frequently mentioned as "travel" was women's appreciation of the role the military has played in their character development. When women, of all Services, chose to mention an additional "most liked" dimension of their Service careers, in all but three instances the reference was to personal growth. "The Service helped me build confidence in myself," "taught me to be independent," "made me ready for leadership," "ended my gullibility and naivete," "taught me to deal with life."

Only two women in the sample, one Black one White, singled out "security" as what they most liked--this despite insistence in the literature that security is a dominant concern of women who enter the Armed Forces (Moskos, 1982; Overbea, 1985).

Prominent among dimensions of the military least liked were bureaucracy and slow promotions.

Women like being in uniform. They acknowledge the pride in service which the uniform reinforces. They also recognize the convenience that the use of a uniform provides. Over half, however, volunteered that they looked forward to opportunities to

dress more femininely. Among the Services, the least appreciated uniform, stylistically, was the Army uniform. One fourth of the women volunteered as well that they regard their uniform as essentially "adaptations" of the male uniform, and that better looking ones could be designed for women of all the Services.

#### Military Women: Enlisted and Officers

Twice as many enlisted women (16) as officers (8) were represented in this intensively interviewed sample. All of the officers had graduated from college and two had master's level training. In addition to high school degrees, three of the enlisted personnel had college level experience of 1 to 3 years. None of these women completed college in the course of military service, but one did 3 years of college work.

Officers responded to questions as to what led them to become officers, their further goals within the military, whether or not they would make the Armed Forces their career and why. Additionally they were asked whether or not they had or were considering involvement with science or technology-related specialties.

Enlisted women were asked about their advancement in rank, whether or not they had been interested in becoming officers, where they thought their future careers would take them, and--as with the officers--their interest in science or technology-related specialties.

All women--enlisted and officers--were encouraged to go beyond specific areas of questioning if particular considerations or issues relating to the military were of interest to them. All were also reassured of the preservation of anonymity, to the extent this could be affirmed. My fears of reticence on their part proved unfounded, and women repeatedly told me that I should feel free to identify them if I chose. "I will tell it like it is," one enlisted woman told me. And that verbal posture was characteristic of most of my exchanges with these women.

Women officers were sometimes briefer in their responses than were enlisted women, elaborating less beyond the dimensions circumscribed in my questions to them and in related probes.

"I had a B.S. degree," a Navy officer told me. "I would not have considered anything but 'officer.'" She has been in the Service for more than 10 years and intends to retire a captain after having served in Washington, DC. She wants leadership and action. In the face of a lesser development she will "get a divorce" from the military (i.e., she will leave it) to which this single woman presently sees herself as "happily married." She regards herself as having the education and experience within the military to qualify for the scenario she anticipates should follow from this preparation.

Women express an absorbing awareness of their responsibilities as officers in a given chain of command. At the same time they are more likely than the above woman to feel themselves at a disadvantage in terms of predictable goals. "I'd like to be--and I need to be--where the ships are," said the highest ranking officer (Navy) I interviewed. "But combat regulations more favorably affect men's access to ships and upward mobility by virtue of that access."

Women officers want travel, particularly in the European theater, and a lessening of restrictions that allow them below optimal involvement in critical roles. At least half the women officers have had some early experiences in areas such as navigation, oceanography, physics and advanced mathematics, but these remain unfocused and nonproductive in terms of career specialization.

Enlisted women report themselves as pleased and proud generally of the progress that has marked their performance in enlisted ranks to date. Many confess to an initial and inhibiting lack of understanding of what lay ahead of them. Half of them, however, since entering the Service have at some time thought about becoming an officer. None has. "I thought about taking a test someone was talking about," an Air Force sergeant told me. "But the word was that it was hard, and I heard a lot about the percentage that failed. They discouraged me." Another woman had considered becoming an officer after she entered the Service, "But once I saw what would be demanded of me--along with other work--I knew I couldn't get college in."

Most fault themselves for "not knowing how to use the system." However, occupied with rising through the enlisted ranks, these women, like many of the officers, cite disparities between their progress and that of men. "I am now two stripes behind. What a male would make in 12 years, it will take me 15."

All but two enlisted women and one of the officers see their careers continuing within the military.

#### Persons Who Influence Their Lives as Military Women

Half of the women, Black or White, see their lives within the military as essentially uninfluenced by any particular person. Response to this question, however, required more reflection on the part of most participants than any other in the interview--as though this consideration had never been entertained. The full questions, as asked of them were: "Can you think of any person who 'changed your life'? Influenced your chances for success?" The sequential position of the questions in the document was such that respondents typically dealt with them in the context of military life.

Although the questions were asked in the singular, half of the responses did not name a particular individual. "People in the Air Force through increasing job awareness of myself." "No one individual, but some females have been influential." "My colleagues in the Air Force--a great many of them."

With the exception of one male boss, individual references were to females. "My first boss in Service was most influential: a supportive, brilliant, workaholic man." "A woman civilian--very professional; she left herself open to me, taught me how to project an image."

Where an individual was singled out for recognition, mothers again dominated replies as a worthy model and in their expectations of best possible performance from their daughters.

Amelia Earhart and Barbara Jordan were the only celebrities mentioned.

This area of questioning brought the first explicit reference to "mentoring." "One of the problems for women is that we have limited resources in the way of mentors or models in the Service, because we don't get to meet senior women." Though other women were less explicit, a sense of deprivation of mentoring opportunities recurred in responses sporadically throughout interviews.

#### Family Life and Women in the Military

Half of the sample, Black, Anglo, and Hispanic, was single. The greatest problem reported by married women lay in conjunction with their relations with their children. Most volunteered that they knew they would face problems anywhere as working mothers. However, as one woman, with more than 20 years in the Service stated: "The military impacts any female's life with dependents like no other job. The military comes first. That's just the way it is. That's just the way we are told to think, and regulations make it difficult to live any other way. Not if you want to stay in. Certainly not if you want to advance within the Service. In our hearts we are deeply torn. We live with it. We are no less military because of it. But it is there in ways men never experience. That I know."

Husbands are seen generally as understanding and helpful, practically and emotionally. "When I rant and rave over what to do, my husband helps me." But they also stand in a different, less pivotal relationship with young children. The woman whose job as mechanic and whose frequent 12-hour emergency shifts kept her from home reported that her 3- and 4-year olds "sometimes cling to my legs and cry when I'm leaving." Another woman was overseas for 8 months after her son was born. "My husband just about took care of him during that first year. God I missed

so much. And you can never get that back or make it up. If I hadn't gotten a different job within the Service, I'd have had to leave it."

A Black woman with 10 years of service behind her is leaving it despite the disapproval of her parents who initially opposed her decision to join the military because they advocated a college education for her. "I know Black women and I know what a lot of us face in the military. My husband--like every other Black male--really wants to have me be at home. His mother, well she really took care of him, keeping his clothes washed, seeing his meals were there. That's what they know and that's what a home is--and where all the good thoughts are about the way a woman should care for it, keeping it all together. Oh sure, he knows that I work and he does some things around the house or with the kids, but the whole thing--the things that take your energy--well I can't remember when I wasn't tired. And on this job "tired" just isn't good enough. If I were a man I'd do it. I'd do 20 years. People I work with, some of them, they say 'you're crazy; you've come this far, you do the 20... 'but it's just not that simple."

Asked what their husbands thought about their being in the military, 8 of the 12 women reported favorable to very favorable attitudes. "He thinks it's great." "My husband says he's proud of me." "There are no problems." One Hispanic woman regards herself as a possible model for other Hispanic women who, like her, may face initial male reticence about a military career for their wives. "Now he thinks I never made a smarter move."

Two women were divorced during their service but reported that the marital problems which precipitated separation had nothing to do with the fact they were in the military.

Single women, Black or White, seem to view military life essentially as a kind of hiatus when it comes to permanent relationships with men. "You find yourself treading water," one woman told me. "If you're not swimming in marital waters when you come in, you're unlikely to start. After a while you may not want to." Another woman, a Black, Air Force officer, told me she was "married to her job. I like it that way." Four women related some version of the reputedly male consensus that unmarried women in the Service are either aberrant sexually or husband-hunters, and are looked upon with suspicion.

Despite a pervading theme that military life presents serious challenges to male-female relationships, six women minimized these obstacles and reported warm, stable relationships with husband and children or with men-friends.

## Military Women and the Future

The Interview with Military Women was adapted, as appropriate, to accommodate as fully as possible the respective impressions of Black, Anglo, and Hispanic subjects. An incontrovertible finding of the research is that these 24 subjects--Black, Anglo, or Hispanic--are first and categorically "woman-focused" in their comments and concerns, and only secondarily invested in ethnically related issues. Black women, however, unanimously are fervently concerned about the dimensions of what they see as the double jeopardy of being Black and female.

Across the Services represented (Air Force, Army, and Navy) there is consensus in the beliefs of Black, Anglo, and Hispanic subjects that the military is democratically conceived, and they have great respect for it. There is further accord that the criteria which determine progress within the system and assure its viability are appropriate. The Services, they agree, can take justifiable pride in their antiracial and antiprejudicial posture on women.

However, they believe as well that the military is more democratic for men than for women, that the system as presently operating rewards men more equitably than women in their progression through it, and that the masculine genesis of the military continues to mitigate full sexual and racial equality.

Women are aggressive and articulate in voicing these convictions and in their advocacy of change that would terminate what they view as disparity between what the system was designed to do and what it currently does--often to the detriment of women's advance within it.

Women see, in the words of a Navy officer, "no great conspiracy. That's the way it has always been done. The Service is traditional and conservative. The Service basically likes the status quo. And the status quo is male." An enlisted Air Force veteran of 20 years of service says: "You're beginning to see change, but it hasn't touched male hearts and minds, and until it does or is made to, the real potential will just lie there--on the books." The Air Force sergeant who had been involved in the hands-on repair and maintenance of aircraft voiced a widely shared sentiment. "It isn't so much opposition or even antagonism... Nothing you can come to grips with and say 'let's deal with it.' You adapt to the male stuff. If you complain or even find a way of doing it differently you're being feminine."

There is consensus among Anglo, Hispanic, and Black subjects that, as women, they must routinely work harder than men for the same rewards, pursue every advantage aggressively, and build around them a network of supportive women upon whom they rely to learn how to cope with the in-place male system. Not to do these things they regard as derelict not only in order to improve

women's image and because they believe this approach the best route to personal advancement, but because they want to be excellent at what they do. "There are not too many ways in which women have failed to try to advance themselves," an Hispanic woman said. "Women know that routinely they must work harder than men. Take Helen. She's the only woman on that crew. She has to be more 'super' than a man on a 'super' job."

They believe the system is reasonable in that it provides for women (as for men) a designated route for rising in the military. "You advance as a woman in the military by 'filling all the squares.' Education, how you test, performance reports. They can get you there or you can run into trouble. Man or woman, when you get a bum rap there are resources. Racism or sexism don't stand the glare when you have hard evidence. The military does its best to stay clean and you get a better shot here than on the outside."

In two contexts, however, the military is associated with impediments over which women have no control. Minority women regard them as influential in their underrepresentation in officer ranks and in the upper echelons of noncommissioned officers.

First and foremost is the denial of access for women to combat-ready appointments when the absence of such experience makes them, in effect, ineligible for advancement to those ranks in the military for which this experience is legitimately critical. "On the one hand, the measure of our success as women is how we adapt in a man's world; on the other hand, there's a 'No Entry' sign on half of it," said an officer who is denied access to the kind of shipboard experience and training for which she sees herself fully qualified.

Women express their awareness of the political and humane debate in progress on women-in-combat and of the related ambiguities presently in place. What they can less willingly accept, in the words of one is, "the 'you-can't-get-there-from-here' consequence for women only in terms of promotion, travel, adventure, and power denied."

Secondly, women want a more empathetic view on the part of the military toward pregnancy and childbirth. This "burning issue," in the words of one respondent, was addressed by Hispanic, Black, and Anglo women despite the absence in the interview document of any question directly related to it.

Concerns are voiced on several levels of abstraction. First and most frequently voiced was the apparent conviction that present practices reflect a simple and unexamined extension of the priority of "masculinity" in the Services. Secondly, women's sexuality is thought to be regarded by men both as a threat ("They think we came into the Services to get pregnant or hunt



husbands"), and a burden ("Pregnancy is treated like some kind of crime against the system. They think pregnancy is trying to get out of something"). The woman whose tour of duty took her out of the country within 3 months after the baby's birth insisted that this kind of separation was not rare. "When the baby arrives you are given 30 days. You can add to that 2 weeks of your own time. You can not do otherwise. There needs to be a more realistic resolution."

Finally some women were outspoken in wanting it understood that "parenthood is not the exclusive domain of women." And they do not see men inviting the same threat of stigma because they take on fatherhood while in the Service. "Do they really think the only single parents are women?" Another woman asked: "Why not marital leave for fathers, particularly in households where both husband and wife are in the Service?" Two such households were represented in this small sample.

In these issues of sex, feminity, and reproduction, women displayed least acceptance and a growing intolerance of what they regard as injustice or harassment. Related jokes and gossip, often graphically repeated for my benefit, particularly offend them.

### Summary and Conclusions

The research reported here was exploratory in nature and limited in scope to hour-long interviews with 24 women drawn in equal number from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The largest representation was of Black women (12); the smallest, Hispanic (2). Ten Anglo women took part. Both officers and enlisted women were represented in each group.

The primary goal of the research was the identification of shared beliefs or themes which could be said to characterize these women's rapport with the military as evidenced by a career review. They were asked 18 open-ended questions on their careers, from the decision to enter a particular Service to their present activities, and they were asked to project their futures with the military. Some of the data elicited were strictly factual in nature, but the broadest scope of each interview was the woman's review of herself in relation to the military over timespans ranging from 8 to 23 years. Several sections invited extrapolation from personal adaptation to women's position generally in the Services today. Typed pages of individual interviews averaged eight pages. Women expressed no concern over anonymity, although anonymity was in every case protected.

In the judgment of a growing number of specialists on the careers of women and minority groups (Sims, 1982; Cox, as quoted by Gillman, 1987), the military in our culture has done a superior

job of assimilation, outstripping most industries. Women in this sample share in this praise of the military system. In their progress through it, however, they report reservations in this praise.

How do women see themselves in relation to the Armed Forces? Future officers and enlisted women are drawn to the military in the first place either out of curiosity or through the fortuitous intervention of a recruitment officer (or a recruitment billboard), or they elected the military over a less inviting choice. Only one woman, an Air Force officer, reported an established, unswerving commitment to a military career. The prospect of financial security is not decisive but is a persuasive factor in their enlistment.

Family members are rarely supportive, and mothers--who will become their most durable models and mentors--are characteristically least supportive initially. Once daughters become part of the military, however, mothers are with few exceptions unflagging of their daughters' progress and well-being.

Few officers or enlisted women ever had any well-defined career goals, but a surprising 10 of the 24 had serious thoughts at some time of a range of jobs in the sciences and technology. Only two women have seen these interest come to fruition in the military.

They enter the military with little or no comprehension of what will be routinely expected of them within the various Services, or in the context of occupational specialties. Unrealistic expectations of travel opportunities are reported. And Black women particularly look to networking with Black women of their own cohort or with more established Blacks to aid their adjustment to military life.

Women find greatest satisfaction within the military when their work regularly allows them a measure of progress. Black women in particular feel their level of self-esteem is affected by performing particular roles that "count." The tenacity of this posture was noted by Myers, who worked with 400 Black women from Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Jackson, Mississippi. "It is important," she reports, "to understand that Blacks are at a juncture in history that has been unprecedented for its necessity to grope with and clarify and *define* (italics hers) (their) status... All roles are not equally important for developing and maintaining a positive self-image" (1971:44).

Women are candid in wanting power within the military system. And once they have responsibility they want more of it. They find satisfaction in the respect that responsibility brings, and develop intense loyalties to immediate supervisors--for whose image they express repeated concern. They are least satisfied with the daily ramifications of bureaucracy within the system and

resentful of "slow promotion." Enlisted women more often than officers report themselves as pleased with their progress through ranks.

Prioritizing the respective demands of military life and family life looms as a major problem for half the sample. Single as well as married women want more creative ways of dealing with the consequences of pregnancy and child-rearing than are currently available within the military. There is consensus that women need more control over these dimensions of their life, and active support of the military in bringing about needed change. Present attitudes they regard as an impediment to an optimally positive image of women in the military.

Women in general and Black women in particular believe that the Army, Navy, and Air Force are so designed that it is feasible for them to succeed within them. In this they concur with Sims who, writing on success and the Black woman, states that "Black women have the greatest opportunity for advancement in those vertically structured organizations within which everyone plays by the same rules governing advancement within ranks." Within these organizations, in theory, "white males are less likely to be able to advance themselves to the disadvantage of... Black women" (Sims, 1982:174). This logic prevails for my sample in the sense that they express the conviction that, given access to the skills, they can advance to the top. And they can advance with more certainty and with less jeopardy than if they were to leave the military for another job, taking these skills with them. Nevertheless, they agree with Prather who, in a study of women's advancement in the professions, advances as her underlying theme the conviction that women progress only by being more like men (Prather, 1971). One of the Hispanic women in the sample recalled that her family opposed her entry into the Service precisely because they feared loss of femininity as an inevitable correlate of her potential success within it.

The 24 women with whom I spoke believe that equality of opportunity is an issue of active and serious concern in all branches of the military. The Armed Services, however, are seen as products of their male-permeated histories. A relaxed, open, unchallenged acceptance of women and their potential, they believe, is not easily accommodated within today's military. They believe, with Jeanne Holm, a retired U.S. Air Force general, that the solution to progress and upward mobility for women is "a best qualified, free-flow system (in which) the sex composition of each service would find its own level" (Holm, 1982:393).

Women want more opportunities for "mentoring." "First permanent duty station is where it is needed. Special issues need to be dealt with. Recruiters aren't doing it. Women need to talk with women--for their benefit and for the good of the Services. Certainly women need to be prepared for the sexual pressure of military life." A staff sergeant commented on the

need for support groups to work with new women in a squadron. One enlisted woman has launched a single women's group that assists new recruits. In their efforts a few women invite the collaboration of "aware and sensitive white males." Some recall and readily name the men who have facilitated their progress or served as guides.

Finally, women concur that they will substantially improve their status in the military when they get warfare qualifications and only then. Black, Hispanic, and Anglo, they want an end to the ambiguity and limitations of the combat-readiness factor which they see as contributing to the advancement of males and second-class citizenship to females. They do not wish to be denied the training and experience that combat readiness automatically provides. Failure to end what they view as discriminatory restriction in this regard they variously credit to: the government, the Congress, and those males who, in their judgment, regard combat--as one woman put it--"the point of entry to the last all-male club" and zealously protect it.

Throughout the interview discussions, respondents reveal themselves vastly and more consistently united as women than separated by ethnicity in their reactions to military life. Further, despite expressed reservations about their careers, Black, Anglo, and Hispanic women would, with only three exceptions, give a very favorable recommendation to the military life if their daughters expressed interest in joining the Services.

"If it were up to me," said one Black enlisted woman, "I'd advise every individual in this country to serve some time in the military. There is unmatched potential for personal growth within it. A seasoning process. And once your wings develop... well, you can fly. And that's a good feeling. Something you can use for the rest of your life."

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW WITH MILITARY WOMEN

Rank

Service

Occupational Specialty

Age

Years in Service

Educational Level

Place Regarded as Home

Of What Does Your Present Family Consist?

1. Why did you choose the military?  
Why specifically (whatever branch)?  
Tell me about joining? What led up to it?
  2. How did your family feel about it? (Husband/male friend, parents, brothers and sisters, other). Pros and cons.
  3. Did your branch of the Service turn out to be what you thought it would be? Probe.
  4. As a child, what did you want to be? People you wanted to be like? Role models?
  5. What are the kinds of things you do in an average day?  
How do you feel about that? What would you like to be doing in the military?
  6. (ENLISTED)  
Have you ever considered becoming an officer? (Before entering? Now? Later?) Do you think it's possible? How would you feel about going to school? Taking college classes? Any classes behind you? Science/technology related?  
How about advancement within the enlisted rank?  
Where will you be in 5/10 years? Will you make the military your career? Why?
- (OFFICER)  
What led you to become an officer? Further goals as officer?  
Considered science/technology related specialties?  
Where will you be in 5/10 years? Will you make the military your career? Why?

INTERVIEW WITH MILITARY WOMEN (CONTINUED)

7. In terms of Black, White, Hispanic women in the military today, have you any suggestions as to how they can advance themselves? Practices that can be changed? Innovations of any kind?
8. Are there any ways in which Black, White, Hispanic women themselves have failed to advance their lot in the military?
9. Can you think of any person who "changed your life"? Influenced your chances for success?
10. How has being in the military changed your family life? (Tell me about it.)
11. How does your family feel now about your being in the military (children, parents, man-in-your-life)?
12. What do you like most about the Service? Least?
13. How do you feel about having to move from place to place? Travel?
14. Do you enjoy wearing a uniform?
15. Would you advise the military as a career for other Black, White, Hispanic women? Enlisted/officer ranks? For your daughter? Why or why not?
16. Have you ever thought about fields such as engineering or technical training within the military? Has anyone ever talked with you about these possibilities? Has anything in your previous experience/education prepared you for it?
17. What practical career benefits do you think the Services offer a woman?
18. Will you stay in the military? (Probe) What will the years ahead be like, do you think?